

Hot Tips for Meeting with Graduate Student Mentees

Create a mentorship agreement and follow its guidelines. Mentorship agreements are a great way to work collaboratively with your graduate student to delineate expectations, responsibilities, and rules of engagement for your mentorship relationship. This document should also establish meeting etiquette, communication standards, and scheduling practices. That way, these practices can be easily referred to (and altered if necessary). Be sure to include **meeting times, meeting frequency, and meeting locations** so there is no unnecessary logistical confusion.

Let your graduate student set the agenda. Part of being a successful mentor is providing opportunities for your graduate student to take charge of their graduate education. Selecting a meeting topic, crafting a meeting agenda, and communicating these to you in a professional manner are important skills for them to learn.

Listen! As the faculty member, you are positioned as the expert in the mentorship relationship, and it is true that you have ample experience and expertise not yet available to your graduate students. That said, it is important to be open to your graduate student's ideas and aspirations, and not use your own experiences and research preferences as a template for your student. It's likely your mentee won't follow the same exact path you did, and it's important that you stay attuned to their wants and needs.

Ask your graduate student to summarize the meeting after it's over. This is an excellent practice for helping your graduate student develop diligent listening and organizational skills. Asking them to document these meeting minutes in written form (email or a shared document) is also a useful way to maintain an archive of your conversations and your student's progress.

Establish expectations for next steps. This might be as simple as scheduling another meeting. Or it might mean thinking with the graduate student about taking a certain action or completing certain tasks. Whatever it may be, don't let the meeting end without a clear sense (for both of you) of what's next.

Have a plan to address conflicts. Make sure that you have a conversation with your graduate student early on in the relationship (or you could even include this in your mentorship agreement) about how you two will proceed if a significant conflict arises. Will you involve the Department head? Will you bring in a conflict resolution facilitator? Having this plan in place before a challenging encounter occurs can save the relationship from undergoing irrevocable damage.