

Establishing a Communication Plan

Introduction:

A critical aspect of developing a strong working relationship with your mentor is to establish expectations regarding communication mode(s) and frequency. Use the questions, below, to stimulate a conversation with your mentor. Not all questions may be relevant to you, your mentor, your project, or your graduate program, so adapt this tool as you see fit.

- Make an appointment to meet with your mentor (or research advisor). As you reflect on how you made this appointment, how easy was this? Did your mentor respond quickly?
- When meeting with your mentor/advisor, take notes! Record these notes in a notebook or by computer while recording the date and time of your conversation. After you have concluded your meeting, summarize these notes and email them to your mentor so that you both have a record of what was discussed.

Questions to consider when discussing a communication plan with your mentor:

1. In your experience in working with graduate students, what communication patterns or modes have you found work well for you and your students, and what isn't as effective? Do you have a preference (email, phone, face-to-face, by text, Zoom or MSTeams)?
2. How often do you prefer to meet with the students that you are mentoring? How are meetings initiated and who leads the agenda? Is it possible to have a standing meeting with a set date and duration of time?
3. What are your expectations of graduate students you are mentoring? Are these expectations written somewhere?
4. What should I do if I need help on my project and I'm not making the progress that I should be making? How do I demonstrate my progress to you?
5. Will I be expected to present at lab group meetings, a class, or seminar series? Do you have expectations of what this presentation should include?
6. Establish a communication plan with your mentor/advisor in which you mutually agree upon mode, frequency, and time.

We acknowledge Dr. Crystal Vander Zanden, Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, for initiating this helpful tool and inspiring the questions included here.