

CLOSING THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP - MENTORS*

Closing the mentoring relationship may occur for several reasons, including a pre-set mentoring timeline reaching its natural ending or because the relationship is no longer serving the best interests of the mentee or the mentor. The latter may occur because you need to take a step back from the mentoring relationship due to other responsibilities or because there is an unresolvable conflict in your relationship.

Use this document as a conversation guide to help close your mentoring relationship. You are encouraged to make any necessary adjustments to prioritize what you think is best in your unique mentoring relationship

Pre-Set Timeline

Your mentoring relationship may be on a pre-set timeline through a formal mentoring program or because you, as a pair, decided your connection was only going to last a specific length of time. Whether your relationship lasted a few weeks or several years, focus your last meeting around recapping your mentoring relationship and the development you both have experienced as a result of your time together. Discuss the outcomes of your mentee's SMART goals, various feedback you exchanged during your discussions, and other topics relevant to your personal mentoring relationship.

Thank your mentee for their investment in the relationship; although this specific chapter of your relationship may be ending, continue to reach out periodically to maintain the positive connection.

Example: Serenity and Scott

Serenity is a first year student taking part in a peer mentoring program to help her get acclimated to campus life. She was matched up with Scott, a third year student at the university. During the three week-long program, Scott met with Serenity three times to speak with her about balancing school and extracurriculars, student leadership opportunities, class scheduling, and more. During their last meeting, they recapped what they had both learned during their time together, as well as concrete ways that Serenity could apply her new knowledge in the future. Scott encouraged Serenity to keep in touch and closed the meeting by stating that she could always reach out if she required any further assistance.

Taking A Step Back

You may need to take a step back from the mentoring relationship for a variety of personal or professional reasons. These may include: new time constraints on your project, an increased academic load, family or health issues, the birth of a child, or other life changes. If you feel the need to press pause on your mentoring relationship, take the initiative and contact your mentee as soon as you are able.

Discuss your changing context, provide them with the information you feel comfortable sharing, and discuss when/if you would like to continue the mentoring relationship. Be sure your new timeline is realistic with your new situation and keep your mentee updated as you feel more comfortable entering the mentoring relationship again. If you require additional assistance in closing out the mentoring relationship, or seeking out further campus support (counseling, emergency funds, etc.) please reference [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#) for a list of resources.

→ [MENTOR.UIOWA.EDU](https://mentor.uiowa.edu)

* Adapted from Rackham

Example: Dr. Chao and Rosa

Rosa is a third year graduate student and Dr. Chao is her mentor; as part of their relationship, Rosa attends various professional networking events around campus with Dr. Chao. However, after three months, Dr. Chao transitions from being a faculty member to being the head of her department. As a result of this change, she no longer has the time to attend most of the networking events. After evaluating her current responsibilities, Dr. Chao decided that she needed to press pause on her mentoring relationship with Rosa, at least until she became accustomed to her new job role.

As soon as she makes this decision, Dr. Chao emails Rosa to set up a meeting, explaining that she wanted to discuss stepping away from their relationship for a moment. During their meeting, the two had an open and transparent conversation, and Dr. Chao explained her new responsibilities and timeline for re-entering the relationship. She also recommended that Rosa reach out to Dr. Yang and Dr. Musa, two other faculty members in the department who would have time to attend the networking events with Rosa. Both left the meeting feeling comfortable and confident in their communication and in their paused relationship.

Unresolvable Conflict

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, the mentoring relationship is not what you had hoped it would be. You and your mentee may not be the best fit, for a variety of reasons, from incompatible communication styles or inappropriate behavior by the mentee. Enter the process with professionalism and know there are several resources to assist you in this transition.

Before ending the mentoring relationship, reference [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#) to make sure you have tried to work out your differences with your mentee. Additionally, seek out the advice of another trusted faculty member or peer in your department to determine whether it is actually in your best interests to end the relationship. This is especially true if the relationship has a long history.

The [Office of the Ombudsperson](#) (confidential office) and the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (non-confidential office) may be especially useful if you wish to speak to professional staff members. Their contact information, as well as additional resources, can be found on [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#).

If you do decide to terminate the mentoring relationship, think about the most diplomatic, respectful way to express to your mentee why you would like to make this change. Refer to [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentors](#) and [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentees](#) for best practices on opening up an evaluation-based conversation.

Inform your mentee promptly about your decision, no matter how awkward this may be. During your conversation with your mentee, explain clearly, but politely, why you wish to end the mentoring relationship. If they owe you any work, be sure to discuss this and arrange a schedule to complete any outstanding obligations. Try to end the conversation on a positive note.

Example: Eleanor and Michelle

Eleanor is a second year undergraduate student. Earlier in the year, she entered into a mentoring relationship with a first-year graduate student named Michelle. At the beginning of their relationship, Eleanor was seeking support with scholarship applications. However, after two months, it became apparent to Michelle that Eleanor was not taking the work seriously. She constantly rescheduled meetings at the last minute, was not responsive to email or text communications, and always cut their time together short.

Even after Michelle spoke with Eleanor about her inconsistent communication, and expressed a genuine desire to accommodate her needs, Eleanor did not make any efforts to change her behavior. Michelle decided that she wanted to end the mentoring relationship because she did not feel like it was an effective investment of her time or energy. She spoke with a staff member in the Office of the Ombudsperson about the best way to end their relationship and received useful advice.

Before her meeting with Eleanor, Michelle went through [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentors](#) and [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentees](#), and thought about how she wanted to conduct that conversation. During their meeting, Michelle clearly, but diplomatically expressed to Eleanor why she wanted to end the relationship and thanked her for her time. She also suggested alternate resources on campus, such as the Writing Center, if Eleanor was seeking out more flexible support during her application process. She left the meeting feeling like she had made the right decision.