

Effective Mentorship in Research Writing: Some Cases

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Case 1: Getting Off to a Good Start

Ann is a new PhD student, and young faculty member Dr. Mary Brown will be her mentor. Each looks forward to the mentoring relationship and is eager to make it work well. However, in the past each has had some not-so-good experiences related to mentoring. What can Ann and Dr. Brown each do to help ensure that this new mentoring relationship succeeds?

Case 2: Feedback That Facilitates

Looking back to her own years as a PhD student, Dr. Mary Brown recalls receiving feedback on her writing from her mentor, Dr. Priscilla Potts. Dr. Potts often made brilliant changes in Mary's writing. But after receiving the feedback, Mary would feel so demoralized that she hardly could write for the next week. Now that she is a mentor herself, she feels determined to provide feedback in a more supportive way. What would you recommend to her?

Case 3: The Mired Mentee

Zeke, a PhD student, finished some research two months ago and is writing a paper about it. However, he still has little of the paper written. Zeke admits to his mentor, Dr. Kevin Yates, that he is experiencing writer's block. Dr. Yates knows that other graduate students also have this problem, and he thinks it would be a good discussion topic for writing club. How might mentors introduce this topic in writing club? What suggestions might club members come up with that could help Zeke and others?

Case 4: Too Similar

Beth, a PhD student, has drafted a paper and given it to her mentor, Dr. Robert Jones, for review. Reading the discussion section, Dr. Jones notices a paragraph that seems strangely familiar. On checking, he finds that, except for a word or two per sentence, the paragraph is the same as one in a paper that he has published. How do you suggest that Dr. Jones proceed?

Case 5: Ready for Revision

Using the good suggestions from his fellow writing club members and his mentor, Zeke has overcome his writer's block. He has finished drafting his journal article and has revised it twice himself. Now he is ready for feedback from others, so he shares his newest draft with his group in writing club. How might the group best proceed in reviewing the draft? What aspects of the writing might be worthwhile for the group to address?

Case 6: A Variety of Venues

Craig, a PhD student, has completed an epidemiologic study in his home region. When he presents it at a department seminar, the attendees urge him to submit a paper. A classmate suggests sending it to *Science* or *Nature*. The associate editor of the university journal encourages Craig to submit it there, noting likelihood of publication in the next issue. Someone else says to obtain a list of journal impact factors and decide accordingly. Craig seeks advice on the matter from his mentor, Dr. Linda Moore. Dr. Moore notes that writing club will meet this week and suggests asking the group for its thoughts. What points about journal choice would be good to ensure emerge during the discussion?

Case 7: Too Good to Be True

After her paper is rejected by a top journal, Liz, a PhD student, is trying to decide where to submit it next. She receives email from a journal seeking submissions. According to the email, this open-access journal (*The Consolidated Journal of Sciences and Humanities*) has a publication fee of only \$99, completes peer review within 2 weeks, and then posts accepted papers within 1 week. When Liz looks at the journal's website, she notes that the editorial board contains many famous scientists, including Marie Curie and Jonas Salk. Liz excitedly tells her mentor, Dr. Arthur Adams, about this journal. How should Dr. Adams proceed?

Case 8: Instructions on Instructions

Don, a PhD student, wants to submit a paper to a journal published by a prestigious society in his field. On looking at the instructions to authors from the journal, he is surprised to find that they are almost 20 pages long. "No one would pay attention to such long instructions," Don says to his advisor, Dr. Peter Clark. "I'm sure the copyeditors at the journal will correct any problems once my paper is accepted." How should Dr. Clark proceed?

Case 9: A Shortcut or Not?

June, a PhD student eager to graduate, obtains two interesting results from a study. When she next meets with her mentor, Dr. Lucy Sloan, June says she would like to write a paper about one of the results and another paper about the other, thus completing the two-paper requirement for graduation. How should Dr. Sloan proceed? Might this situation be one to discuss in writing club?

Case 10: Too Great a Barrier?

Fred, a PhD student, submits a paper to a good peer-reviewed journal. When the paper is accepted contingent on revision, Fred feels discouraged. However, his mentor, Dr. Susan White, explains that revisions usually are required, and Fred starts working on the revisions. Fred finds that in general the proposed revisions improve the paper or at least do not harm it. However, he finds that one of the proposed revisions would introduce a major inaccuracy. Alarmed, Fred tells Dr. White that he wants to withdraw the paper and submit it to another journal. How should Dr. White proceed?

