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MENTOR ME!

You've been working on your science fair project for a while. Maybe you're expanding on last year's project and need some help to do that. Or maybe some guidance would really help you take your project from good to excellent. Or maybe it has nothing to do with a science fair project – it's an interest that you want to pursue and develop.

A mentor can help you, no matter your situation. A mentor is a researcher willing to spend some time with you, help steer you in the right direction, or let you use their facilities and equipment to carry out your experiment. It's an amazing opportunity! Here are a few tips to help you make the most of it.

So how do I find a mentor?

Relax. We're taking care of that for you. We will take a close look at your research interests and match you up with a researcher who is able to provide you with the help you need. We'll ask you to provide us with a CV and a letter of introduction. We'll pass these on to a potential mentor. If the mentor thinks the match could work, we'll put you and the mentor in touch with each other. The rest is up to you.



But I don't live near a university. What kind of help can a mentor give me?



Obviously, there's nothing like the experience of working in a real lab, but we know that isn't always possible. Thankfully, we have modern technology at our disposal. Through e-mail and phone, your mentor can help you decide in what direction to take your work, give you suggestions for reading and provide feedback along the way. It may be a one-time deal, or the beginning of an ongoing relationship – it's up to you and what your needs are.

So what do I have to do before I meet my mentor?

You won't have unlimited time with your mentor – both of you have other things to do as well. So it helps to be prepared, so you can make the best use of your time. Have a clear idea of what it is you want to accomplish – some students even write out proposals or plans for their mentors. At the very minimum, make sure you have a relatively focused idea of what you'd like to do in your time with your mentor.

Your first meeting is probably your most important encounter with your mentor. Treat it like an interview. Put your best face forward and use the time to discuss each other's expectations for the mentor-student relationship. And remember, before you can start working together, you need a signed letter of permission from your parents or guardians.

How can I make the best use of my time with my mentor?



A mentor's time is valuable – and so is yours. So when you've set a time to meet, be on time and be ready to work. If you're working in your mentor's lab, make sure you know and *follow* all safety rules and procedures. Work together to set goals and timelines for what you would like to accomplish. At all times, you need to demonstrate your commitment to the mentoring process by communicating regularly with your mentor, acting responsibly when in the lab and meeting your mentor's expectations. The best mentor-mentee relationships are built on trust – it's up to you to earn that trust.



Help, my mentor is taking over my project!

One of the most difficult aspects of being a mentor is knowing when to step back and let the student take over. It is, ultimately, your project. In fact, science fairs will ask you to document the role of your mentor, if you worked with one, to ensure that they are judging your work, not your mentor's. Ideally, the situation won't come up, but if it does, you need to be able to express your concerns politely but firmly to your mentor.

What if it doesn't work out?

We make every effort to try to ensure a good match. But sometimes things just don't work out. Maybe the research interests don't mesh. Maybe the research connection is there, but you've got a personality clash. Or maybe you and your mentor can't manage to find a good time for both of you to work together.

If this is the case with you and your mentor, don't let it worry you. We will go back to the drawing board and try to find a mentor with whom you are better suited.

Where can I find more information?

There's lots of material out there to help you establish and maintain a relationship with a mentor. Among the most useful are:

- *The SMARTS Guide to Mentorship: An Introduction to Mentorship Mechanics* by Eden Full, Natalie Raso and Joshua Liu, available online at <http://www.yfs-fsj.ca/SMARTS/support/resources.aspx>.
- *Guide-conseil du mentoré, Guide-conseil de l'enseignant and Guide-conseil du mentor*, Conseil de développement du loisir scientifique, available online under SCIENCE ET MENTORAT at www.exposciencesbell.qc.ca.
- *Science Fair Alumni Mentorship Program: Guidelines for Students*, Science Fair Foundation of BC, available online at http://www.sciencefairs.ca/pdf/amp_student06-07.pdf. You may also find some useful tips at <http://www.sciencefairs.ca/students.html>.



Sami Obaid,
Student

"It's been really great. All the mentors I've found want students in their lab. They want to help and encourage kids, help bring up the next generation of researchers."

Will Turk,
Student

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