ACADEMIC MENTORING
AT UNSW

DVC (Academic) & PVC (Education)
A Guide for Mentors and Mentees
Introducing Academic Mentoring at UNSW

This guide has been designed to support academic mentors and mentees at UNSW on their mentoring journey.

The approach to mentoring adopted by UNSW is informed by the ‘spectrum’ approach to academic mentoring (Harvey, Ambler, & Cahir 2017). Spectrum highlights a variety of mentoring relationships that can be formed. It also signifies flexibility, as some mentoring relationships may be sustained over an extended period of time whereas others may be short term and aligned with a particular task or focus. This approach to academic mentoring presents a multitude, or a spectrum, of alternatives when considering a mentoring relationship. These options include, but are not exclusive to, one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring, peer mentoring, online mentoring and compound mentoring (Harvey et al., 2017).

- One-on-one mentoring relationships can be established through either a formal program or a more organically formed relationship that often occurs between individuals in a working environment.
- Group mentoring involves a small group of individuals working with one experienced member of staff on an agreed project.
- Peer mentoring can be two colleagues or a small group of individuals that support one another; this type of mentoring can take the form of a writing circle, a reading group, or any other group formed through an agreed task or focus.
- Online mentoring can be one-on-one or a group of individuals who establish a mentoring relationship using communication tools available through the internet or mobile phone. This form of mentoring utilises such tools as discussion forums, Facebook groups, Skype, Zoom, Twitter or email.
- Compound mentoring is a form of mentoring whereby the mentee has more than one mentor, chosen for their expertise in particular areas.
Mentoring is also a process that regularly occurs outside formal programs or approaches. Academic Mentoring at UNSW endeavors to provide generic resources and frameworks to assist members of staff employed in the higher education sector who have already established a mentoring culture within their faculty or department. This guide is also designed to provide information for members of staff who would like either to become a mentor or to be mentored. In the following pages we provide information that may help you develop a mentoring relationship or assist you with the continuation of an existing mentoring relationship.

The benefits of an established mentoring culture are numerous. A mentoring relationship can offer the mentee psycho-social benefits including development of self-confidence (Boles & Diehm, 2013), as well as defining and pursuing goals, expanding perspectives, strengthening self-development plans and supporting career advancement (Carmel & Paul, 2015). A mentoring relationship can also support motivation and work satisfaction for both mentees and mentors. Research into mentoring programs in both academia and private organisations has shown that mentoring relationships provide mentors with new perspectives on ideas and issues, and that the increased self-awareness resulting from the opportunity of sharing their knowledge with new academics enhanced their personal growth (Ambler, Harvey, & Cahir, 2016; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Long, 1997; Rolfe-Felt, 2002).

Research into established mentoring programs has revealed that they assist with creating a more collaborative environment (Boles & Diehm, 2013) that fosters personal and professional growth through the sharing of skills, attitudes and behaviours. A strong mentoring culture can also support improved performance of personnel, which, in turn, can contribute to the identification, development and retention of talent and enriched learning among staff (Ambler et al., 2016; Long, 1997).

It is equally important to recognise that while there are numerous and wide-ranging benefits of an established mentoring culture for staff and the institution, difficulties can arise in all forms of mentoring, which is why it is imperative to establish the boundaries of any mentoring relationship from the beginning (Long, 1997). Most of these boundaries can be defined between the individuals or the group, and there are resources in this guide to assist with that process. However, it needs to be understood that having a mentor is not a guarantee for success, and mentees should not use their mentors as counsellors or mediators unless this style of relationship was agreed to in the beginning (Harvey et al., 2017).

This guide is informed by current research in the area of mentoring in both academic and corporate sectors. It is designed to provide direction in establishing, maintaining and over time concluding mentoring relationships, while attempting to avoid some of the common pitfalls. The following pages contain information on beginning a mentoring relationship, an outline of an agreement, checklists for meetings as well as the required skills for a successful mentoring relationship, and further useful hints for both mentors and mentees. The majority of this guide is based on one-on-one mentoring relationships but all the resources and information can easily be adapted to all forms of mentoring. The guide can be followed in sequence from beginning to end and also revisited throughout the mentoring relationship (Harvey et al., 2017).

