

BEST PRACTICES FOR MENTORS*

Mentoring relationships are flexible and diverse by nature; no two relationships will be exactly the same. Throughout the relationship, as a mentor you will be fostering genuine dialogue with your mentee and assisting them as they grow towards their goal. Consider the best practices below as tools to help you navigate this mutual process.

1. Get To Know Your Mentee

Before beginning, speak with your mentee and establish a trusting, genuine rapport. Discuss their previous educational or career experience, what they hope to do in the future, and why they want to achieve their goals. Being open and approachable is especially important when a mentee is shy or comes from a cultural background with different norms regarding authority structures than the U.S. university systems. For more information on identity-sensitive mentoring, see [Identity Relevant Mentoring](#).

2. Establish Working Agreements

You and your mentee must communicate clearly from the beginning about your roles and responsibilities within the relationship. Agree on ground rules, form a basic structure for engagement, and revise these agreements as needed. More information on mentoring agreements and developing shared expectations can be found in the [Sample Mentor Agreement](#).

3. Focus On Developing Robust Learning Goals

Mentoring is meant to teach and guide the mentee. Assess whether you can assist the mentee in achieving their goals and aid them in creating, tracking, and accomplishing robust targets.

4. Balance Talking And Listening

When speaking with a mentee, give them your full attention and encourage them to discuss their ideas. Mentoring isn't just about providing advice, but also a secure space for personal development and subject exploration.

5. Ask Questions Rather Than Give Answers

Nurture self-reflection within your mentee, take time to flesh out their thinking, and ask questions that allow them to express individual insights. Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions usually start with "how/what/when/where/why" and encourages students to speak and share their experiences.

6. Engage In Meaningful And Authentic Conversation

Go beyond the surface. Share your own successes and failures, as well as what you are learning from your mentee and the relationship. Provide support in times of discouragement, as well as triumph.

7. Check Out Assumptions And Hunches

If you believe something is off-track, address the issue as soon as possible. Do not assume that only mentees who need help will ask for it or hesitate to reach out to mentees who are becoming distant. Simply stating "I want to check out my assumption that ..." will open up a broader conversation to clarify obstacles.

8. Support And Challenge Your Mentee

After creating a solid relationship, encourage your mentee to build their skills or try a new technique. Remind them that mistakes or failures are a productive part of the learning process.

9. Set The Expectation Of Two-Way Feedback

Set the expectation for regular, candid feedback early on in your relationship. Model how to ask and receive constructive feedback by asking your mentee for specific evaluations on your contributions as a mentor. Balance clear, concrete feedback with deserved praise and compassion.

10. Check In Regularly To Stay On Track

Stay connected and create an accountability plan for regular engagement.

Above all else, know that your mentees will remember how they were treated. Conduct yourself in a manner which models and encourages mutual communication, honesty, and respect. The role model you provide will have a lasting impact on how your mentee operates as an academic or professional in the future.

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

*Adapted from The Center for Mentoring and Rackham