

Research Mentor Training

The selections you have chosen for your customized curricula are drawn from materials based on *Entering Mentoring* (Pfund, Branchaw, and Handelsman, 2014).

The Entering Mentoring-based materials have been developed and tested by many partners across the country. Individual acknowledgements can be found in footers of each page.

A full listing of partners and funders can be found at CIMERProject.org.

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Maintaining effective communication

1. A Few Things I Noticed About Your Presentation...
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Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn strategies to use to provide constructive feedback to their mentees (trainees)

Case Study

A Few Things I Noticed About Your Presentation...

As he leaves the crowded conference room, Dr. Tariq tells Dr. Timms he'll see her in a few minutes. Dr. Timms was the last presenter in the practice session. Back in his office, Dr. Tariq sits looking distractedly out the window and releases a heavy sigh. He shifts his attention back to his notes for a last review: ... reading slides ... too fast ... too long ... print too small ... too much print ... color contrast ... meandering ...

A few moments later he hears a knock on the door and beckons Dr. Timms to come in. She plops in a chair across from him and looks up expectantly. He meets her gaze and smiles. "Thanks for coming by. I wanted to make sure we could review your talk since the conference is in a week and I know you're in clinic all day tomorrow—and then I'm out of town," he says with a heavy accent. Dr. Timms continues to stare without comment, a blank expression on her face.

"Well, as you know I think your research is really important and I'm glad that we have this opportunity to share it. I think this conference will be a great opportunity for you to meet some key colleagues in this field." She nods slightly, and shifts in her seat. "I do think there are a few things that could tighten your presentation." She continues to stare and Dr. Tariq keeps his focus on his notes as he continues. "For example you had some long sentences and even whole paragraphs on your slides. While they were well written"—his computer chimes as a new email arrives and he glances over to see who it's from. *Oh, not again ...* "As I was saying, while they were well written—I mean you know your writing is strong—it is really too much text for a slide. You could try to shorten some to bullet points. Then you can still make those points without just reading your slides to the audience."

He looks up and sees that she is now looking at the floor. "It would also allow you to increase the font size a bit. I think it might have been hard to read from the back of the room." He looks up again and sees she is taking some notes. "To cut back on the time, I think you could cut the four slides on the background and just briefly summarize those." He waits for comment and the silence drags on a few moments. "What do you think?"

"I can look at it." Her face remains expressionless as she glances up and briefly meets his eye.

*From Pfund, et al. Mentor Training for Clinical and Translational Researchers (2012).
New York, NY: W.H. Freeman & Co.*

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Mentor Training for **Clinical and Translational Researchers**

Maintaining Effective Communication

“That might allow you to slow down a bit,” he continues. “Of course it’s natural to get nervous and then one tends to talk faster. Perhaps you could practice it a bit at home and focus on slowing the pace and not looking at your notes as much. Have you tried practicing out loud to yourself at home?”

“Yes.”

The phone rings. He checks caller ID. *I’ll have to call her back when this is over.* “Okay then. I can send you a link to some tips on slide composition and oral presentation and hopefully that will be helpful.” There is another long moment of silence. “Well do you have any questions for me?”

“No, not right now.”

“Okay then, well good luck!” He forces another smile and reaches out to shake her hand as she rises to leave. She takes it and smiles back feebly.

“Thanks.”

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. How could this situation have been handled differently? What should the mentor do now?
3. Does a lack of response constitute feedback? When you get no response, how do you interpret that?

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Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to identify different communication styles

Activity

Communication Styles Test

- **TELL (7 min):** Mentors should individually complete a communication styles test and calculate their score. There are many such inventories available online such as the “Effective Communication Styles Inventory” (<http://www.whecare.com/images/form.pdf>) or the “PACE Palette” (<http://www.paceorg.com>).
- **ASK:** Think about the way you communicate with your current mentees when engaging in the following activity.
- **DISCUSS (8 min):** Mentors discuss their results in pairs and compare results. Questions to guide their discussion can include (you may wish to write these questions on the whiteboard or flipchart):
 - Specifically, to what extent did or didn’t the test validate what you know about yourself?
 - What did you learn?
- **DISCUSS (10 min):** With entire group discuss additional questions regarding communication styles:
 - In what other situations could you apply this type of assessment?
 - How can you determine your mentee’s communication style?
 - What are strategies for communicating across different styles?

NOTE: We acknowledge that all such tests are at some level oversimplifications, but can be an effective starting point for reflection and discussion. As a facilitator, you may want to provide a specific example of how your results helped you reflect on your communication with mentees.

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Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to engage in active listening and use multiple strategies for improving communication.

Activity

Active Listening

- (15 min): Mentors form groups of three. One mentor shares a current challenge they are facing in their mentoring relationship(s). The second person practices active listening skills and tries to develop a plan of action to resolve the situation. The third person acts as observer and notes tone, body language, facial expressions, etc. Participants rotate roles and discuss what they learned as time allows. Refer to the provided reading for tips on active listening or for more information on nonverbal communication.
- DISCUSS (10 min): In the large group have mentors share what they learned from the exercise and the strategies that the groups elicited. You may want to record the ideas generated in this discussion on a white board or flip chart.

Summary Activity (5 min)

- REFLECTION (5 min): Mentors reflect on the handout about interpersonal communication and write down two areas for personal improvement.