Mentors and mentees need to remember that ‘no is a productive word’

It is remarkable how difficult it can be to utter this one little word, ‘no’. It is equally astonishing how easily this word offends. Nevertheless, it is imperative that ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are said clearly – not only to mentors and mentees but to yourself as well (Sinetar, 1998, p. 102).

This is important not only for setting the boundaries of the mentoring relationship but also for your own benefit. Saying ‘yes’ and ‘no’ clearly establishes your expectations of yourself and other people’s expectations of you.
Before you begin a mentoring relationship – Reflect

Your responses to the reflection exercises listed below can be useful not only for setting your goals but also for understanding what areas you would like to focus on in any future mentoring relationship.

There are multiple theoretical and practical approaches to reflection. We are proposing that reflection exercises are a useful way to think, plan and set your goals for your academic journey. Reflective practice has been recognised as “having a role in academic learning, in skills development and for lifelong learning” (Harvey, Coulson, Mackaway, & Winchester-Seeto, 2010, p. 143).

Reflecting on your past experiences can give you the time and space to appreciate and fully comprehend what you have learnt, summarise your challenges and successes, and revisit the direction of your academic pathway, as you plan your future goals.

These reflection exercises are designed to help guide you through planning your future academic goals. You can do all the exercises or just a few to suit current needs – you are the only person who knows where your attention and time is best used.

We encourage you to be kind to yourself and to enjoy the reflection process but most importantly, congratulate yourself on taking time-out to turn your experiences from something that you did into something that you learnt and can use in planning your academic journey.

**Reflection Exercise: Accomplishments**
What has happened in your academic career so far? Write a comprehensive list of everything that you have accomplished – big and small.

**Reflection Exercise: Your strengths**
Write a list of any specific skills, areas of expertise and natural or practiced strengths you have.

**Reflection Exercise: Developing your strengths**
Write a list of any specific skills, areas of expertise that you would like to develop.

**Reflection Exercise: Your goals**
Now that you have reflected upon what you have achieved so far, what strengths you have and what strengths you would like to develop – think about what skills or area of your academic career you would like to focus on over the next 12 months?

**Reflection Exercise: Next steps**
Does achieving your goals require establishing some form of a mentoring relationship?

Remember that mentoring can be more than the traditional expert-novice relationship. We have many committed mentors who are willing to share their expertise and work with you to achieve your goals. Start searching for your mentor.
Beginning a mentoring relationship

Academic Mentoring at UNSW requires mentees to be proactive in searching for a mentor. This approach enables flexibility in how mentors and mentees are paired (Ewing et al., 2008). There is a list of mentors on our website, people who have expertise in learning and teaching as well as research. Alternatively, mentees may wish to approach another member of staff or an expert in a particular field. There is a spectrum of possibilities when selecting a mentor. Mentees are advised to begin the process of searching for a mentor on our website. For a mentee who is seeking specific assistance or advice it may be appropriate to approach another staff member. Some further points to consider are:

- A mentor needs to be a person with established experience and knowledge in the area in which you require assistance or advice.
- A mentor can be located in the same department but if the mentor is your supervisor then the mentee and the mentor need to consider how the mentoring relationship will not conflate with the boundaries of supervision.

Once the mentee has selected a potential mentor, the next stage is to make initial contact. The recommended approach is email as this avoids any duress on the potential mentor and allows time for a considered decision to be made. There are direct email links listed in each of the mentor profiles. Some potential examples for mentees to use in an opening email are:

- ‘I’ve identified that as an area that I need to improve. I’ve noticed that your skills are excellent. Would you be willing to offer me some guidance in that area?’
- ‘I would like to have someone assist me with […]. Are you available and willing to mentor me through this process?’

When a positive response is received after initial contact is made, it is imperative that both the mentee and mentor understand the purpose of the relationship. The mentees should state clearly their purpose for seeking a mentor and mentors should state clearly how they can assist. This establishes a framework for the relationship, to ensure that expectations are reasonable (Connor & Pokora, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Harvey et al., 2017).

