10 Questions to Ask a Potential Mentor at Your First Meeting

1. What are your professional interests in research, teaching, industry, and service? What recent or current projects are you working on?

2. Given my goals and interests, what courses, projects, or organizations should I become involved with to explore them?

3. What other people or experiences does the university offer to help me develop professionally?

4. What are your other commitments? How much time do you normally give to students?

5. What do you consider to be a normal workload and how much time do you expect me to devote to research or teaching?

6. What strengths, skills, and interests are you looking for in your advisees?

7. How often do you like to meet one-on-one with advisees?

8. Can I develop a dissertation topic from the research I may do with you?

9. How many other advisees do you have? How many advisees have you graduated and how long did it take those advisees to graduate?

10. Will you be at the university for the entire year? If not, can we maintain regular communication?
Dear Student,

Welcome to your graduate studies at USC!

A positive and constructive relationship with a faculty mentor is at the heart of most successful graduate studies programs. The graduate education experience is the forum for your professional training, acquisition of knowledge and skills sets, and socialization, that are all necessary for you to be successful in your field.

At USC it is our aspiration that mentoring relationships exemplify dedication to excellence, mutual respect, fairness, collegiality, honesty, open communication, and integrity. Both the faculty and the student share responsibility for facilitating a good relationship, and your mentor, as well as you, contributes to the successful pursuit of the graduate degree.

To help you in navigating your relationship with your faculty mentor we are providing the following lists of suggestions. Of course you and your mentor may have your own thoughts on what is desirable in your relationship, and there is a great deal of individual variation. A more detailed list of suggestions is available on the Graduate School web site: http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/

We are delighted to have you as part of our academic community. I trust your graduate studies will be fulfilling and productive.

Jean Morrison
Vice Provost for Graduate Programs

The Ideal Students:

- Choose their mentors thoughtfully and wisely by becoming familiar with the professor’s research and professional interests.
- Develop short and long term professional and research goals; share these goals with their mentor.
- Recognize their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Submit work promptly and come to meetings prepared with specific goals, questions, and tasks to accomplish.
- Communicate regularly with the faculty about their progress, changes, or professional needs.
- Clarify their mentor’s expectations and policies.
- Respect their mentor's time and reputation.
- Are pro-active in their own mentoring relationships, asking mentors for information and advice on workshops that will enhance their professional development.
- Know the requirements for the degree program and explicitly ask their mentor for help in successfully completing those requirements.
- Follow their mentor’s advice and follow up with their mentor about any advice or suggestions.

The Ideal Mentors:

- Read and return work promptly with constructive comments.
- Develop with the student a list of short and long term research and professional goals.
- Clarify expectations and policies.
- Communicate regularly about research progress, scheduling changes, and workshops or seminars that will aid in the student’s professional development.
- Provide students with opportunities to develop and practice professional skills required for research, teaching, and service.
- Help students develop innovative dissertation topics.
- Help the student develop a marketable job dossier.
- Treat students respectfully as future colleagues.
- Encourage the student and provide emotional and moral support.
- Acknowledge that students have responsibilities outside the academy.