

Communication Plan

How to use this document:

This document contains a (long) list of questions that mentees and mentors might want to address with each other. This was written with undergraduate and graduate student mentees paired with graduate student, post-doctoral researchers, and professors in mind. Some of these questions may not be relevant to your institutional context or your particular field of research.

Again, this document is long, and asking all of these questions at your first meeting will likely be overwhelming. Instead of approaching this as a list of things you must ask right away, you might read through this list and think about which questions resonate with you, which questions seem particularly relevant in your program, and which questions don't chime with your approach.

Folks often revisit some of these questions at regular intervals, in the event the answers have changed, and over the development of both the mentor and the mentee careers. As a lab gets bigger, or as a student becomes more independent, meeting frequency might change.

This is designed as a written document, which I much prefer. However, if it feels better to go through these questions without writing the answers, that is an option.

Feel free to make your own copy and tailor it to your own voice and style. Most importantly, what questions are missing? What issues or challenges have you seen? Be sure to include those in your own version.

Sample Plan

1. Structured Communication

1. How should we communicate research and career goals and progress?
 - a. How frequently would you like to meet to discuss research?
 - b. How would you like to get in touch about research updates? Only by in-person conversation? By email? By shared Google doc?
 - c. How should we stay on the same page about goals? A shared Google doc? Summaries at our formal research update meetings? A whiteboard? An IDP?
2. What are the goals of our meetings?
 - a. Are they to update the mentor on progress?
 - b. Are they to increase accountability of mentee?
 - c. Are they to ensure that mentor and mentee research goals and expectations are aligned?
3. What should our email and meeting policy be?
 - a. What are our email timeframes? Should we expect emails on evenings or weekends?
 - b. I prefer to know that you have received something within a few days, but I know that sometimes responses can take longer than that to craft, especially if they require experiments, data, or deep thought. If either of us can't fully respond to an email, can we agree to acknowledge receipt of the email within a few days? What number of days would work for you?
 - c. What if one of us stops responding to emails?
 - d. What if one of us is more than 15 minutes late for a meeting?
 - e. What if one of us misses a meeting entirely?

2. Aligning expectations

1. During this summer research experience:
 - a. What are our research goals?
 - b. What skills or techniques would you like to learn?
 - c. What analyses would you like to learn?
 - d. What communication skills would you like to learn? (Reading papers, writing grants, presenting at group meetings, etc)
 - e. What are your expectations for how you will spend your time?
 - i. My expectations are XYZ
 1. Ex: I expect that you will spend Y hours in lab - between these specific hours, and with a one hour lunch.

2. Ex: I expect that you will work for Z hours per week from wherever is most comfortable for you.
 3. Ex: I expect that you will spend, at minimum, 1 hour per day reading the literature, 1 hour per day planning experiments, and 4 hours per day doing experiments.
 4. Ex: I expect you to work for X hours each week and log your time in a spreadsheet.
2. Beyond this summer research experience:
 - a. I know that this is likely to change, and this is simply to gauge your interest.
 - i. What are your overall career goals?
 - ii. Are you tentatively hoping to pursue a career in research?
 3. *Looking back, after the summer research experience:
 - a. Are you hopeful to continue research beyond this summer program?

3. Mentorship network

1. What should we do to increase your mentorship network?
 - a. Should I connect you with faculty colleagues of mine?
 - b. Should you request introductions with specific faculty?
 - c. How can I support you in reaching out to faculty yourself?
 - d. How can I support you in finding other mentors here at this university?

4. Feedback

1. How should I give you feedback?
 - a. What kind of feedback feels most useful to you? Written? Verbal?
 - b. Would you like to explicitly solicit feedback?
 - c. What should I do if I have feedback for you that you have not solicited?
 - d. Would you like me to act as a cheerleader? As a pessimist? As an optimist? What role feels most useful for me to serve?
 - e. Should we formalize periodic evaluations of your research progress?
2. How can I solicit feedback from you?
 - a. Would you like to use formal evaluations of my role as a mentor?
 - b. Would you like to start or end meetings reflecting upon our mentorship relationship?

5. Personal experiences and belonging

1. How can I demonstrate to you that I value your input and ideas?
 - a. Is there certain language that feels really empowering to you?

- b. Is there certain language that feels really disempowering to you?
2. How can I help you feel a sense of belonging here?
 - a. What messages make you feel like you belong in this lab?
 - b. What messages make you feel like you do not belong in this lab?
3. What is important that you think I should know about you and your approach to this relationship?
4. What if I am worried about you?
 - a. I never want to put you in a situation that is harmful. I also know that if I am worried about you, I want to make sure you are getting appropriate care. Under what circumstances is it okay for me to reach out to student counseling services, etc?
 - b. If something happens that makes me worried about you, what would your preferred course of action be? Is there someone in your life I should call?
5. How should we deal with conflict or discomfort?
 - a. If we are in a group and I think you're feeling hurt, what should I do?
 - b. If we are in a group and I think you've hurt someone else's feelings, what should I do?