

SPDAC Guidelines for Mentorship Meetings: These guidelines should be seen as a starting point for mentorship interactions. Because the format of mentorship meetings at SICB varies among divisions, the “prior to the meeting” guidelines may not be applicable to all. We encourage mentors and mentees to reach out to SPDAC representatives with any questions or suggestions on how to further promote effective and equitable mentorship.

Best Practices for Mentors

Prior to the meeting (if you coordinate over email):

1. **Introduce yourself!** Provide some brief background about yourself to your mentee(s) and ask them for their preferred names and pronouns. Communicate about when and where you will meet. If **you** have to set this up, suggest some possible blocks of time and public locations. This will help your mentee feel more prepared and less stressed about meeting you, especially if this is their first conference.
2. **Find common ground.** Ask your mentee(s) what they hope to gain from the mentorship meeting so you can prepare to answer questions that are important to them. Subjects will vary by mentee interests; see Mentee Guidelines below for a list of possible questions they might ask!

During the mentorship meeting:

3. **Be punctual.** Please show up on time to your designated meeting place. We understand that schedule challenges may occur prior to or during the meeting, and encourage you to communicate any changes in your schedule with your mentee(s) as soon as possible via email or through the SICB app.
4. **Introduce yourself (again).** **Briefly** (~2 minutes) tell mentees about your educational background, any elements of your personal background you'd like to share, your research, and your current position. This will help mentees get to know you and provide some conversation starters.
5. **Be an active listener.** Make eye contact and ask questions to help guide your meeting. Allow your mentee(s) to guide the conversation. Avoid distractions such as phones or laptops or waving at longtime SICB friends that may walk by.
6. **Start with the basics.** Do not assume mentees know everything about your field. Explain the basics of your research, academic position, etc. so that mentees understand what you are talking about and the advice you give them.
7. **Provide insight!** This is one of the most important parts of the meeting, as the mentee is hoping to learn from you. Feel free to share your own experiences with the mentee,

provide suggestions, and help establish possible connections for mentees to pursue further.

8. **Be mindful.** Be respectful during your meeting and use appropriate language. We all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences that impact who we are and how we approach conversations. A mentee who feels respected by their mentor is likely to ask better questions and more fully appreciate the information shared with them.

9. **If you have a group of mentees, manage group dynamics.** Speak directly to all mentees and give everyone a chance to ask questions. Address quieter mentees directly if one mentee is much more vocal than others.

10. **Share contact information.** Mentorship need not be limited to the meeting! If you are comfortable doing so, consider sharing your email address or social media information with mentees (if they have it), or encouraging them to reach out again (if they don't have it) to reconnect in the future.

Best Practices for Mentees

1. **Bring Questions.** Come prepared with a few questions to help guide your conversation with your mentor. All questions are good questions! Here are some suggestions:

- What do you recommend that I do to get a job as [insert your career goal]?
- Should I get a Masters or a PhD degree?
- What is your biggest piece of advice for someone at my career stage?
- How do I get into graduate school/find a good advisor?
- What are your tips for maintaining positive work-life balance?
- How did you get into your current research area?
- Why did you choose to work on [research topic]?
- Why did you choose to work at your type of institution and do you enjoy it?
- What is the best thing about your job? What is the worst thing about your job?
- How do I make the most out of SICB 2026?

2. **Practice your “elevator pitch”.** Jot down a few sentences about your research interests and career goals that you could explain in 30 seconds or less. This will help you to quickly introduce yourself to mentors and other mentees.

Example 1 [undergraduate]: Hi, my name is Morgan and I'm a senior at Iowa State University majoring in biology. I've been doing undergraduate research in a lab that studies evolutionary ecology in painted turtles. I like evolutionary research and I want to go to graduate school, but I'm not sure if I want to get a Masters before applying for a PhD program, or if I should work for a couple

years first. I'm excited to be at the meeting to explore more research topics, and I hope to keep working with reptiles.

Example 2 [graduate student]: Hi, my name is Morgan and I'm a 5th year PhD student at Auburn University. I'm interested in macroecology and trait evolution, and I love all herps. For my PhD work, I'm studying how developmental plasticity evolves in anole lizards, mostly using comparisons across species and populations inhabiting different climates. I'm hoping to become a professor at a research-focused institution, but I'm also very interested in opportunities in government or the non-profit sector. I'm about to start my first postdoctoral position and I could really use some advice on how to make the most of this stage of an academic career.

3. **If you are in a group of mentees, practice active listening.** Make eye contact with the speaker, and don't interrupt. Allow time for other mentees to ask questions, and ensure that you speak up too. Everyone can learn from each other's questions!
4. **Consider exchanging contact information with other mentees.** Part of professional networking is building a "peer network" of people at your career stage who will become your future colleagues!
5. **Follow-up afterwards.** After the meeting it is good practice to follow up with a thank you to your mentor. Remember that they are very busy and volunteered to mentor you.
 - **Consider writing a short email to your mentor.** Thank them for their time and ask any follow-up questions that you might have.
 - **You can also email other mentees.** If you met other students or postdocs you would like to keep in touch with, send them a quick message saying you enjoyed meeting them and look forward to seeing them again at a future conference.