Building a Relationship with a Mentee

Building an effective relationship of mutual understanding and trust with the mentee is a critical component of effective mentoring. Mentors can establish rapport with their mentees by using effective interpersonal communication skills, actively building trust, and maintaining confidentiality. This document contains information and advice to help mentors build rapport and create positive relationships with mentees so both parties can achieve the greatest benefit from the mentoring experience.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a person-to-person, two-way, verbal and nonverbal sharing of information between two or more persons. Good communication helps to develop a positive working relationship between the mentor and mentee by helping the mentee to better understand directions and feedback from the mentor, feel respected and understood, and be motivated to learn from the mentor.

Mentees learn best from mentors who are sincere, approachable, and nonjudgmental. These qualities are communicated primarily by facial expressions, and, to a limited extent, by words. People often remember more about how a subject is communicated than the speaker's knowledge of the subject.

There are two types of communication: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication is communication that occurs through spoken words. Nonverbal communication is communication that occurs through unspoken mediums, such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, silence, and eye contact. It is important for mentors to remember they are communicating to mentees both when they are speaking and when they are not speaking. Up to 93% of human communication is nonverbal.¹ Body language tells those with whom we are communicating a great deal about what we are thinking and feeling. Examples of positive or open body language include:

- ▶ Eye contact (depending on the culture)
- ▶ Open or relaxed posture
- ▶ Nodding or other affirmation
- ▶ Pleasant facial expressions

Examples of negative or closed body language include crossed arms, averted eyes, and pointing fingers. The mentor needs to be aware of what he or she is communicating nonverbally as well as what the mentee is communicating nonverbally.

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Maintaining Effective Communication

When mentoring, effective communication involves more than providing information or giving advice; it requires asking questions, listening carefully, trying to understand a mentee's concerns or needs, demonstrating a caring attitude, remaining open-minded, and helping solve problems. There are many communication skills that mentors can utilize to effectively communicate with mentees, including the following:

- ▶ *Active listening:* Be sure to really listen to what a mentee is saying. Often, instead of truly listening to the mentee, the mentor is thinking about his or her response, what to say next, or something else entirely. It is important to quiet these thoughts and remain fully engaged in the task of listening.
- ▶ *Attending:* Listen while observing, and communicate attentiveness. This can include verbal follow-up (saying “yes” or “I see”) or nonverbal cues (making eye contact and nodding the head).
- ▶ *Reflective listening:* Verbally reflect back what the mentee has just said. This helps the mentor to check whether or not he or she understands the mentee, and helps the mentee feel understood.

Examples:

- ▷ “So it seems that you’re overwhelmed with your workload.”
- ▷ “It seems that you are concerned about that experiment.”
- ▶ *Paraphrasing:* Determine the basic message of the mentee’s previous statement and rephrase it in your own words to check for understanding.

Examples:

- ▷ “You’re interested in developing a system for improving that.”
- ▷ “It sounds like you’re concerned about the design of the experiment.”
- ▶ *Summarizing:* Select main points from a conversation and bring them together in a complete statement. This helps ensure the message is received correctly. For example, “Let me tell you what I heard, so I can be sure that I understand you. You said that the main challenge right now is balancing your clinical load and writing the research proposal.”
- ▶ *Asking open-ended questions:* Ask mentees questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open-ended questions encourage a full, meaningful answer using the mentee’s own knowledge and feelings, whereas closed-ended questions encourage a short or single-word answer. Examples:

Close-ended question: “You didn’t think the experiment would work?”

Open-ended question: “What factors led you to your decision to change the protocol?”

Close-ended question: “Did you understand what we discussed today?”

Open-ended question: “Can you summarize what we discussed today?”

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Maintaining Effective Communication

- ▶ *Probing*: Identify a subject or topic that needs further discussion or clarification and use open-ended questions to examine the situation in greater depth. For example, “I heard you say you are overwhelmed; please tell me more about that.”
- ▶ *Self-disclosure*: Share appropriate personal feelings, attitudes, opinions, and experiences to increase the intimacy of communication. For example, “I can relate to your difficult situation, I have experienced something similar and recall being very frustrated. Hopefully I can assist you to figure out how to move forward.”
- ▶ *Interpreting*: Add to the mentee’s ideas to present alternate ways of looking at circumstances. When using this technique, it is important to check back in with the mentee and be sure you are interpreting correctly before assigning additional meaning to their words. For example, “So you are saying that the reason the interpretation is flawed is because of the statistical test used to analyze the data? That is likely one reason, but have you also considered that the design may be wrong as well?”
- ▶ *Confrontation*: Use questions or statements to encourage mentees to face difficult issues without accusing, judging, or devaluing them. This can include gently pointing out contradictions in mentees’ behavior or statements, as well as guiding mentees to face an issue that is being avoided. For example, “It’s great that you are so committed to mentoring the younger researcher in the group. However, I am concerned that you are not dedicating enough time to your own research.”

A number of attitudes and/or behaviors can serve as barriers to communication—these can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal barriers to communication that should be *avoided* include the following:

- ▶ *Moralizing*: Making judgments about a mentee’s behavior, including calling it right or wrong, or telling them what they should or should not do.
- ▶ *Arguing*: Disagreeing with instead of encouraging the mentee.
- ▶ *Preaching*: Telling the mentee what to do in a self-righteous way.
- ▶ *Storytelling*: Relating long-winded personal narratives that are not relevant or helpful to the mentee.
- ▶ *Blocking communication*: Speaking without listening to the mentee’s responses, using an aggressive voice, showing impatience, showing annoyance when interrupted, or having an authoritative manner. These behaviors often lead to the mentee feeling down, humiliated, scared, and insecure. As a result, the mentee may remain passive and refrain from asking questions, or distrust the mentor and disregard his or her recommendations.
- ▶ *Talking too much*: Talking so much that the mentee does not have time to express themselves. As a mentor, it is important not to dominate the interaction.