An agreement should be reached about the style, duration and regularity of meetings possible between mentee and mentor. A written agreement is recommended to formally document expectations, and for accountability (Kashiwagi, Varkey, & Cook, 2013). It is important to discuss whether the meetings will be, for example, a weekly coffee meeting, a monthly formalised meeting in a meeting room, impromptu emailing or fortnightly phone calls. Three other matters need to be discussed between mentee and mentor at the beginning of a mentoring relationship: the timeframe of the relationship, the confidentiality agreement, and the no-fault no-blame procedure, all of which are detailed in this guide. If these various contingencies are discussed at the beginning of the relationship then expectations will be in place and shared, which will assist in avoiding any potential complications (Harvey et al., 2017).

Hint:
Make use of the Mentoring Agreement (see page 13). We encourage all mentees and mentors to fill out this form or at the very least have an email discussion about the items listed on it.
Building a mentoring relationship requires time and energy. But that doesn’t mean that all mentoring relationships become protracted time-consuming endeavours for mentees and mentors. Researchers, studying mentoring, have recommended roles and responsibilities as well as identified key skills for both mentees and mentors to ensure that the mentoring relationship has clear boundaries (Connor & Pokora, 2007; Harvey et al., 2017; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; McCarthy, 2008; Nick et al., 2012; Rolfe-Flett, 2002; Spencer, 1996). Here is a summarised version of these recommended roles and responsibilities.

Recommended roles and responsibilities for mentees are:
• Be proactive in acquiring new skills and knowledge, including seeking guidance
• Accept responsibility for your own decisions and actions
• Engage in critical thinking and reflection
• Complete tasks by agreed times
• Maintain confidentiality

Recommended roles and responsibilities for mentors are:
• Provide information, constructive comments, guidance, and potentially advocacy
• Listen to the mentee’s plans and decisions
• Engage in critical thinking and reflection
• Complete tasks by agreed times
• Maintain confidentiality

A mentoring relationship is most beneficial when both can share experiences, which requires openness and honesty to help build credibility and trust between the mentor and mentee. Studies of mentoring have also addressed what a mentoring relationship ‘needs’ (Rolfe-Flett, 2002; Spencer, 1996). These points are listed here for your consideration. Note that meeting all these prescribed ‘needs’, depending on the situation, may or may not be possible.

A mentor needs to be able not only to focus on you and what you would like to achieve, but also to help you to focus.

A mentor needs to be available for interaction. If a mentor is not available to meet or interact via phone, email or videoconference, it defeats the purpose of the arrangement. In these situations we recommend that the mentor and mentee discuss availability issues and then decide whether or not to continue with the relationship. Every mentee needs a mentor who is open-minded. This can allow mentees to progress in a way that they need to progress, not necessarily in the way that the mentor would prefer.
Key skills for mentees

The identified key skills for a mentee are:
• Being proactive
• Maintaining an active role within the relationship

Academic Mentoring at UNSW requires mentees to be proactive in:
• Addressing areas of concern or areas that they would like to improve
• Finding a mentor
• Contacting the potential mentor directly
• Requesting assistance or advice in a particular area

The mentoring relationship requires mentees to continuously take the initiative and accept an active role in the mentoring relationship. This might be as simple as allowing time for reflection before you meet with your mentor, or sending an agenda for the meeting. If you prefer a less formal approach you could write a list of items that you would like to discuss and even prioritise them (Connor & Pokora, 2007).

‘Criticism is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing.’
– Aristotle (Reference: www.thinkexist.com)

‘The number one thing that is the standout would be that it (mentoring) enabled me to learn how to build better relationships. Even with someone that I never thought I would have a relationship with’
(Amblor et al., 2016, p. 7).
Key skills for mentors

The identified key skills for mentors are:

- Active listening
- Questioning
- Providing constructive feedback

Listening carefully is considered to be the most important of the key skills (McCarthy, 2008, p. 56). Poor listening has been described by Johnson and Ridley (2004) as ‘an epidemic in Western culture’. They claim:

People do not take the time to attend to the meanings behind other people’s words ... mentors often rush to give an answer, offer advice, or tell their story without tuning into their mentee’s real concern or points of view. This inattentiveness communicates that what the mentee has to say is not worthwhile or important (Johnson & Ridley, 2004, p. 46).

