

MENTORING GUIDELINES

of the University of Oldenburg

Guidelines for establishing a
successful mentoring partnership

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Authors and sources

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The following sources were used in preparing these guidelines:

Haasen, Nele (2001): Mentoring – Persönliche Karriereförderung als Erfolgskonzept. Heyne Verlag München.

Heinze, Christine (2002): Frauen auf Erfolgskurs: so kommen Sie weiter mit Mentoring. Verlag Herder Freiburg im Breisgau.

MentorinnenNetzwerk (2002): Leitfaden für Mentorinnen. Hessisches Koordinierungsbüro.

1. WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is a proven and effective tool for supporting early-career researchers and leadership development. Mentoring is based on the informal transfer of experience and knowledge and the individual support of an early-career researcher (mentee) by an individual with specialist academic or professional experience (mentor). Mentoring promotes professional and personal development. Mentors support their (usually) younger colleagues in the early stages of their academic careers by giving insights into potential career pathways, career planning advice and constructive feedback on their achievements and skills. They impart important knowledge of leadership requirements, structures and processes in academia and research, explain unwritten and informal practices and facilitate access to career-relevant networks.

Mentoring partnerships have the following characteristics:

- Mentoring is a non-hierarchical partnership and does not involve authority to issue instructions.
- The duration of a mentoring partnership is limited. Regular contact is maintained throughout the mentoring period.
- Age is an irrelevant factor even though the mentors are usually older than their mentees.
- Mentoring is a mutual process of give and take. Mentors can also benefit through personal and professional development.
- The programme structure and funding of mentoring programmes must be visible and transparent.
- Voluntary contribution, mutual goodwill, respect and trust are pivotal to mentoring partnerships.
- Mentoring is designed to support rather than replace professional coaching.

The concept of mentoring goes back to Greek mythology: Odysseus asked his friend Mentor to teach and advise his son Telemachus during his absence. However, it was often a woman, the goddess Pallas Athene, who carried out these duties in the form of Mentor.

2. WHAT DOES MENTORING INCLUDE?

Mentoring is a process that focuses on a confidential partnership between mentor and mentee. It is a process in which exchange, learning and experimentation take place, and where new skills can be developed. The goal of a mentoring partnership is to encourage mentees to act autonomously; the mentee takes ownership of their own learning and development processes – the role of the mentor is to guide them during this process for a set period of time.

Mentoring includes:

- **Coaching:** Mentors actively lead and encourage mentees to develop important skills and behaviours for the future.
- **Advice:** Mentors can offer mentees advice on specific topics that the mentee has prepared. Mentors assist mentees in solving problems and making difficult decisions.

- **Communicating knowledge:** Mentors share specialist and informal knowledge in their field with their mentee, including guidance on unwritten rules at the university and in academic research.
- **Enabling participation:** Mentors give mentees the opportunity to share their own experiences and to learn by acting independently. They may involve mentees in academic and professional activities through shadowing in meetings and committee sessions.
- **Support:** Mentors encourage mentees to gather their own experiences. A mentor can work with the mentee by acting as an exercise partner in advance, discussing the procedure, discussing possible consequences and then taking stock of the experience gained.
- **Feedback:** Mentor and mentee give each other constructive feedback on the effectiveness of their actions and approaches. Mentors help mentees to recognise their own skills and apply their strengths in a targeted manner.
- **Networking:** Mentors give mentees tips on how to make use of and maintain contacts. They can introduce mentees to professional and academic networks and mediate contact.

3. MENTEES

The mentoring partnership is focused on the learning and development process of the mentee. Mentees are the main stakeholders in the mentoring process – it is the duty of the mentee to actively seek assistance from their mentor and to take responsibility for their own learning within the mentoring partnership. This not only requires specific skills, but also the initiative of mentees.