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Examples of nonverbal barriers to communication include shuffling papers, not looking directly at the mentee when he or she is speaking, and allowing interruptions or distractions. These barriers may have consequences for both the mentor and the mentee. They may lead to a poor sharing of information, fewer questions being asked by the mentee, difficulty in understanding problems, uncomfortable situations, and a lack of motivation on the part of the mentee.

Establishing Trust

Establishing trust is an essential component in building rapport with a mentee. Trust is the trait of believing in the honesty and reliability of others.² Some mentees may be nervous about working with a mentor. To put them at ease, create a trusting relationship by empathizing with their challenges, share knowledge without being patronizing, and remain nonjudgmental. Along with the other communication skills listed above, establishing a trusting dynamic is essential for a productive and positive mentor/mentee relationship.

The following list provides some ideas for how the mentor can build trust with the mentee:

- ▶ Share appropriate personal experiences from a time when they were being mentored.
- ▶ Acknowledge mentee strengths and accomplishments from the onset of the mentoring process.
- ▶ Encourage questions of any type and tell the mentee that there is no such thing as a bad question.
- ▶ Take time to learn culturally appropriate ways of interacting with your mentee and helping your mentee to interact appropriately with their peers.
- ▶ When appropriate, consider how local knowledge can be incorporated into the mentoring experience.
- ▶ Acknowledge the mentee's existing knowledge and incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge.
- ▶ Ask for and be open to receiving feedback from mentees, apply constructive feedback to improve mentoring skills.
- ▶ Eat a meal with the mentee to get to know him or her in a non-work setting.

Adapted from the I-TECH Clinical Mentoring Toolkit, produced by the International Training and

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Maintaining Effective Communication

Education Center for Health (I-TECH)/University of Washington with funding from the US Health Resources and Services Administration. For more information, visit www.go2itech.org.

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Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to engage in active listening.

Activity

Communication Role Play

Have mentors work in pairs and role-play the scripted conversation between mentor and mentee below. Then discuss how the mentor could have reacted differently; practice a response that includes active listening. Use the techniques in the reading to guide your approach. (Alternatively, facilitators could role play the scenario and then discuss with the full group.)

Scripted conversation:

Mentee walks into his mentor's office excited after coming from a meeting with a co-primary mentor.

Mentee: [Knocks and walks in office] Hi! I'm so glad I caught you in your office. I just came from my meeting with Dr. Jahns and I have really exciting news about our upcoming grant. He said—

Mentor: [Interrupting] I was hoping you'd stop by. I just submitted the abstract for the conference next month. I was thinking . . . [email notification pops up on computer and mentor is distracted]

Mentee: [Patiently waits for mentor to read email]

Mentor: Ooh I just received an email back from Dr. Tram. He agreed to present at the conference. His ideas are so innovative. I want to make sure you meet him. I have to quick run to my next meeting. What were you saying before?

Mentee: Dr. Jahns is really excited about our idea for the grant. He and I thought of a few suggestions on how to integrate our projects—

Mentor: [Interrupting] That's great but we already decided our approach at the lab meeting two weeks ago. I already know what he has to say about it and it doesn't make any sense to change it.

Mentee: I really think we should consider—

Mentor: [Interrupting] I have to go. We can talk next week. I expect a draft of the grant at our next meeting.

Mentor walks out of his office and hurries down the hall.

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Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to identify different communication styles

Activity

Working with Different Communication Styles

Have mentors generate a list of different communication styles and discuss the styles they feel most and least comfortable with. If time allows, ask mentors to share practical strategies for working with mentees who have very different communication styles from their own.

Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to use multiple strategies for improving communication

Activity

Barriers to Good Communication

- Have mentors brainstorm a list of barriers to good communication, record them on a white board or flip chart, and then have mentors choose two or three barriers and discuss practical ways to overcome them. For example, one barrier might be a lack of time to meet one-on-one. Some solutions might be more frequently email, telecoms, or setting up a time to chat by instant message each week.
- Alternatively, have the mentors create a list of all the forms of communication used by them and their mentee (face-to-face meetings, email, sticky notes, phone calls, etc.). Organize the resulting list by types of communication and assign each type to a subgroup of two to three mentors. Each subgroup should then discuss ways each method can be improved. At the end, have each smaller group report to the entire group. Record all ideas on the whiteboard or flip chart. You may want to send a compiled list to the entire group.

Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to use multiple strategies for improving communication (in person, at a distance, across multiple mentors, and within proper personal boundaries)

Activity

Reviewing Strategies (10 min)

- Review for 2-3 minutes the list of specific strategies for improving communication between mentors and mentees that the group has generated throughout the session.
- **DISCUSS (7 min):** Discuss the list with the entire group and add any additional ideas. Include in the discussion the times or circumstances in which each strategy would be most appropriate.

Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to identify different communication styles.

Activity

Communication Styles

Have mentors generate a list of different communication styles and discuss the styles they feel most and least comfortable with. If time allows, ask mentors to share practical strategies for working with mentees who have very different communication styles from their own.

Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to provide constructive feedback

Activity

Building a Relationship

Have mentors read “Building a Relationship with a Mentee” (starting on the next page) and discuss their own communication skills and how they are linked to their ability to provide effective constructive feedback. Have them write down two skills they will work on when providing feedback. You may want to return to these skills at the next session to see if they have had a chance to practice them.

