

Chapter 2

Mentorship: How to Find and Be a Great Mentor

Mentorship is an important and complicated part of the PhD experience. Finding the right *mentors* (yes, plural) for you is key to your success in grad school and beyond.

[...]

No one is perfect. Every advisor is stronger in some areas than in others. This means you ultimately need multiple mentors. If you identify your advisor's weaknesses, you can find other people to supplement them so that you receive the well-rounded mentorship you need. In the rest of this chapter, we will cover different methods for finding mentors, including formal structures like your thesis committee and informal extracurriculars. (Yes, extracurricular activities still exist in grad school.)

[...]

How to Use your Thesis Committee

If you are wondering why I would include an entire section on scheduling update meetings with your committee, allow me to reiterate – **use** your committee. Don't simply send an email every 6-12 months asking to schedule an update. These people are here to help you, and they will if you talk to them. Otherwise, they will do the minimum – show up once or twice a year without much engagement.

Instead, interact with your committee and develop a personal rapport with each person outside the mandatory update meetings. Truly, this is one of the most important pieces of advice I can give you. Ideally, you want your committee to be on your side, even willing to go

to bat for you if the situation calls for it. At a minimum, you want neutral committee members who like you well enough not to impede you. This can only happen if you build a relationship with them. It will not happen from seeing each other in a conference room 1-2 times a year.

Seek their opinion on a decision you are trying to make. Ask for another set of eyes on an abstract or manuscript. If they cannot review it themselves, they could offer someone in their lab to help, and you could reciprocate. Even if you never end up needing serious help from your committee, getting to know them benefits you. The more you interact with your committee, the better you will understand how they think and predict how they ask questions. If you know what they are looking for or likely to ask in an update meeting or your thesis defense, you will be that much more prepared.

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