



Guide to meetings with your advisor

Meetings with an advisor may be intimidating but are necessary avenues of communication in graduate school. The following suggestions are intended to make those meetings as productive as possible:

1. **Be proactive: initiate the meeting.** Don't be afraid to reach out. Take the lead on discussing your plans, progress and even your concerns and challenges. Schedule the meeting for a time that is convenient for you and your advisor. Ask your advisor for a range of dates and times that may be suitable. In your email to advisors, you can provide a tentative agenda (see point #2) or a brief narrative (no more than a few sentences) of what you'd like to discuss. If you want feedback on written material, also mention this. (See point #4)
2. **Prepare an agenda or a list of topics to discuss.** Consider sharing this with your advisor ahead of time. Agendas are generally useful tools to guide the conversation as well as to ensure important and pressing matters to you and your advisor are addressed. Be realistic about the time you have scheduled for your meeting as well as how many items you'd like to discuss. It may be helpful to prioritize the items of most immediate concern (personal or academic) on your agenda. These may require the most time and consideration. (See the resources at the bottom for sample meeting agenda.)
3. **If and when you are comfortable, share personal circumstances that may be affecting or will affect your academic milestones, such as family plans or illness, planned travel, etc.** Doing so can be challenging, and there will be some situations in which it may ultimately not be advisable. Nonetheless, sharing information about situations likely to affect your academic progress sets the stage for you and your advisor to have frank conversations about expectations.
4. **If you'd like an advisor to review written material, plan to give your advisor ample time to review the material.** Depending on your advisor's schedule (Are they teaching? Do they have other advisees? Are they traveling?) and the amount of material you are sending, a good review of written materials may take some time. Consider one or two weeks of time for review; adjust the meeting date with this in mind.
5. **Aim to have "next steps" clarified by the end of your meeting.** Before ending your meeting, discuss reasonable time frames for feedback and progress on next steps. You may want to schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss progress and other items that may not have been addressed during the current meeting.

6. **Summarize meeting points, outcomes and next steps.** It may be helpful to send the meeting points and notes to your advisor; reiterate key points in the discussion the next step planned or conclusion. Invite your advisor to review the notes and to respond if they have further thoughts on or disagree with any points. These notes may serve as reminders of what was discussed and what the next steps are. In some circumstances, these meeting notes may help to clarify and dispel misunderstandings.

Potential agenda items to consider or prepare:

- a. Progress: What are you doing? How are you doing?
- b. Specific help and feedback: What specific input and feedback do you need, by when, in what format?
- c. Academic/Professional Plans: Where are you going? Think about your goals and your timeline. Consider reviewing academic requirements. Review the written timeline you and your advisor have created together. Are you on track? Are there issues and concerns you have? Are you thinking of publishing? Are you ready to publish?
- d. Trouble points and challenges: Can your advisor help or find resource for you?
- e. Expectations and next steps for the next meeting

For helpful guidance and additional resources on choosing mentors or advisors and for first meetings with potential advisors, please see additional resources. [LINK to student best practices - resources section]

This document was created and adapted for Brown University graduate students, drawing from various resources listed below.

Resources for meetings with your advisors

- [PhD tool kit](#), ThinkWell

Provides a wealth of planning worksheets, including meeting agendas, meeting notes templates, thesis planners, writing audits and more.

- [Graduate Students: Working with your faculty adviser](#), University of Washington, College of Education

Gives a good overview of meetings with advisors, how to prepare, what to expect and how to summarize.

- [A Mentee Guidebook for students: How graduate students can become respected professionals and trusted colleagues](#), The Graduate Senate of Case Western Reserve University

Offers guidelines on meetings with advisors, choosing an advisor, considerations and setting expectations, suggestions for what to do when unexpected circumstances and conflicts with mentors arise.