Building a Relationship with a Mentee



Adapted from the I-TECH Clinical Mentoring Toolkit, produced by the International Training and Education Center for Health (I-TECH)/University of Washington with funding from the US Health Resources and Services Administration.

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- Eye contact (depending on the culture)
- Open or relaxed posture
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- Pleasant facial expressions

¹ Mehrabian, Albert. *Nonverbal communication*. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, Chicago; 1972.

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Examples of negative or closed body language include crossed arms, averted eyes, and pointing fingers. The mentor needs to be aware of what he or she is communicating nonverbally as well as what the mentee is communicating nonverbally.

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- **Reflective listening:** Verbally reflect back what the mentee has just said. This helps the mentor to check whether or not he or she understands the mentee, and helps the mentee feel understood. Examples:
 - “So it seems that you’re overwhelmed with your workload.”
 - “It seems that you are concerned about that experiment.”
- **Paraphrasing:** Determine the basic message of the mentee’s previous statement and rephrase it in your own words to check for understanding. Examples:
 - “You’re interested in developing a system for improving that.”
 - “It sounds like you’re concerned about the design of the experiment.”
- **Summarizing:** Select main points from a conversation and bring them together in a complete statement. This helps ensure the message is received correctly. For example, “Let me tell you what I heard, so I can be sure that I understand you. You said that the main challenge right now is balancing your clinical load and writing the research proposal.”
- **Asking open-ended questions:** Ask mentees questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open-ended questions encourage a full, meaningful answer using the mentee’s own knowledge and feelings, whereas closed-ended questions encourage a short or single-word answer. Examples:
 - Close-ended question:* “You didn’t think the experiment would work?”
 - Open-ended question:* “What factors led you to your decision to change the protocol?”
 - Close-ended question:* “Did you understand what we discussed today?”
 - Open-ended question:* “Can you summarize what we discussed today?”
- **Probing:** Identify a subject or topic that needs further discussion or clarification and use open-ended questions to examine the situation in greater depth. For example, “I heard you say you are overwhelmed; please tell me more about that.”

Part of the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2014.

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Maintaining Effective Communication

- **Self-disclosure:** Share appropriate personal feelings, attitudes, opinions, and experiences to increase the intimacy of communication. For example, “I can relate to your difficult situation, I have experienced something similar and recall being very frustrated. Hopefully I can assist you to figure out how to move forward.”
- **Interpreting:** Add to the mentee’s ideas to present alternate ways of looking at circumstances. When using this technique, it is important to check back in with the mentee and be sure you are interpreting correctly before assigning additional meaning to their words. For example, “So you are saying that the reason the interpretation is flawed is because of the statistical test used to analyze the data? That is likely one reason, but have you also considered that the design may be wrong as well?”
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A number of attitudes and/or behaviors can serve as barriers to communication—these can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal barriers to communication that should be avoided include the following:

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- **Arguing:** Disagreeing with instead of encouraging the mentee.
- **Preaching:** Telling the mentee what to do in a self-righteous way.
- **Storytelling:** Relating long-winded personal narratives that are not relevant or helpful to the mentee.
- **Blocking communication:** Speaking without listening to the mentee’s responses, using an aggressive voice, showing impatience, showing annoyance when interrupted, or having an authoritative manner. These behaviors often lead to the mentee feeling down, humiliated, scared, and insecure. As a result, the mentee may remain passive and refrain from asking questions, or distrust the mentor and disregard his or her recommendations.
- **Talking too much:** Talking so much that the mentee does not have time to express him or herself. As a mentor, it is important not to dominate the interaction.

Examples of nonverbal barriers to communication include shuffling papers, not looking directly at the mentee when he or she is speaking, and allowing interruptions or distractions. These barriers may have consequences for both the mentor and the mentee. They may lead to poor information sharing, fewer questions being asked by the mentee, difficulty in understanding problems, uncomfortable situations, and a lack of motivation on the part of the mentee.

Establishing Trust

Establishing trust is an essential component in building rapport. Trust is the trait of believing in the honesty and reliability of others.² Some mentees may be nervous about working with a mentor. To put them at ease and create a trusting relationship, empathize with their challenges, share knowledge without being patronizing, and remain encouraging. Along with the other communication skills listed above, establishing a trusting dynamic is essential for a productive and positive relationship.

The following list provides some ideas for how the mentor can build trust with the mentee:

- Encourage questions of any type and tell the mentee that there is no such thing as a bad question.
- Acknowledge mentee strengths and accomplishments from the onset of the mentoring process and be intentional about how you expect to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge.
- Ask for and be open to receiving feedback from mentees, establish a format for this to occur and apply constructive feedback to improve mentoring skills.
- Share appropriate personal experiences from a time when you were being mentored.
- When appropriate, consider how “local knowledge” can be incorporated into the mentoring experience. In other words, think about how you can socialize the mentee to the department or institution.

² WordNet. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Cognitive Science Library; c2006 [cited 2008 5 June]. Available from: <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>.

Learning Objective:

Mentors will learn to communicate effectively across diverse dimensions including various backgrounds, disciplines, generations, ethnicities, positions of power, etc.

Case Study **Saying No**

Dr. Yin is clinical faculty member in Pediatrics and the recent recipient of a career development award. Dr. Yin found his first year as an investigator very challenging. In particular, he struggled to balance his clinical responsibilities with his research productivity. However, in just the last few months, Dr. Yin has figured out a schedule and an organizational system that is working well for him. He is finally feeling that his research program is moving forward and he is also able to meet his clinical responsibilities. However, last week Dr. Yin's department chair asked him to chair a Faculty Search Committee. Dr. Yin cannot imagine finding time for this leadership role without his current research or clinical work suffering. He feels he must say no to his department chair, but fears the repercussions both in terms of their relationship and the opinion his chair holds of him. He goes to his mentor for advice...

