

Finding & Working with Mentors

Navigating mentorship at different career stages

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Roadmap

1. What mentors are actually for
2. Who to ask, and what each career stage is good for
3. Where they come from, including formal schemes
4. Making contact, including the cold email question

What Mentors Are For

No One Mentor Does Everything

- You need several people, not one.
- Different needs, different people.
- Your supervisor is one of them, not all of them.
- Most of it is informal. Nobody is assigned.

Different Things to Ask For

Practical

- Reading a draft
- Methods
- Grants and transitions

Positional

- Letters
- Introductions
- Being named in rooms you are not in

Know which one you are asking for.

Mine, and What Each One Is For

- **Molly Melin:** the profession, and being a woman in this field.
- **Kara Ross Camarena:** methods.
- **Sanja Badanjak:** postdoc transitions and grants.
- Three people. Three different questions.

What a Door Opening Looks Like

- Molly suggested my name to Cullen Hendrix.
- That became a collaboration.
- That became a $20k grant.
- I could not have made that introduction myself.

Who to Ask

What Each Stage Is Good For

Stage	Best for	Less good for
Peers, senior PhDs	Daily reality, drafts, morale	Reach beyond your circle
Just landed a job	**The job market, start to finish**	Long-term strategy
Junior postdoc	Fresh market intel, job docs	Still finding their footing
Senior postdoc	Methods, papers, grant basics	No hiring power
Assistant professor	Current norms, honest advice	Time-poor, on the clock
Associate, full professor	Publishing, collaborations, letters	Dated on the market

On the market, ask whoever just survived it.

Reading the Level

- Just did it beats senior, for anything procedural.
- Senior is for publishing, collaborations and introductions.
- Seniority is not expertise in your situation.
- Ask the person whose career you would actually want.

When It Does Not Work

- I had one that did not. The advice was confident and wrong for me.
- Different journals. Different kind of university.
- Different career, wanted at a different pace.
- Good advice for their path is not advice for yours.

Inside or Outside

Inside or Outside

- Starting with people inside your own institution is fine. That is where most of us start.
- Their role changes over time as you collect more.
- Outside gives you a field-wide view, and somewhere frank to go.
- You are building a set, not choosing a side.

Formal Programmes Work

- **APSA** mentor, through the scheme.
- **ESOC:** intensive mentors
- **GEP:** different again, and where I learned how publishing works.
- **Journeys & WICS:** group mentorship for women
- The Conference mentorship receptions are useful enough too. Sign up for these.

One Conversation Counts

- A mentor does not have to be a standing relationship.
- One good chat can resolve the thing you are stuck on.
- Receptions, panels, a coffee at a conference.
- Nobody has to be appointed for it to count.

Asking Someone to Back a Grant

- Postdoc applications usually need a named host or supporter.
- Asking is itself a mentorship ask, and a good first one.
- You may not get the grant. The relationship still stands.
- Often that is where the relationship starts.

Making Contact

Cold Emailing

- I have done it twice. Once it worked, once it did not.
- Both times I was already established, not starting out.
- I did not send an introduction. I sent a whole project.
- A warm introduction still beats it every time.

If You Do Send One

- Short.
- Bring something, not just yourself.
- Say why them, specifically.
- Make it easy to say no.

What Gets a Reply From Me

- Short, and something in it for both of us.
- That is email. In person is a different story.
- I am far keener at conferences than in my inbox.
- So is almost everyone.

Where People Actually Meet

- Conferences, especially the small ones.
- Workshops, summer schools, methods courses.
- Mentorship receptions and schemes.
- Then follow up. That is the part people skip.

When I Say Yes

- Promise, grit, and fit. That is mostly it.
- Not if someone has one foot out the door.
- Not if expectations are unrealistic, though sometimes we fix that first.
- **And yes:** women get asked far more. Nearly all my roles are built on it.

How You Keep It

- Slowly become their equal.
- It turns into collaboration, not a favour they do you.
- They still mentor you, now on progression and promotion.
- The relationship does not end. It changes shape.

Takeaways

- Several mentors, one question each.
- For the market, ask whoever just did it.
- Sign up for the formal schemes. One chat counts.
- Advice that fits their career may not fit yours.

Questions?