Active listening is a multifaceted and demanding activity that requires several skills. When you are listening to your mentee it is sometimes useful to clarify what the mentee has said, by either asking a question or repeating a fragment of what you have heard (McCarthy, 2008). It is important not to interrupt while you are clarifying or repeating a portion of what your mentee has said (Johnson & Ridley, 2004). It is equally important to ask questions as you are listening, to help the mentee crystallise thoughts or opinions. Some ‘open-ended’ questions suggested by McCarthy (2008, p. 55) are:

- What have you tried?
- Tell me what has worked and what has not.
- Do you know why?
- Have you thought about it from another perspective?

These questions can help you to adequately reflect on what your mentee has said, and they can also show the mentee that you have understood (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; McCarthy, 2008). Active listening and questioning are two of the most important key skills, but utilising these skills can lead to situations where the mentor will need to provide constructive feedback to the mentee.

‘I found talking out loud with another person and reflecting on my experience and listening to them reflecting on theirs was a very effective way of critically reflecting. It is more generative than writing a critical reflection. Verbally negotiating our stories and dovetailing our stories is very useful. I do this a lot more than I used to, I talk with other colleagues and share stories of critical reflection. I am much less shameful of some of the mistakes I have made, I am much more open about talking about the things I haven’t done well’

‘I learned a specific skill: how to get an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant. Effective mentoring took me from successive years of failure and frustration to two significant grants in a single year’
[Q#8] (Ambler et al., 2016, p. 11).

‘I learnt, you can set timelines, but academic writing has a way of finding its own time. You try to push it and she (my mentor) would say ‘no, it will be ready when it’s ready’. You learn experiential wisdom. There’s more of an impact on attitude and disposition rather than the mechanical things of writing an abstract’
[participant 3] (Ambler et al., 2016, p. 11).
What is constructive feedback?

Constructive feedback is given with the objective of being helpful. It is delivered respectfully, in a clear and mindful manner, and it is either solution-oriented or action-oriented.

One method of constructive feedback is the sandwich approach. This three layered approach is as follows:

- **Top slice:** a positive comment.
- **Filling:** a constructive comment.
- **Bottom slice:** another positive comment.

**Hint:**

Always be mindful of the objectives of giving the feedback and also consider how you would like constructive criticism to be given to you. Ovando (2005, p. 173) suggests that constructive feedback needs to be delivered:

- Jointly, set a climate of respect and trust.
- Acknowledging strengths, identifying areas of development, praising extra professional efforts, asking questions for future reflection and providing suggestions.

‘*We need very strong ears to hear ourselves judged frankly, and because there are few who can endure frank criticism without being stung by it, those who venture to criticise us perform a remarkable act of friendship.*’

– Michel de Montaigne
Case Study: Chris and Kym*

Chris and Kym’s first meeting

Chris is an early career academic who has drafted two journal articles and would like to be mentored over the next six months to achieve publication of the articles. At the first meeting Kym (the mentor) and Chris start by exchanging information about themselves (social histories and contact details).

☐ Identify the goal for the mentoring relationship

☐ Kym will mentor Chris in developing the two drafted articles so that they are ready for submission

☐ Establish the purpose of the meeting

At the first meeting the purpose is to establish the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the mentee. Chris and Kym complete the Mentoring Agreement, and in doing so discuss and agree upon their roles and responsibilities.

☐ Establish both mentor’s and mentee’s roles and responsibilities

Chris and Kym discuss their mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship and this encompasses each other’s roles and responsibilities. Decisions include that Chris will provide two draft journal articles and Kym will read each. After reading, Kym will suggest potential journals for publication, provide information on the protocols for submission, provide feedback on the abstracts, and peer review the articles. Both have agreed that feedback will be constructive.

Chris has asked for specific feedback on whether the structure is well organised, whether the literature is relevant and up to date, and on the quality of the writing. In return, Chris has agreed to act on advice and resubmit the next draft at an agreed time.