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What should Dr. Yin's mentor do now? What should Dr. Yin do now? What advice could you give Dr. Yin for framing a conversation with his department chair?
2. What strategies have you used to assure that your mentees' time is adequately protected?
3. How do you advise a mentee who is receiving conflicting career advice, especially if it is from someone with authority or status well above the mentee?
4. How would this be different if it were a community partner from whom the mentee had to decline an important invitation?

*Note: This case is taken from the mentee's perspective, providing mentors a slightly different lens.

Part of the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2014.

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Mentor Training for Social Science Researchers

Maintaining Effective Communication

Stephanie A. Robert and Pamela S. Asquith

Adapted from the
W.H. Freeman *Entering Mentoring Series* 2017



Maintaining Effective Communication

Introduction

Good communication is a key element of any relationship and a mentoring relationship is no exception. As research mentors, it is not enough to say that we know good communication when we see it. Rather, it is critical that mentors reflect upon and identify characteristics of effective communication and take time to practice communication skills in the session and with their mentees.

Learning Objectives

Mentors will have the knowledge and skills to:

1. Provide constructive feedback
2. Communicate effectively across diverse dimensions including varied backgrounds, disciplines, generations, ethnicities, positions of power, etc.
3. Identify different communication styles
4. Engage in active listening
5. Use multiple strategies for improving communication (in person, at a distance, across multiple mentors, and within proper personal boundaries)

Overview of Activities for the Communication Session: Please note that a core activity is listed for each learning objective. We encourage you to engage the mentors in this activity. There is a list of additional activities that can be used if there is extra time in the session or the core activity is not working well for your group.

	Learning Objectives	Core Activities	Additional Activities
1	Provide Constructive Feedback	Mentors read and discuss Case #1: <i>Giving Constructive Feedback</i> (Activity #1)	Mentors read about interpersonal communication and discuss implications for their practice (Activity #4)
2	Communicate effectively across diverse dimensions	Mentors continue discussion about Case #1, focusing on the discussion questions #1-4 for Objective #2	Mentors read and discuss Case #2: <i>Saying No</i> (Activity #5)
3	Identify different communication styles	Mentors take a communication styles test and discuss their results in pairs (Activity #2)	Mentors generate a list of different communication styles and discuss styles they feel most and least comfortable with (Activity #6)
4	Engage in active listening	Mentors work in groups to share current mentoring challenges and practice active listening (Activity #3)	Mentors role play a scripted conversation between mentor and mentee and practice active listening (Activity #7)
5	Use multiple strategies for improving communication	Mentors discuss what they learned from Activity #3 and share specific strategies for improving communication between mentors and mentees	Mentors create a list of barriers to good communication with mentees and share strategies for overcoming such barriers (Activity #8)

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

For additional resources and complete curriculum—including information on competencies and facilitator notes—visit: CIMERProject.org

Facilitation Guide

Recommended Session on Maintaining Effective Communication (135 minutes)

Materials Needed for the Session:

- Table tents and markers
- Chalkboard, whiteboard, or flip chart
- Handouts:
 - Copies of introduction and learning objectives for *Maintaining Effective Communication* (page 33)
 - Copies of Communication Case Study #1: *Giving Constructive Feedback*, and the additional case if desired (pages 38 and 39)
 - Copies of a Communication Styles Test (see page 36)
 - Copies of *Building a Relationship with a Mentee*. (This reading can also be sent to mentors to review in advance.) (pages 41-44)

❖ Introduction (5 min):

TELL: Review the introduction and learning objectives for the session.

❖ Objectives 1 and 2: Provide constructive feedback and communicate effectively across diverse dimensions (30 min)

ACTIVITY #1: Case Study

- Distribute *Communication Case #1: Giving Constructive Feedback*. Introduce the case and either let participants read the case individually for two to three minutes (5 min)
- (Objective 1) DISCUSS (15 min) with entire group: You may want to record the ideas generated in this discussion on a white board or flip chart. Use the guiding questions following the case study.
- (Objective 2) DISCUSS (10 min) with the group: You may want to record the ideas generated in this discussion on a white board or flip chart. Guide the discussion using the following questions.
 1. Discuss the role of trust in this interaction.
 2. How would your own response be affected if your mentee's cultural background was different from your own (race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, etc.)?
 3. How might a difference in gender affect communication in this case?
 4. What if English was the mentee's second language and speaking fluently was a challenge? Would you handle the situation differently? Does it matter that the mentor's first language is not English?

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❖ **Objective 3: Identifying different communication styles (30 min)**

❖ **ACTIVITY #2: Communication Styles Test (7 min):**

- **TELL:** Mentors should individually complete a communication styles test and calculate their score
- **NOTE:** Suggestion to facilitators: complete the communication styles test in advance of facilitating it to help you field questions on the instructions and to share the example of your experience with the activity.
- **TELL:** As you engage in the following activity, think about the way you communicate with your current mentees.
- **DISCUSS (10 min):** Mentors discuss their results in pairs/triads and compare results. Questions to guide their discussion can include (you may wish to write these questions on a whiteboard or flipchart):
 1. To what extent did or didn't the test validate what you know about yourself?
 2. What did you learn?
- **DISCUSS (13 min)** with entire group additional questions regarding communication styles:
 1. How can you determine your mentee's communication style? Is it worth knowing?
 2. What are strategies for communicating across different styles?
 3. Do you think you account for the fact that your mentees may have different preferred communication styles?
 4. In what other situations could you apply this type of assessment?

