

## Getting the most out of a mentor relationship

Relationships between a mentor and mentee are two-way streets, so it is helpful to be proactive in how you want to steer the relationship to make it the best for you. In order to make sure you get the most out of your relationship, we've compiled some advice from past mentees and mentors. Please note that this is a long list and it is ok to pull out pieces that work for you!

### Setting goals is key!

1. Set clear goals for yourself and the mentoring relationship before choosing a mentor
  - It's hard to feel like you're making progress if you don't know what progress you want to make! Be sure to think about one to three things you want to get out of your mentoring relationship and choose mentors with those goals in mind.
    - Ex: if you want to learn what it's like to be an ecology researcher, make sure you reach out to more senior mentors who already have experience working in the field full time.
  - Tip: For help setting goals and finding a mentor to help you succeed, see our "How to Choose a Mentor" worksheet
2. Make sure your mentor knows what your goals are from the very first time you meet with them.
3. Return to your goals often to make sure your current conversations are productive.
4. Setting short term goals can help break long term goals into more manageable pieces.
  - Ex: if you want to learn what it's like to be an ecology researcher, brainstorm what specific questions you have about the job and plan to ask them one or a few at a time
5. Don't be afraid to edit or completely change your goals as your interests and knowledge change and grow.

### When meeting with your mentor:

1. Be prepared and organized
  - Mentors are just as busy as you- they may not have time to come up with ideas for conversation, so make sure you show up to meetings prepared with questions, updates, or other discussion ideas.
  - Keep a journal or written log of your conversations to help retain information and make sure you are exploring new topics
  - If you plan to speak with your mentor on a schedule, suggest dates and times to talk and send reminders ahead of time.
  - Don't be afraid to send follow ups or reminders to your mentors. If you aren't hearing back from someone, there is a good chance your email got lost in their inbox. It is always ok to send a second friendly message if you haven't heard back in a few days. Mentors will appreciate you reaching back out to stay in touch.
2. Take initiative and ask a lot of questions
  - Show enthusiasm and share your thoughts

- Don't wait or expect your mentor to provide advice or guidance- be prepared to ask questions to learn what you want
3. Communicate openly
    - Be honest and transparent about your interests, concerns, and feedback to your mentor and to yourself.
  4. Seek feedback and act on it
    - Practice active listening: focus on understanding what your mentor is saying, not how you want to respond.
    - Regularly ask for constructive feedback as appropriate.
    - Take feedback seriously and make efforts to improve based on it.
  5. Be respectful and kind
    - Be respectful of your mentors' views and opinions, even if they are different from yours. Always assume that your mentor is offering their advice and opinions in good faith (if you ever think this is not the case, contact us at [contact@symbioticstem.org](mailto:contact@symbioticstem.org) or any of the emails at the bottom of this form immediately).
    - Make sure you are on time to meetings and respond promptly to communication
    - Be mindful of your mentor's other commitments and responsibilities
    - Acknowledge and appreciate the time and effort your mentor invests in your relationship. A simple thank you can go a long way!
  6. Be open minded
    - Be willing to learn new things, even if they are outside of your comfort zone.
    - Remember that everyone you meet can teach you something cool.
  7. Focus on a growth mindset and be brave
    - Talking to someone new, especially someone older than you, can be scary. Remember that all of our mentors are here because they are excited to talk with you!
    - Don't be intimidated by your mentors or what they have achieved. They started out in high school just like you and many of them have the same concerns about their future you might feel. Consider talking about your concerns and their path out of high school to navigate these things together.
  8. Be committed and consistent
    - Building a strong mentoring relationship can take time and effort.
    - Stay committed to achieving your goals (even if they change)
  9. Reflect on your progress and know when it is time to end a mentoring relationship
    - Return to your goals often with your mentor.

- Remember that it is normal for mentoring relationships to “fizzle out” - this normally happens if you aren’t a good match or you’ve already achieved your goals. Don’t feel a need to keep these relationships going- be deliberate in pausing or ending a relationship for a new one if it is time to move on. Just be sure to tell your mentor what is happening. Mentors will always be happy if you decide to reach out again in the future!
- For advice on ending or switching a mentor relationship, see our guide.