A discussion of the boundaries for this mentoring relationship results in establishing that meetings will be limited to the one hour per fortnight, but that email communication will be used for providing written feedback (using ‘track changes’ in Word). Mobile phone calls will only be used as a last resort.

Chris and Kym discuss and then agree to the confidentiality agreement and the no-fault, no-blame procedure.

☐ Timeframe in which this task can be achieved

Submissions for the special edition of the journal that has been targeted by Chris are due in six months, so the timeframe for the relationship is set as six months.

☐ Frequency of meetings

Both Chris and Kym agree to meet for one hour each fortnight. They arrive at this decision as the intervening time will allow Chris to progress and develop suggestions and ideas from each meeting. Also, one hour per fortnight is seen as a realistic time commitment. As Kym has an office overlooking the playing fields, they decide that their mentoring meetings will take place there.

* Characters in this case study are fictional
Mentoring Agreement

We are voluntarily entering into a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship. It is intended that this relationship will be a rewarding experience. Our time together will be defined by a specific task initiated by the mentee. The mentor will advise and/or assist with the process of completing this specific task. Features of our mentoring relationship will include:

Duration of the mentoring relationship:

Frequency of meetings:

Maximum length of each meeting:

Mentoring activities:

Mentee’s responsibilities:

Mentor’s responsibilities:

Confidentiality agreement**:

We have discussed these principles to establish the boundaries of our mentoring relationship and the no-fault, no-blame procedure should this relationship need to end.

Mentor:           Date:                       

Mentee:          Date:                        

** UNSW Academic Mentoring confidentiality agreement is uncomplicated. It is simply that all information exchanged during the meetings between mentors and mentees, both online and face-to-face, remains between those parties, unless either the mentor or the mentee has given permission for that information to be discussed with others.
No fault, No blame procedure

In cases of a difference that cannot be resolved by a frank, respectful discussion, the mentor or the mentee need to trust intuitive judgment and acknowledge any disparity as soon as possible. Keep in mind that the earlier it is addressed the easier it will be.

This ‘no-fault no-blame’ procedure is designed to make these difficult discussions and situations straightforward. A mentor or mentee who encounters a problem within the relationship should:

1. First see if it can be rectified by having an open and honest discussion (if possible do this face-to-face).
2. If an agreement cannot be negotiated or the situation cannot be rectified then mentor and mentee need to formally end the mentoring relationship.
3. In very serious cases mentors and mentees may contact UNSW’s Employee Assistance Program (Benestar) or Human Resources for support.
An overview of the UNSW Code of Conduct is included below as an example:

**Part A: Overview of code**
This Code sets out the University’s expectations of staff and affiliates with respect to their professional and personal conduct. It is intended to promote integrity and ethical behaviour, and to guide individuals’ dealings with colleagues, students, the University, and the national and international community. The Code stands beside but does not exclude or replace other legally binding obligations.

The Code has broad application. It applies to all staff and affiliates of the University, regardless of their level or seniority. It covers all circumstances when staff and affiliates are performing work, duties or functions for the University, as well as related activities, such as work-related functions, travel, conferences and any circumstances when a person is representing the University.

The UNSW 2025 Strategy sets out the overarching strategic priorities and themes that guide staff and affiliates to achieve EXCELLENCE in all that we do:

A. Academic Excellence
   A1. Research Quality
   A2. Educational Excellence

B. Social Engagement
   B1. A Just Society
   B2. Grand Challenges
   B3. Knowledge Exchange

C. Global Impact
   C1. International Education
   C2. Partnerships
   C3. Disadvantaged Communities

Critical to the delivery of the 2025 Strategy are 5 UNSW Behaviours, expected of all staff and affiliates:
Demonstrates Excellence; Drives Innovation; Builds Collaboration; Embraces Diversity, and Displays Respect.

