

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH AN ADVISOR

(adapted from “Tips for Chairing a Graduate Student Committee” presented by C&I Faculty, April 2007)

Working with an advisor should be a rewarding experience (for BOTH of you). Here are a few tips that will help you get the most from this experience.

- **GET CONNECTED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE:**
  - **With your advisor**

Talk with your advisor about his/her research interests and passions, as well as yours. Find out how to get involved early on in research projects (with your advisor or with other faculty members), writing efforts, and other activities that will help you to grow and develop. Attend the various seminars that are offered in the college and university. Join professional organizations and attend conferences in your field. Keep your advisor apprised of your activities (e.g., annually updated CV).
  - **With other students**

Get involved with other graduate students to form mutual support groups. This can occur informally within the program/department or through student organizations such as CIGSA, PAET, and others. You can help each other to understand the academic culture of the college and department and learn what you need to do to succeed. In addition, you can help each other by proofreading each other’s work, giving feedback on research ideas, and working together on projects. This helps to build graduate student camaraderie and it eases the burden on the faculty.
- **BECOME FAMILIAR WITH:**
  - **Graduate policies and procedures**

Review the Graduate School’s website (<http://www.gradschool.purdue.edu>), the Office of Graduate Studies (<http://www.education.purdue.edu/gradoffice>), and the online COE Graduate Handbook (<http://www.education.purdue.edu/gradoffice/facultyhandbook/index.html>). Be responsible for knowing the rules. Do the legwork necessary to schedule committee meetings, get copies of materials to the committee to review, make sure forms are completed, etc.
  - **Your advisor’s style and schedule**

At a minimum, try to meet formally with your advisor at least once per semester to register for classes and keep him/her apprised of your overall progress. More frequent meetings will be needed as you progress to discuss projects, research, and writing. Keep good records, and document your decisions. Avoid making appointments or doing business in the hallways; things may slip through the cracks.
- **SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**
  - Set goals and expectations for yourself and use them to keep you on track. Clearly lay out what you are doing and what your expectations are along the way. Set up milestones and keep your advisor in the loop. Many headaches can be avoided by doing some advance planning.
  - Setting daily, weekly, and monthly goals is a good idea, and works even better if you use a “buddy system” where you and another student meet at regular intervals to review your progress. Try to find people to work with: doing research is much easier if you have someone to bounce ideas off of and to give you feedback.

- Breaking down any project into smaller pieces is always a good tactic when things seem unmanageable. For example, instead of focusing first on writing an entire paper, focus on the goal of writing a section or outline.
- **HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE**
  - Develop a contract with your advisor or otherwise set requirements for what you will accomplish. Take it upon yourself to report your progress to your advisor, and talk to him or her often enough to assure that you are moving along on a reasonable timeline. If you don't care about your progress enough to keep it on track, who will?
  - Head off problems in advance. Seek to resolve small problems before they become big ones. If you experience specific problems in your program, talk with your advisor and take steps to remedy the problem early on. Be careful about doing things that will impede your progress such as taking on too much work or accepting a faculty position before completing your dissertation. Realize that you are your own best friend and ally (and conversely, your own worse enemy) in the graduate school process.
- **BE RESPECTFUL OF YOUR ADVISOR'S TIME (make appointments, don't abuse email, get info from other sources if possible).**
  - When requesting a meeting, send an email indicating the purpose of the meeting and the amount of time needed. Come to the meeting with an agenda in hand. Make sure that the most important topics are covered first. If you don't get to some of the smaller items, follow up with email. You don't necessarily need to meet face-to-face to answer minor questions or address every detail.
  - Don't give work to your advisor that has not been proofread or edited. If this is not your strength, ask a colleague to read your work first and/or use a professional editor. Names of professional editors are available through the Writing Lab here on campus.
  - Find out when your advisor is available to meet and to give feedback on your work. Many faculty members take breaks when there are breaks in the academic calendar (Christmas, Spring Break, summer). As a general rule, students should submit work to faculty members for review at least two weeks in advance of a scheduled meeting (e.g., prelim or proposal defense).
  - Finally, listen very carefully and take heed to the advice you are given. You don't have to learn things the hard way!