Case 11: An Inconveniently Timed Absence

Jill, a PhD student, is first author of a paper that has been accepted by a journal. Jill receives from the journal an email message stating that she will receive page proofs electronically next Wednesday and then will have 48 hours to review them and inform the journal of any errors. However, Jill has long been scheduled to do field work all next week in a region without Internet access. Jill asks her mentor, Dr. Rita Mills, what she should do. How should Dr. Mills proceed?

Case 12: Title Troubles

Meg, a PhD student, is about to submit a paper to a journal. On rereading the instructions to authors, she notices that she must submit a running title. Puzzled, Meg calls her mentor, Dr. Pam Woods, for advice. How should Dr. Woods proceed?

Case 13: An Authorship Decision

Mike, a PhD student, is about to submit a paper about some of his research. Department member Dr. Ronald Tracy allowed Mike to use some equipment in his lab in the research, and he now asks to be listed as an author. Mike approaches his mentor, Dr. Ellen Curtis, for advice. How should Dr. Curtis proceed?

Case 14: What's in a Name?

Sarah Smith, a PhD student, is writing a paper. She worries that she will be confused with some of the other researchers with the same name, including one in a closely related field. During a meeting with her mentor, Dr. Hildegard Lukaszewski-Benedetti, she expresses this concern. The mentor thinks this issue will be good to discuss in writing club. What points might be good to include in the discussion?

Case 15: No Madness in the Methods

Tess, a PhD student, is writing a paper on some research that used a variety of methods. Some methods that she used are very well known in her discipline. Some others are not well known but have been described in detail in the literature. And one method was newly developed by Tess herself. Tess asks her mentor, Dr. Sally Stone, how detailed her methods section should be. How should Dr. Stone proceed?

Case 16: Being Double Sure?

Dr. Willard Wells, a mentor and highly respected clinician, is preparing a paper on a series of noteworthy clinical cases. He shares a draft with his mentee, Ruth, and points out proudly that extensive data on each patient appears in both the text and an accompanying table. "You just can't be too thorough," he says. Ruth isn't so sure, though, about repeating so much information. How should she proceed?

Case 17: Nothing to Hide

Jane, a PhD student, has drafted the discussion section of a paper. Her mentor, Dr. Laura Hill, says the draft is good overall but advises Jane to add a section on strengths and limitations of the research. Jane respectfully expresses concern that noting strengths would seem immodest and that calling attention to limitations would increase the likelihood that the paper would be rejected. How should Dr. Hill proceed?

Case 18: An Amorphous Introduction

Ed, a PhD student, proudly shows his mentor, Dr. Rachel Reed, the introduction he has drafted for his paper. Dr. Reed perceives that this introduction includes some good content but that it is at least twice the appropriate length for the target journal and that it has no discernible structure. Ed and Dr. Reed decide together to ask his writing club group to review his draft introduction. What points might be good to include in the group's discussion? How might the group leader elicit these points?

Case 19: A Reference Request

Gail is a PhD student, and Dr. Clifford Miller is her mentor. Dr. Herman Nelson, another faculty member, has a lab down the hall and does related research. Dr. Nelson hears that Gail is writing some papers and asks her to cite a few of his articles as references, so he will have a higher citation count when considered for promotion. Gail doesn't think the references are very relevant, and she wonders whether she should discuss the situation with her mentor. What would you advise?

Case 20: Aghast at an Abstract

Ken, a PhD student, is about to submit a paper to a journal but obtains an additional result from his study. "It's too much trouble to rewrite the paper," Ken says to his mentor, Dr. Betty Logan. "I'll just add the new result to the abstract." How should Dr. Logan proceed?

Case 21 (supplementary case): In the Media Spotlight

Craig (from Case 6) ends up publishing his study in a leading journal in his specialty. His university disseminates a news release about it, and a radio reporter, a television reporter, and two newspaper reporters ask to interview him. Craig has not been interviewed for the popular media before, and so he seeks advice from his mentor, Dr. Linda Moore, who has been interviewed many times. How should Dr. Moore proceed? What suggestions should she make?

