

Establishing a Working Relationship with your Mentor

How to Make the Most of Your New Opportunity

Now that you will be conducting research, scholarship, or creative work with mentorship from a faculty member, what should you do next? Here are some tips to make the most of your new found opportunity.

Time Clarity: Yours and Theirs:

Discuss with the professor exactly when you are available and for how long. Be honest as to the days and times that you are able to devote to your research project. If you are working independently on research or a creative investigation/performance/project, suggest project milestones and points when you and the professor will consult. If you are functioning as a research assistant, settle on laboratory, office, or library hours that are consistent with the professor's needs as well as your own. Whether you are a paid or unpaid assistant, be sure your research time is spent doing the agreed upon work unless the professor gives you permission to do your own work.

Time and Energy Outside of Designated Research Times:

When your research, scholarship, or creative work takes place outside of sessions in the office, lab, or studio, be explicit about the amount of time you will be devoting. Even in research that is usually lab or studio-based, you may be asked to put in some extra time at home, in the library or in other tasks to support your work. Talk with your professor about your other commitments that might prevent you from completing such additional assignments.

Expectations:

Discuss with you professor the expectations he or she has for you as well as your goals for the experience. Will this be a major independent project for you or a small role in the professor's ongoing work? Discuss whether you should check in and out, how to report problems and results, and the faculty member's preferred method of communication, i.e. e-mail, telephone, or stopping by in person. Pay close attention to all of these and make sure all of your questions are answered. You want to establish and maintain a good relationship with your professor. A large part of this is making sure you meet or exceed his or her expectations.

Commitment and Privilege:

Many students seek mentorship, support, or a role within an ongoing faculty project. When a professor agrees to mentor your work or accepts you into his or her research group, you have received a privilege and accepted an obligation. You are receiving a valuable gift of time, expertise, and support. Show that you value this. In some fields, you may be joining a research effort that directly affects your mentor's career. By accepting the position you are letting the professor know that you are dedicated to assisting with his or her future as well as your own.

The mentoring you receive may extend beyond the specific project you and your mentor have agreed on. You may be invited to meet visiting artists, participate in the department journal club, or attend team meetings. Keep your behavior professional during these events. Use the time to learn both about your chosen field and how work is conducted in your department.

Safety, Security, and Confidentiality:

Be aware of and comfortable with all equipment and safety practices for your studio or laboratory. Learn about the hazards and potential incidents you are expected to be able to handle. Your work may involve expensive, dangerous, or valuable materials. Learn and practice appropriate security measures. These could include making sure to lock a room when you leave for the night, safeguarding equipment, handling animals, or securing data on the computer. Research equipment, space and resources are not yours. Do not load any software onto a computer unless you get specific permission to do so. Confidentiality in your research assignment includes protecting personal information your professor shares, overheard conversations, and knowledge you gain about other students. Security also involves knowing where and how to store your personal property while in the studio or research location.