As a mentee, you:

- have professional/personal goals and are committed to achieving them
- are able to build and maintain relationships with other people
- can openly discuss your ideas, reservations and weaknesses
- have the courage to make mistakes and try something new
- are willing to think about your own position and critically question your thinking or actions
- are willing to accept and implement advice from others
- are honest, trustworthy and loyal to the mentor
- take responsibility for your own actions and make your own decisions

The roles of a mentee

- **Set goals:** Mentees must set clear goals for the mentoring process. It is your responsibility to recognise your own plans and support needs. At the beginning of the mentoring partnership, you will agree on specific topics and measures with your mentor that will help you achieve your goals.
- **Maintain contact:** It is your responsibility to keep your mentor informed of your progress. If you have any questions, call your mentor between appointments or write an email (if agreed).
- **Be proactive:** Prepare before meeting with the mentor, clearly define which aspect of the topic is

important to you and how you expect your mentor to contribute. If applicable, try to prepare an initial solution to the problem. Keep a written record of the mentoring meeting which you can also share with your mentor, depending on your agreement.

- **Be open:** Mentoring is more effective when the mentor is aware of your weaknesses and the difficulties you may have. This gives you the chance to learn from mistakes or difficult situations. Although trust is an important basis for communicating in this way, being open can also help to build trust.
- **Put what you learn into practice:** Rather than just engaging in planning, asking questions and discussion, make sure that you actively apply what you learn. Do not expect ready-made solutions but use the mentor's suggestions to shape your development whilst applying your own creativity and commitment.
- **Reflect:** On the mentoring process and your role in it.

Opportunities for mentees

Mentoring offers the opportunity to develop professionally and personally in many ways:

- **Personal development:** Mentoring makes your skills visible to others and gives you the opportunity to develop them. In dialogue with your mentor, you can improve your ability to analyse problems and sharpen your judgement. Mentoring can help you to better assess your own performance, learn to use your strengths more effectively and manage your weaknesses more easily. This will boost your self-confidence.
- **Skills development:** The mentoring process trains a wide range of skills, such as analytical and conflict management skills, teamwork skills and social skills (self-competence, self-assertion, perseverance and networking skills). You can also further develop your professional skills. During the mentoring process, you will gain insight into the mentor's professional behaviours, other professional fields or topics such as management techniques, dealing with employees or preparing meetings.
- **Orientation:** The mentoring process helps to clarify career development opportunities. You will learn to realistically assess opportunities, perspectives and the energy you will need to invest. Through your mentor, you will have the opportunity to learn from others' perspectives and experiences and expand your horizons.
- **Career planning:** In the mentoring process, you will gain greater clarity about your professional and personal goals and have the opportunity to develop individual career development strategies.
- **New contacts:** You may be able to establish professional contacts through your mentor and gain access to networks that can help you to develop your career.

Checklist: Preparing meetings

To get the most out of mentoring meetings, consider the following aspects in advance:

Topic

Define the topic clearly, with an example if necessary. What exactly are you getting at? Careers can be discussed from many different perspectives. But your mentor needs to know which aspect you are interested in. Inform your mentor in advance about the topic of the next meeting.

Previous knowledge

Think about what prior knowledge you already have and share it with your mentor. This prevents your mentor from telling you things that you already know. If you want your mentor's advice on a particular situation, take notes in advance so that you do not forget to describe an important aspect. Or draw an organizational chart or something similar on flipchart paper beforehand and bring it to the meeting. After the meeting, provide the mentor with material for which they need to prepare, such as a report that you wrote and on which you would like feedback.

Initial considerations

If you are looking for a solution to a question, you should prepare for a discussion by listing your own initial considerations. This also helps your mentor to see that you have used your own initiative and are not leaving the problem-solving to them.

Mentor's contribution

What do you expect from your mentor? Do you want to hear about their own experience? Do you want to know what books they have read on the topic? Do you expect feedback on your actions? Should the mentor ask you questions and help to solve your problem or should they tell you about their background? The more accurately you formulate your expectations towards your mentor, the more you will get from their answers.

When you need support

Ask for support if you need it. Call your mentor (if agreed) when an issue arises and do not leave it until it is too late.

