

2025 Mentee Strategies. Prompt: *Please share any strategies that you have found useful to take a proactive role in your own mentoring. We aim to share anonymized recommendations and ideas with other trainees.*

Find a graduate student to collaborate with who has skills you lack & are not being offered any training to develop. Informal mentorship, or formal mentorship, that takes this form can be game-changing.

Ask for meetings with my advisor
Voice questions

I would describe myself as highly motivated and usually don't hesitate to directly contact others when I feel like I would benefit from that contact.

Regular open communication with mentors.

IDP

Be very clear with what you need from your advisor. Choose your words carefully to make your point very clear. I've found that it is okay to be blunt if that's what it takes.

be more proactive about communicating where the gaps lie
be honest as much as possible
schedule meetings at some level of frequency (every two-three weeks)
form strong mentorship bonds/networks within labs and outside of lab

I have done a lot to adjust the way that I view mentorship in the lab and realize that most decisions that I make are ultimately decided by me. When viewed like that, having the support to make those decisions from my PI is a huge amount of trust placed in me.

Talking to department leadership to get a more balanced perspective when conflict arises with advisor
Asking for help/what I need when I need it. Trying to communicate clearly.

Defining the parameters of how I want my feedback. Explicitly stating I want my mentor to focus on this kind of topic, give me this kind of feedback, and ideally around this time.

I have found it helpful to communicate goals with my advisor so that we are on the same page with how to work towards achieving them

Planning what I want to say to my mentor ahead of time and discussing it with other lab members
Directly discussing my understanding of my advisor's expectations for me with them often helps prevent miscommunication.

I have found it helpful to determine actionable steps towards accomplishing my research goals and directly communicating them to my advisor, whether that be finding funding opportunities or potential collaborations

Asking direct questions to my mentor has been helpful.

Advocate for yourself, actively evaluate and re-evaluate your own goals and aspirations, be consistent in communicating

Communicating to my advisor the specific areas in which I believe I have the most room for growth, and asking their

Always coming to meetings with a list of topics I need to discuss with my advisor

Reflect on your own goals and progress with somewhat regular frequency (every 2 months or so) to identify how you are doing and how you feel about it. This helps me identify what I feel like I'm missing and communicate that to my advisor

Do not wait for clues to what your advisor expects or values from your work. If you are unsure, ask them.

I appreciate the yearly IDP meetings and planning out the semester at the start to make sure everyone is on the same page.

I found that preparing well for my one-on-ones allows me to get more out of them. My meetings with my PI are pretty infrequent so I found that putting effort into preparation is very helpful. Having a bulleted list of topics and referring to them directly allows me to take control of the meeting if it goes off topic.

Identifying points that do or feel like they need improvement and specifically ask for support in that specific matter

I've found it very helpful to communicate my goals and intentions for meetings with my advisor in advance so that we are both on the same page going into a meeting. I also find it helpful to schedule separate meetings for scientific discussions vs career or lab environment discussions.

When I want to discuss anything related to my mentoring/professional development, I am the one to reach out and work around a busy schedule (even if we have to meet off-hours or on weekends).

Proactively scheduling regular meetings to discuss progress towards milestones helps with both troubleshooting and matching expectations

I have always proactively sought out additional mentors, including enrolling in the faculty mentor program at Whitehead, which has been very helpful, other postdocs and faculty at Whitehead and MIT, my thesis advisor, etc.

While the system isn't necessarily bad, the primary goal is not grad student wellbeing. As a result, it is strictly necessary to continuously "manage up" and very actively pursue anything that is necessary for your success, despite theoretical responsibility of mentor figures to provide.

Staying organized and advocating for myself and my priorities

Meeting with other postdocs and faculty for coffee chats

Making time to meet with other trainees to learn about their projects

soliciting feedback and mentorship from other advisors (e.g. thesis committee) and other members of the lab

Setting expectations in the beginning of the mentorship and emphasizing a desire for open communication

Asking for what you need

Clearly communicate with my mentors what mentorship style best works for me

When my advisor and I have a meeting that I found particularly helpful or fun, I make sure to tell him that that conversation was especially useful or enjoyable to me. This helps us both keep in mind that the goal is to have fun with science, because science is fun when you do it with fun people.

I recognize that shortcomings can come from the mentor and the mentee, and that taking a step in my mentor's direction can be very helpful to close the gap between our expectations of each other.