NOTE: We acknowledge that all such tests are at some level oversimplifications, but can be an effective starting point for reflection and discussion. As a facilitator, you may want to provide a specific example of how your results helped you reflect on your communication with mentees.

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

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❖ **Objectives 4 and 5: Engage in active listening and use multiple strategies for improving communication (60 min)**

- **ACTIVITY #3: *Building a Relationship with a Mentee* and active listening/feedback**
- **TELL:** Read *Building a Relationship with a Mentee* (5 min)
- **TELL:** After you read it, take a 10 minute break. As you take your break, think about a current communication challenge you are facing with a mentee, or a communication challenge you worry about facing.
- **DO:** Take a 10 minute break (10 min) (Optional if not following 3 day agenda)
- **TELL:** Have mentors form groups of three and choose roles for the active listening activity (25 min)
 - **Speaker:** One mentor has one minute to share a current communication challenge s/he is facing in a mentoring relationship.
 - **Listener:** The second person practices active listening skills and has five minutes to ask questions and to try to come to a clear understanding of the situation.
 - **Observer:** The third person observes and notes tone, body language, facial expressions, feedback approach, etc. and has two minutes to describe what s/he observed.
 - Participants rotate roles and discuss what they learned as time allows. Refer to the provided reading for tips on active listening or for more information on nonverbal communication.
 - **NOTE:** Leaving instructions on a whiteboard or slide during this activity is helpful for participants to process the directions.
- **DISCUSS (10 min):** In the large group have mentors share what they learned from the exercise and the strategies that the pairs elicited. If you have time, make this large group discussion longer so that people can elicit additional ideas from each other about their current challenges.
- **REFLECTION (10 min):** Mentors reflect on the discussion today and on the handout, *Building a Relationship with a Mentee* about interpersonal communication and write down two areas for personal improvement. If there is time, you can have people volunteer to share what they will be working on. This can normalize that everyone has aspects of communication that they can work on.

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

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❖ Conclusion (10 min)

DISCUSS: What worked well for you in the training today and what did not? [If you are out of time or even if you prefer, you can have people write their feedback so that it can be reviewed before the next session. **If your training for the day is not ending at this point, you skip this conclusion exercise altogether**].

ASSIGN: Homework for self-efficacy in research and for equity and inclusion: Read the What is Self-Efficacy handout (pages 90-91) and the Benefits and Challenges of Diversity article (pages 75-84). In the latter reading, see the questions posed on page 80 under “Consciously strive to minimize the influence of unintentional bias” to perform your own ‘thought experiment.’

Maintaining Effective Communication

Case #1: Giving Constructive Feedback

As he leaves the crowded conference room, Dr. Tariq (the mentor) tells Dr. Timms (the mentee) he'll see her in a few minutes. Dr. Timms was the last postdoctoral fellow to present in a practice session before a conference. Back in his office Dr. Tariq sits looking distractedly out the window and releases a heavy sigh. He shifts his attention back to his notes for a last review of his written comments: reading slides...too fast...too long...text too small...too much text...color contrast...meandering....

A few moments later he hears a knock on the door and asks Dr. Timms to come in. She sits in a chair across the desk from him and looks up expectantly. He meets her gaze, smiles, and says: "Thanks for coming by. I wanted to make sure we could review your practice talk since the conference is in a week and I leave town in a couple days." Dr. Timms continues to stare without comment, a blank expression on her face.

"Well, as you know I think your research is really important and I'm glad that we have this opportunity to share it," continues Dr. Tariq. "I think this conference will be a great opportunity for you to meet some key colleagues in this field." Dr. Timms nods slightly, and shifts in her seat.

"I do think there are a few things that could tighten your presentation." She continues to stare and Dr. Tariq keeps his focus on his notes as he continues. "For example you had some long sentences, and even whole paragraphs on your slides. While they were well written"—His computer chimes as a new email arrives and he glances over to see who it's from. *Oh, not again.* "As I was saying, while they were well written—I mean you know your writing is strong—it is really too much text for a slide. You could try to shorten some to bullet points. Then you can still make those points without just reading your slides to the audience."

He looks up and sees that she is now looking at the floor. "It would also allow you to increase the font size a bit. I think it might have been hard to read from the back of the room." He looks up again and sees she is taking some notes. "To cut back on the time, I think you could cut the four slides on the background and just briefly summarize those." He waits for comment and the silence drags on a few moments. "What do you think?"

"I can look at it." Her face remains expressionless as she glances up and briefly meets his eye.

"That might allow you to slow down a bit," he continues. "Of course it's natural to get nervous and then one tends to talk faster. Perhaps you could practice it a bit at home and focus on slowing the pace and not looking at your notes as much. Have you tried practicing out loud to yourself at home?"

"Yes."

The phone rings. He checks caller ID. *I'll have to call her back when this is over.* "Ok then. I can send you a link to some tips on slide composition and oral presentation and hopefully that will be helpful." There is another long moment of silence. "Well do you have any questions for me?"

"No, not right now."

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

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“Ok then, well good luck!” He forces another smile and reaches out to shake her hand as she rises to leave. She takes it and smiles feebly back, adding a quick “Thanks.”