Benefits of documenting the meeting

- Accountability for results (documentation)
- Helps to track the development of the mentoring partnership
- If documentation is accessible to both parties: agreements and actions are more likely to be respected
- Records can be used to build a list of contacts suggested by your mentor that you can use for later reference
- It is important to write down not only what you talked to your mentor about but also the conclusions that you have drawn from the meeting

4. MENTORS

A mentor can assume various roles arising from the needs of the mentoring partnership: this might be as a consultant, knowledge mediator, supporter, door opener, role model or contact.

As a mentor, you:

- are interested in strengthening a mentee's skills and contributing to their development
- are willing to share your professional and life experience, give the mentee insights into your professional tasks and activities and explain your own working style
- know the informal structures and rules of your institution or industry and are willing to share your knowledge
- have a good network and extensive contacts and can imagine sharing these with your mentee
- are open to learning new things yourself from the mentee and recognize this as an enriching aspect of the mentoring partnership
- are willing to invest time in a mentoring partnership which lasts for almost one year; on average, mentee and mentor meet every four to six weeks for about two hours

The roles of a mentor

- **Advisor and knowledge mediator:** The mentee will approach you with questions and for advice on topics from their current professional situation. You may offer them your professional opinion, advise them and contribute your own experiences and knowledge of informal structures and rules in your field. If the matter at hand requires specialist knowledge, you may provide theoretical input and work on a feasible solution with the mentee. You may also impart knowledge by allowing the mentee to participate in meetings or committee sessions or by involving them in current projects or work processes. The mentee can observe directly how you do certain things and you can share ideas with them.
- **Supporter:** You will contribute to developing the mentee's strengths: based on your experience, you may recognize that your mentee has particular strengths. You will be expected to give consistent positive feedback to your mentee on these strengths and consider with your mentee in which situations they can use and expand them. You should encourage new behaviours and discuss your mentee's experiences with them.
- **Exercise partner:** It is claimed that we retain 10% of what we hear, 60% of what we see, and 90% of what we do ourselves. Evidently, we learn the most from our own experience. For this reason, it is important that you encourage your mentee to gather their own experience. Your role is to act as a partner for your mentee to explore new strategies. You should take ideas and initiatives suggested by your mentee seriously, discuss their approach and possible consequences and then take stock of the experience gained. In doing so, the mentee may ask you questions that might not otherwise be asked so readily in academic and professional contexts, such as how to behave in certain circles or at certain events.

- **Career consultant:** Another aspect of mentoring is supporting your mentee in developing their career. Discuss what goals they have and what steps they could take to achieve their goals. From your experience, you will certainly be familiar with aspects that can support or hinder your career. You may discuss with your mentee what difficulties might arise and how they could be overcome.
- **Door opener:** If possible, share contacts with your mentee that you consider useful. You may introduce them to academic and professional networks and suggest how they can make and maintain useful contacts themselves.
- **Reflect on your own role:** In the course of mentoring, you should always reflect on your own role. This prevents you from giving too much or falling into the role of rescuer for the mentee. In becoming a mentor, you have not assumed responsibility for ensuring the well-being or successful career development or qualifications of your mentee. If topics arise that you cannot help the mentee with from your experience and knowledge, communicate this clearly and set boundaries where necessary. Some topics are better discussed with a professional coach and you should not feel compelled (or overestimate your ability) to take on the role of a professional coach.

Opportunities for mentors

Mentoring is a mutually beneficial process and mentors can also benefit from their commitment:

- **Sharing your own experiences:** A mentee is an interested and grateful listener with whom you can share your own experiences and values.
- **Self-reflection:** Questions raised and perspectives given by the mentee may encourage you to reflect on your own professional development and working style.
- **Inspiration:** In working with the mentee, you will discover new ideas, views and behaviours that will broaden your own horizons. Examining certain topics such as power and influence can also lead to new insights.
- **Feedback:** The mentee sees your behaviour as an outsider. The openness and confidentiality of the mentoring partnership allows you to receive open feedback about your visibility and work.
- **Reinforcing your own skills:** By practising active listening and empathetic counselling, you can develop your own coaching and counselling skills in the mentoring process.
- **Contact:** Through the mentee, the mentor potentially gains exposure to a younger generation and insights into their thoughts and experiences. Through networking with other mentors, you can establish contact with other people from your field or from other industries and gather ideas for your own professional development.
- **Building your reputation:** You can build your reputation as a good manager and a supporter of early-career researchers.

