



The Carnegie Astrophysics Summer Student Internship Program

Getting the most out of your relationship with your mentor

Mentors are a critical resource and important professional relationship for students. If mentoring relationships are cultivated and maintained, they can benefit both the mentor and mentee for many years. Here are some suggestions for starting out on the right foot with your mentor(s).

- 1) Set up a regular time to meet if you haven't set up a time already.
- 2) Have a conversation with your mentor about their expectations and goals for you this summer. If you know what your advisor expects and when, it's easier to meet their expectations. You should also share your expectations and goals. If your advisor know more about your goals, they can better help you achieve them.
- 3) Take notes during your meetings. If something is unclear, feel free to ask for clarification right away. If you feel uncomfortable asking a question in person, or if a question comes up later when you are reviewing your notes, email your mentor to follow-up with your questions.
- 4) Respect your mentor's time; they are also busy. Come to your meetings prepared and organized with questions and things you need from your mentor. If they do not set a goal or agenda for the meeting, feel free to tell them your goal or agenda items.
- 5) Be dependable. If you set a time for a meeting, be there and be ready. If you need to change the time of a meeting, email in advance.
- 6) Ask for what you need, and try to be clear and direct. If you are struggling to do this, or if something isn't working in your mentor-mentee relationship (e.g., communication, expectations, timeline), try to talk with them about it. You can also talk to Gwen or another mentoring team member.
- 7) Don't be afraid to admit to not knowing something. Think about how much easier to say you don't understand the first or second time something comes up versus the tenth time! Also, your mentor can't help you and they can't teach you if you don't tell them you don't understand.

- 8) Be respectful. Everyone has different life experiences, including your mentor. However, they have been in the field of astronomy longer than you, so chances are if they ask you to do something, it's to your benefit! It's fine to ask about the purpose of a task, but as long as that answer makes sense, try to at least attempt the task. If you find yourself questioning every task, that might be a sign you and your mentor aren't a great match professionally and this should be discussed with Gwen.
- 9) Be responsive. If you ask for advice, let your mentor know what action you have taken and how it is working out.
- 10) Respond to emails quickly. Different mentors may have different definitions of "quickly", so this is a good thing to talk to your mentor about early on. If you don't have an answer to a question, and you need more time to come up with an answer, it's fine to say so. But you should communicate that you received the message and propose a timeline for delivering a full response.
- 11) Try to solve some problems on your own. Have you googled it? Maybe try that before asking your mentor. We also provide a list of experts for questions about lots of different topics!
- 12) This one is challenging for everyone: Try not to take negative feedback personally. Your mentor is there to help you succeed. If they give you negative feedback, try to use it in a constructive way to improve your work. If you feel like you are receiving excessive negative feedback, talk to Gwen or other members of your mentoring committee.
- 13) Your advisor will have high but not unrealistic expectations of you. You may be confronted with challenging tasks this summer -- try to think of them as opportunities. Keep an open mind to trying and learning new things.