**Primary Obligations**
The overarching obligation of all staff and affiliates is to act in the best interests of the University at all times. To this end, staff and affiliates have three primary obligations with respect to their personal and professional conduct:

1. An obligation to the University in terms of responsible stewardship of its resources and protection of its reputation in the wider community;
2. A duty to observe standards of equity and respect in dealing with every member of the University community; and
3. An obligation to act appropriately when a conflict of interest arises between a staff member or affiliate’s own self-interest and their duty to the University.
Suggested topics to cover during the first meeting:

- Identify the goals of the mentoring relationship
- Discuss a timeframe in which the task can be achieved
- Establish the mentor’s roles and responsibilities
- Establish the mentee’s roles and responsibilities
- Agree on frequency of meetings
- Discuss confidentiality agreement
- Discuss the no-fault, no-blame procedure

It is recommended that the expectations and objectives be set during the first meeting but also revisited over the next few meetings. These boundaries must be established and then maintained, to avoid future frustrations or excessive expectations. Ideally, during the first meeting mentor and mentee will arrange to exchange either a publication or a research grant application (a document that is relevant for the focus of the mentoring relationship), so that these documents can be discussed in the next meeting or at the very least provide a context for the next meeting (McCarthy, 2008, p. 43).
Checklist: Ongoing meetings

To support the management of meetings and to ensure clarity and structure, please consider the following guidelines:

- Establish a timeframe for the meeting
- Establish a goal for this meeting
- Make notes during the meeting
- Discuss and decide on the action items for the following meeting
- Make arrangements for the next meeting

On the next page is a suggested template for meeting notes. Alternatively, if both mentee and mentor prefer a less formal approach, the mentee might send a post-meeting email simply summarising the meeting.

Mentoring Etiquette

- Be on time for all appointments
- Respond to any messages within a reasonable time *(perhaps this can be decided upon during the first meeting)*
- Complete any agreed task within the agreed deadline
- Be diplomatic during meetings
Meeting Notes

Document dated:

Prepared by:

From the last meeting....

Action items for the next meeting
Mentor: ____________________________ Mentee: ____________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

To discuss in the next meeting
To support the management of the last meetings consider the following guidelines:

- Complete your final reflection before the last meeting
- Exchange the details of the reflection for your records

In many ways the last meeting is as important as the first meeting. The recommended approach is that both mentor and mentee complete their final reflection to ensure that the conclusion of their mentoring relationship becomes a mutual learning experience. This reflection is beneficial to both mentor and mentee, as they can synthesise key learnings and outcomes from the mentoring relationship. It can also serve as the basis of discussion and collaborative reflection during the last meeting.

It is also possible that the mentor or the mentee would like to utilise these reflections for future research, publications or for academic portfolios. If that is the case then that possibility should be addressed in this final meeting.

Mentoring can assist with creating an environment that fosters personal and professional learning through the sharing of skills, attitudes and behaviours. It can provide new perspectives on ideas and issues, leadership skills, increase motivation and work satisfaction. Mentoring relationships can also expand perspectives and strengthen self-development plans and reinforce learning (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Long, 1997; Rolfe-Felt, 2002).

**Hint:**

Soft copies of the templates included in this guide are all available on the web. They can be used in your academic portfolios.
Final Reflection

Reflection is a deliberate and conscientious process that employs a person's cognitive, emotional and somatic capacities to mindfully contemplate on past, present or future (intended or planned) actions in order to learn, better understand and potentially improve future actions (Harvey, Coulson, & McMaugh, 2016, p. 9)

Document dated:

Prepared by:

Key Learnings

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Key Outcomes

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Mentor: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Mentee: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Checklist summary

Checklist: The First Meeting
Suggested topics to cover during the first meeting:

- Identify the goals of the mentoring relationship
- Discuss a timeframe in which the task can be achieved
- Establish the mentor's roles and responsibilities
- Establish the mentee's roles and responsibilities
- Agree on frequency of meetings
- Discuss confidentiality agreement
- Discuss the no-fault, no-blame procedure

Checklist: Ongoing Meetings
To support the management of meetings and to ensure clarity and structure please consider the following guidelines:

- Establish a timeframe for the meeting
- Establish a goal for this meeting
- Make notes during the meeting
- Discuss and decide on the action items for the following meeting
- Make arrangements for the next meeting

Checklist: The Last Meeting
To support the management of the last meetings consider the following guidelines:

- Complete your reflection before the last meeting
- Exchange the details of the reflection for your records
References