- Identify and propose actionable direction.
- Communicate to understand the current priority of the lab.
- Use newly acquired skills to demonstrate competence.

Communicating about needs and how I feel about certain mentorship behaviors.

Be clear with yourself what questions you want to ask and how you want to ask them. With that clarity, be open to communication with your advisor so they can find the best way to support you in your goals.

Stand up for yourself and don't be cowardly

Approach mentorship as a collaboration - know what you want to get out of it, and think about how both parties can work to that goal

I aim to be a very direct person in identifying the mentorship I need and actively seeking it out. My advisor doesn't provide all the mentorship I need, but I chose them for their strengths in what they can provide as mentorship. For support my advisor cannot give, I currently feel that I have clearly identified it and will continue to reach out to individuals who can provide mentorship in that area.

Observe and learn as if you will receive zero mentorship and minimal training. Hit the ground running as quickly as possible and do not wait around. Be adamant when asking for help or guidance. Independence and taking your learning into your own hands with the opportunities available is the best way forward.

To me, empathy is key in mentorship. Thankfully, I receive a lot of support and guidance from my own mentor (who is emphatic and balanced in his approach), which have been great sources of learning and personal growth for me and have informed my own approach to mentorship.

Coming to meetings with a detailed agenda to guide discussion helps

Finding mentorship from other PIs at Whitehead and other universities.

Set clear goals.

I find that people show up and perform when it's obvious you first put in the effort for them. When a lab makes an effort to make an open spot for someone, then people will want to join. This is not just because it's easier to fill a "you-shaped" spot, but the effort reflects a desire to support, protect, and care for that individual. When that bond is formed and you need to rely on that person, more often than not, they show up for you beyond expectations. It's a good investment.

Trying to have distinct opportunities (including and in addition to the IDP meeting) to discuss things that are going well & poorly with the advisor. Making my professional goals clear to my advisor and advocating for what I will need in order to reach those professional goals.

Be proactive in asking for best practices / examples from other senior or experienced members of the lab.

Setting an agenda for meetings. Setting consistent meetings.

As a 4th year, I have started thinking about plans for after graduation and have come to an agreement about how to fit in an industry internship that I found after finalizing a first author manuscript. I think having done the legwork upfront to see what internships were available allowed me to come up with a good plan with my advisor.

Prepare thoroughly before meeting with my PI. They often go well off-topic during meetings, so having slides prepared in advance and being willing to redirect the conversation back to the slides is very helpful to having a productive meeting

Setting the stage for clear communication. If you're wanting a type of communication, start it with your mentor.

Making sure I come to my advisor when I need guidance on something.

Paying attention to the ways in which my advisor best receives information, for example I realized fairly early on that dumping a lot of data into our 1 on 1 meetings was not an effective way to communicate progress.

Asking direct questions about my advisors opinion on different scientific practices/mentoring styles

Identifying what I want and what I need to get there has been key. It is hard to ask for help if you are unsure what it is you need help with.

Every new year, I discuss my goals for the year to come with my PI. I also try to set timelines, based on conferences that I would like to present at.

I think I aim to actively create a dialogue with my PI so it is not just a one-sided conversation between either of us. It's helpful to set expectations out from the very beginning so there is no misunderstanding.

Mostly communication. I searched for an adviser that would be willing to communicate more maybe than most. That's what really helped me.

I think it is important to remember that your mentor can be wrong/mistaken and therefore it is always good to have good secondary mentors. These can be members of your thesis committee (if you have one), professors you know from other schools, lab members, and anyone else you admire/trust.

Seeking mentorship elsewhere. Involving other PIs in meetings so my advisor attends and actually contributes to the discussion.

I am trying to ask for feedback not just from the pi but from everyone I work with because I can learn from all of them

Scheduling regular meetings, both for science goals and career & thesis goals, has helped me a lot! PhDs go by so quickly!

I have clear goals for the extent and type of mentorship I want to receive in my postdoc training. I communicated those very clearly when I came in for my interview. I asked pointed and difficult questions during my interview to gauge whether my potential faculty mentor matches (can match) my mentorship needs. I also communicated at the interview the areas I want to work on and would like their support.

Setting a running meeting and having active communication.

I share progress and ask for anything I need on a regular basis.

I figure out exactly what I need from my advisor so that knows how he can help me