

Mentoring Graduate Student Writers

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What Would You Do?

Joe is a third year PhD student in your lab working on his first publication as lead author, a journal article for which you will be a co-author. He's been working on the content for a while and has finally shared a draft with you, after several weeks of you asking to see it. The manuscript is very much a draft – the line of argument is unclear, the literature review just summarizes articles related to the paper topic, and it's riddled with grammatical and stylistic errors.

You are disappointed with Joe's draft. You thought he would be farther along by now since he's been a co-author on other articles. You don't have time to deal with it at the moment because you have your own revise-and-resubmit due, so you plan to discuss it at his next one-on-one meeting in two weeks.

What are your biggest concerns or challenges when mentoring graduate students to be scholarly writers?

What Are Your Goals for Mentoring Writers?

- Motivate grad students to become effective writers who understand researchers earn their living and develop careers based on their writing
- Build scholarly, psychological, and social habits and structures to support a well-functioning process and productive writing strategies
- Help writers understand all aspects of manuscript writing, from research design to crafting an argument to communicating with reviewers
- Introduce writers to rhetorical conventions of purpose, audience, and genre
- Give feedback that meets writers where they are developmentally and encourages them to see writing as a thinking process, not just a final product

Concerns Graduate Student Writers Have...

- What should all these documents I'm supposed to write look like? What should they include, and how should they be organized?
- How much time should it take me to write something?
- I'm afraid my professors, committee members, and fellow grad students will read my writing and realize I'm a fraud and don't know what I'm actually doing. What should I do about this?
- I'm not aware of the disciplinary conventions of a thesis/dissertation in my program. What should the structure look like? What goes where? How much detail do I need in each chapter/section?
- How much time should I spend on the different phases of my scholarly writing projects? I feel like the clock is always ticking.

Hear from Fellow Faculty



Dr. Eunhwa Yang
School of Building
Construction



Dr. M.G. Finn
School of Chemistry and
Biochemistry



Jacqueline
Snedecker
School of Chemical
and Biomolecular
Engineering

Common Mentoring Hiccups

Not having an initial conversation about student's writing experiences, process, and goals as well as "how academic writing happens" in the field

- Everyone has different writing experiences and fears that can guide mentoring approach
- Opportunity to normalize writing struggle, revision, constructive criticism

Not establishing expectations about drafting process, interim deadlines, boundaries, quality of work, feedback format early in the relationship

- Set guidelines and expectations for mentoring relationship about writing activities

Waiting to see a complete draft

- Working on sections allows you to correct issues early in the writing process

Common Mentoring Hiccups

Ignoring the rhetorical considerations of writing

- Help your student understand the nuances of purpose, audience, and genres in your field

Focusing on the “micro” aspects of the writing before the “macro” aspects

- Work with student to develop argument, structure, detail before grammar and style

Expecting students will learn to write scholarly prose without spending time with them talking about writing, offering actionable feedback, and supporting their individual development and socialization into the field

- It takes time and effort.

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