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. How could this situation have been handled differently? What should the mentor do now?
3. How do you interpret silence or very short responses? Does your interpretation of this kind of response differ depending on who the speaker is (e.g., mentee, peer, or supervisor)

Adapted from Pfund C, House S, Asquith P, et al. 2012. Mentor Training for Clinical and Translational Researchers. 1st ed., Entering mentoring series. W. H. Freeman and Co, New York, NY.

Additional Activities (if time allows):

Objective 1; Activity #4:

Have mentors read about interpersonal communication (below). Have them discuss their own communication skills and two areas for improvement. If you are running a multiple-day workshop, you can have them write these down and return to them at the end of the workshop. Have they made improvement on those specific skills?

Objective 2; Activity #5:

Case #2: *Saying No*

Dr. Yin is a second-year assistant professor. Dr. Yin found his first year as a faculty member very challenging. In particular, Dr. Yin struggled to balance his teaching responsibilities with his research productivity. However, in just the last few months, he has figured out a schedule and an organizational system that is working well for him. He is finally feeling that his research program is moving forward and his teaching is getting easier. Last week Dr. Yin's department chair asked Dr. Yin to join the chair's research project. While the project is interesting and has some publication potential, Dr. Yin cannot imagine fitting it in without his own current research suffering. Dr. Yin feels he must say no to his department chair, but fears the repercussions both in terms of their relationship and the opinion his chair holds of him.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What could have been done to avoid this situation?
3. What strategies have you used to assure that your mentee's time is adequately protected?

Adapted from Pfund C, House S, Asquith P, et al. 2012. MentorTraining for Clinical and Translational Researchers. 1st ed., Entering mentoring series. W. H. Freeman and Co, New York, NY.

Objective 3; Activity #6:

Have mentors generate a list of different communication styles and discuss the styles they feel most and least comfortable with. If time allows, ask mentors to share practical strategies for working with mentees who have very different communication styles from their own.

Objective 4; Activity #7:

Have mentors work in pairs and role-play the scripted conversation between mentor and mentee on page 40. Then discuss how the mentor could have reacted differently; practice a response that includes good active listening. Use the techniques in the reading to guide your approach. (Alternatively, facilitators could role play the scenario and then discuss with the full group.)

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

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Scripted conversation:

Mentee walks into his mentor's office excited after coming from a meeting with a co-primary mentor.

Mentee: [Knocks and walks in office] Hi! I'm so glad I caught you in your office. I just came from my meeting with Dr. Jahns and I have really exciting news about our upcoming grant. He said --

Mentor: [Interrupting] I was hoping you'd stop by. I just submitted the abstract for the conference next month. I was thinking... [email notification pops up on computer and mentor is distracted]

Mentee: [Patiently waits for mentor to read email]

Mentor: Ooh I just received an email back from Dr. Tram. He agreed to present at the conference. His ideas are so innovative. I want to make sure you meet him. I have to quickly run to my next meeting. What were you saying before?

Mentee: Dr. Jahns is really excited about our idea for the grant. He and I thought of a few suggestions on how to integrate our projects --

Mentor: [Interrupting] That's great but we already decided our approach at the lab meeting two weeks ago. I already know what he has to say about it and it doesn't make any sense to change it.

Mentee: I really think we should consider --

Mentor: [Interrupting] I have to go. We can talk next week. I expect a draft of the grant at our next meeting.

Mentor walks out of his office and hurries down the hall.

Objective 5; Activity #8

Have mentors brainstorm a list of barriers to good communication with a mentee, record them on a white board or flip chart, and then have participants choose two or three barriers and discuss practical ways to overcome them. For example, one barrier might be a lack of time to meet one-on-one. Some solutions might be more frequent e-mail, progress summaries, or phone calls.

Adapted from the W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series, 2017.

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Building a Relationship with a Mentee



Adapted from the I-TECH Clinical Mentoring Toolkit, produced by the

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Building an effective relationship of mutual understanding and trust with the mentee is a critical component of effective mentoring. Mentors can establish rapport with their mentees by using effective interpersonal communication skills, actively building trust, and maintaining confidentiality. This document contains information and advice to help mentors build rapport and create positive relationships with mentees so both parties can achieve the greatest benefit from the mentoring experience.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a person-to-person, two-way, verbal and nonverbal sharing of information between two or more persons. Good communication helps to develop a positive working relationship between the mentor and mentee by helping the mentee to better understand directions and feedback from the mentor, feel respected and understood, and be motivated to learn from the mentor. Mentees learn best from mentors who are sincere, approachable, and nonjudgmental. These qualities are communicated primarily by facial expressions, and, to a limited extent, by words. People often remember more about how a subject is communicated than the speaker's knowledge of the subject.

There are two types of communication: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication is communication that occurs through spoken words. Nonverbal communication is communication that occurs through unspoken mediums, such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, silence, and eye contact. It is important for mentors to remember they are communicating to mentees both when they are speaking and when they are not speaking. Up to 93% of human communication is nonverbal.¹ Body language tells those with whom we are communicating a great deal about what we are thinking and feeling. Examples of positive or open body language include:

- Eye contact (depending on the culture)
- Open or relaxed posture
- Nodding or other affirmation
- Pleasant facial expressions

Examples of negative or closed body language include crossed arms, averted eyes, and pointing fingers. The mentor needs to be aware of what he or she is communicating nonverbally as well as what the mentee is communicating nonverbally.

¹ Mehrabian, Albert. *Nonverbal communication*. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, Chicago; 1972.