Checklist for mentors

Talk about yourself

Respond openly to questions asked by the mentee and openly report on your own professional experiences, both formal and informal. Since career planning and development also entails private aspects (e.g. family planning, relocations, etc.), mentors should be willing to report on their own approach to maintaining a work-life balance.

Listening and asking questions

It is important that you really understand the concerns and the circumstances faced by your mentee. Avoid fixed patterns of thinking and opt for openness, curiosity and interest.

Confirm and encourage

Support the mentee in realistically assessing and valuing their own skills.

Practice

Train new behaviours through conversations. Ask the mentee what they have learned and how they intend to act in similar situations in the future.

Moral support

If a mentee makes mistakes or encounters difficulties, show sympathy, provide encouragement and work together to find solutions. Ask them to describe the problem and have them explain what they have tried to change about the situation.

Mirror/Confront

If necessary, address unproductive behaviour of the mentee. If you feel that the mentee is expecting you as a mentor to do all the work, discuss this openly and ask the mentee to make a worthy contribution.

5. MENTORING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

To ensure a successful mentoring partnership, the mentee and mentor should agree on the conditions of the partnership in an initial meeting. A formal agreement is important for establishing a culture of openness and fostering trust.

Issues to be clarified are:

- **Mutual expectations:** Mentor and mentee agree on what they expect from mentoring in general, what they expect from each other and any reservations they may have. If there are expectations that one of the two sides cannot meet, they now have the opportunity to discuss and clarify whether expectations can be met in a changed form.
- **Objectives and contents of the mentoring cooperation:** Mentee and mentor agree on the professional and personal goals of the mentoring process proposed by the mentee. It is important to consider together whether and how these objectives can be achieved. The mentor must decide whether they feel competent to contribute to the achievement of the goals or whether certain goals

are outside their capabilities. It is then possible to consider how the mentee can achieve these goals by other means.

- **Locations where the meetings will take place:** Meetings at the mentor's workplace are of particular interest for mentees. However, this cannot be made possible by every mentor. It is therefore important to clarify where the meetings are to take place right from the start of the partnership. Meetings should preferably take place in a quiet environment and undisturbed atmosphere.
- **Methods and measures for the mentoring process:** There are many different methods for supporting a mentee. Mentoring can take the form of informal conversations, prepared topics with questions, discussing a specific project or shadowing the mentor at professional appointments.
- **Make a written agreement:** Setting the agreement out in writing clearly regulates the objectives, tasks and responsibilities of the mentoring partnership that have been discussed. The agreement is binding and the results can be verified. The mentor or mentor and mentee can check back on what they have planned and what they have already achieved. If you wish, you may make use of the model mentoring agreement as the formal basis for the mentoring partnership.

Meeting procedure

1. Opening the conversation

Welcome

Brief personal exchange

Clarification of organisational issues: Time, possible change of location, invite other participants...

2. Reason for the meeting

Main topic of the meeting

Purpose of meeting, what is the goal?

3. Structure of meeting

Define aspects of the topic that will be dealt with

Exclusion, postponement of certain topics/problems

Determine the order of topics to be discussed

4. Discussion – first topic

Topic discussion:

- Clarification: Topic name, starting point
- Actual discussion of the topic/problem area
- Definition of responsibilities ("Who will do what and by when?")

- Interim summary (“We agree that...”)
- Check question (“Does that conclude this point?”)
- Record agreements and tasks

5. Discussion - second topic

As above

6. Meeting conclusion

Summary

Postponement if necessary, define actions

Copy and share minutes immediately if necessary

7. Meeting closure

Schedule a new appointment

Thanks and departure

6. CONTACT

For formal and organisational issues:

If you have any questions, please contact the programme coordinator.