



Tips to Find a Quality Research Mentor

What is a mentor?

A research mentor is someone who can provide you with feedback, support, and structured goal-setting to move forward as a student researcher. Faculty mentors can help student researchers engage in research and scholarly activity, grow in an understanding of their field, and provide experience relevant for future professional goals.

With guidance from their mentors, students can engage in key elements of research and scholarship, learning to distinguish between personal beliefs and evidence as well as to situate the concepts, practices, and results of their work within a broader context.

Having a mentor can also help you build your professional network and connect you with other opportunities in your professional and educational journey.

What makes a good mentor:

1. **Relevant expertise or knowledge:** You want someone who can advance your understanding of your field in general, or the specific research focus you are interested in.
2. **Enthusiasm for sharing knowledge with you:** The best mentors give advice not just to hear themselves talk, but because they want others to benefit from their hard-earned experience over the course of their careers.
3. **Respectful attitude and honest, direct feedback:** You want someone who treats both you and others well rather than someone who criticizes you harshly and unconstructively. You want someone who will give feedback that is kind, direct, and honest when necessary.
4. **Reflective listening and empathy:** A good mentor is able to listen to your ideas and be understanding as you describe what you need. They should be asking questions instead of only telling you what to do.

When thinking about potential mentors, consider the following:

1. **Who do you look up to:** Are there faculty members you already know who may be a good fit? Do you want someone who knows your research topic, or someone who can move you forward with the general research process?
2. **Where can you find a mentor:** Think through faculty you have been in class with, ask your program administrators or advisors for ideas, search your department faculty lists for potential sources, or talk to your classmates about research they have done.

Before you reach out to a potential mentor, answer these questions for yourself:

1. **What are your research goals:** Are you just starting out with discovering research, or do you have a specific topic you want support in studying? How much communication do you need, and what type of mentorship are you wanting?
2. **What are you trying to accomplish:** Is this something that can be completed in one semester, or are you looking for something longer than one year? Do you want to meet weekly, monthly, or only when you run into problems?

When approaching a mentor, first prepare:

1. **Have an explanation ready of what you are looking for:** Write down your ideas of what you want to accomplish through this relationship. Include your research objectives and personal or professional development goals.
2. **Research their previous publications or focus of studies:** These can often be found on department faculty websites. Have a few things to mention about what you like in their work.
3. **How much investment are you looking for:** If you are reaching out by email, be specific for what you are initially asking. Are you just looking for an initial introductory meeting, or are you asking for ongoing communication? Be clear about how often you want to meet and make sure it works with their work-load and schedule.

Tips to be a good mentee:

1. **Work to keep the goals you set:** Mentors can help keep you on track, but you need to be prepared each time you touch-base. Think through your project updates and areas in which you need support or additional ideas.
2. **Establish how you will meet:** Whether via Zoom, phone or in person, talk through how you want to create calendar invites and agendas and how often you will meet. A good frequency and rhythm of communication is crucial. Sometimes shorter, more frequent meetings are more productive than longer monthly meetings.
3. **Be open to accepting and giving feedback.** Your mentor is there to help you continue to grow, so be open and willing to listen to their feedback. If you are unclear about what your mentor is telling you or where to take your project, don't be afraid to speak up for what you need as well. Mentorship is a two-way street.
4. **Takes notes during your meetings and be accountable:** Record what you talk through and follow-up by email with your mentor. This will help keep you on track with action steps and overall progress.
5. **Talk about end-date and end of project timeframe:** How long are you initially committing? Will that be the end of the semester, the end of the school year, will you re-evaluate as the project progresses?

Still have questions? Email undergrad.research@ucdenver.edu to get started. You can also set up an appointment through [Handshake](#). Select: Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities: 'Undergraduate Research- Advising'.

More resources:

[Mentee-Mentor Contract Template](#)

[Tips on Writing Inquiry Letters to Faculty](#)

[Additional Mentoring Resources](#)

[More Mentoring Communication Tips](#)

Adapted from the following:

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-find-qualities-good-mentor>

<https://www.npr.org/2019/10/25/773158390/how-to-find-a-mentor-and-make-it-work>