When mentoring, effective communication involves more than providing information or giving advice; it requires asking questions, listening carefully, trying to understand a mentee’s concerns or needs, demonstrating a caring attitude, remaining open-minded, and helping solve problems. There are many communication skills that mentors can utilize to effectively communicate with mentees, including the following:

- **Active listening**: Be sure to really listen to what a mentee is saying. Often, instead of truly listening to the mentee, the mentor is thinking about his or her response, what to say next, or something else entirely. It is important to quiet these thoughts and remain fully engaged in the task of listening.
- **Attending**: Listen while observing, and communicate attentiveness. This can include verbal followup (saying “yes” or “I see”) or nonverbal cues (making eye contact and nodding the head).
- **Reflective listening**: Verbally reflect back what the mentee has just said. This helps the mentor to check whether or not he or she understands the mentee, and helps the mentee feel understood.

Examples:

- “So it seems that you’re overwhelmed with your workload.” ○ “It seems that you are concerned about that experiment.”
- **Paraphrasing**: Determine the basic message of the mentee’s previous statement and rephrase it in your own words to check for understanding. Examples:
 - “You’re interested in developing a system for improving that.” ○ “It sounds like you’re concerned about the design of the experiment.”
- **Summarizing**: Select main points from a conversation and bring them together in a complete statement. This helps ensure the message is received correctly. For example, “Let me tell you what I heard, so I can be sure that I understand you. You said that the main challenge right now is balancing your clinical load and writing the research proposal.”
- **Asking open-ended questions**: Ask mentees questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open-ended questions encourage a full, meaningful answer using the mentee’s own knowledge and feelings, whereas closed-ended questions encourage a short or single-word answer. Examples:
 - Close-ended question*: “You didn’t think the experiment would work?”
 - Open-ended question*: “What factors led you to your decision to change the protocol?”
 - Close-ended question*: “Did you understand what we discussed today?”
 - Open-ended question*: “Can you summarize what we discussed today?”

- **Probing**: Identify a subject or topic that needs further discussion or clarification and use open-ended questions to examine the situation in greater depth. For example, “I heard you say you are overwhelmed; please tell me more about that.”
- **Self-disclosure**: Share appropriate personal feelings, attitudes, opinions, and experiences to increase the intimacy of communication. For example, “I can relate to your difficult situation, I have experienced something similar and recall being very frustrated. Hopefully I can assist you to figure out how to move forward.”
- **Interpreting**: Add to the mentee’s ideas to present alternate ways of looking at circumstances. When using this technique, it is important to check back in with the mentee and be sure you are interpreting correctly before assigning additional meaning to their words. For example, “So you are saying that the reason the interpretation is flawed is because of the statistical test used to analyze the data? That is likely one reason, but have you also considered that the design may be wrong as well?”
- **Confrontation**: Use questions or statements to encourage mentees to face difficult issues without accusing, judging, or devaluing them. This can include gently pointing out contradictions in mentees’ behavior or statements, as well as guiding mentees to face an issue that is being avoided. For example, “It’s great that you are so committed to mentoring the younger researcher in the group. However, I am concerned that you are not dedicating enough time to your own research.” A number of attitudes and/or behaviors can serve as barriers to communication—these can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal barriers to communication that should be avoided include the following:
 - **Moralizing**: Making judgments about a mentee’s behavior, including calling it right or wrong, or telling them what they should or should not do.
 - **Arguing**: Disagreeing with instead of encouraging the mentee.
 - **Preaching**: Telling the mentee what to do in a self-righteous way.
 - **Storytelling**: Relating long-winded personal narratives that are not relevant or helpful to the mentee.
 - **Blocking communication**: Speaking without listening to the mentee’s responses, using an aggressive voice, showing impatience, showing annoyance when interrupted, or having an authoritative manner. These behaviors often lead to the mentee feeling down, humiliated, scared, and insecure. As a result, the mentee may remain passive and refrain from asking questions, or distrust the mentor and disregard his or her recommendations.
 - **Talking too much**: Talking so much that the mentee does not have time to express themselves. As a mentor, it is important not to dominate the interaction.

Examples of nonverbal barriers to communication include shuffling papers, not looking directly at the mentee when he or she is speaking, and allowing interruptions or distractions. These barriers may have consequences for both the mentor and the mentee. They may lead to a poor sharing of information, fewer questions being asked by the mentee, difficulty in understanding problems, uncomfortable situations, and a lack of motivation on the part of the mentee.

Establishing Trust

Establishing trust is an essential component in building rapport with a mentee. Trust is the trait of believing in the honesty and reliability of others.² Some mentees may be nervous about working with a mentor. To put them at ease, create a trusting relationship by empathizing with their challenges, share knowledge without being patronizing, and remain nonjudgmental. Along with the other communication skills listed above, establishing a trusting dynamic is essential for a productive and positive mentor/mentee relationship.

The following list provides some ideas for how the mentor can build trust with the mentee:

- Share appropriate personal experiences from a time when they were being mentored.
- Acknowledge mentee strengths and accomplishments from the onset of the mentoring process.
- Encourage questions of any type and tell the mentee that there is no such thing as a bad question.
- Take time to learn culturally appropriate ways of interacting with your mentee and helping your mentee to interact appropriately with their peers.
- When appropriate, consider how local knowledge can be incorporated into the mentoring experience.
- Acknowledge the mentee's existing knowledge and incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge.
- Ask for and be open to receiving feedback from mentees, apply constructive feedback to improve mentoring skills.

² WordNet. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Cognitive Science Library; c2006 [cited 2008 5 June]. Available from: <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>.