

IDP Mentor Conversation Tips

A Guide for Graduate Students

Use this guide to prepare for and lead productive IDP discussions with your advisor.

Your IDP is a tool for **structured, productive conversations**, not a contract or performance evaluation. Use it to build alignment, clarify expectations, and ensure you're getting the mentoring you need to succeed.

Before the Meeting

Schedule strategically:

- Send a meeting request with clear purpose: *"I'd like to meet to review my IDP, get your feedback, and set objectives for the next 6–12 months."*
- Aim for 45–60 minutes max when your advisor isn't rushed

Prepare your materials:

- Share your draft IDP at least 3–5 days in advance so your mentor has time to read it
- Bring a short agenda (3–4 bullet points maximum)
- Review your progress since last discussion
- Identify 2–3 specific questions you want answered

Sample agenda items:

- Clarify expectations and program milestones
 - Get feedback on my research and professional development goals
 - Discuss realistic timelines for next semester
 - Identify any skills gaps or resources I (you) need
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During the Meeting

Open with context and appreciation:

- *"Thank you for meeting with me. I'd like to walk through my IDP to get your perspective and refine my goals for the next semester."*
- *"I've been reflecting on my progress and would like your input on where to focus my energy."*

Lead the conversation section by section:

- YOU drive the discussion. Use your IDP as the roadmap.
- Briefly summarize each section (research, professional development, teaching, personal) in your own words
- For each goal area: *"Here's how I'm currently thinking about this. What do you see that I might be missing?"*

Ask targeted, specific questions:

Instead of vague "What do you think?" try:

- "Are these research goals realistic for this semester given my coursework?"
- "What technical skills should I prioritize at my current stage?"
- "Where do you see the biggest risks or bottlenecks in my timeline?"
- "Are there specific conferences or workshops you recommend I attend this year?"
- "Who else in the department should I connect with for [specific skill/topic]?"

Listen actively and reflect:

- Take notes during the conversation
- Summarize key points: "So I'm hearing that I should aim to submit a draft to you by October and add a conference abstract goal for spring. Is that right?"
- Ask follow-up questions if something is unclear

Negotiate and document decisions together:

- Adjust timelines collaboratively if goals seem unrealistic
 - Revise goals based on mentor feedback
 - Clarify what "good progress" looks like: "What would a successful semester look like from your perspective?"
 - Agree on any resources (courses, workshops, collaborators, funding) you'll pursue
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Closing the Meeting

Confirm concrete next steps:

- "So, over the next 3 months, I'll focus on [X, Y, and Z]. Does that align with your expectations?"
- "I'll send you a draft of [deliverable] by [date] for your feedback."

Clarify the follow-up rhythm:

- "Would a brief IDP check-in once per semester work for you, or would you prefer more frequent reviews?"
- "When should we meet again to review my progress; mid-semester?"

Express gratitude and follow up:

- Thank your mentor for their time and guidance
- Within 24 hours, send a brief summary email (3–5 bullets) recapping agreed-upon items and next steps

Sample follow-up email:

Subject: Summary of our IDP meeting—next steps

Hi Dr. [Name],

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss my IDP. Here's a quick summary of what we agreed on:

Thanks again for your guidance. Please let me know if I missed anything or if you have additional suggestions.

Best,
[Your name]

Tips for Difficult Conversations

If your mentor seems unsupportive or dismissive:

- Stay professional and focus on concrete goals: *"I understand timelines are uncertain. Could we identify 2–3 priorities for this semester?"*
- Seek additional mentors for areas where your primary advisor can't provide support

If you're falling behind on goals:

- Be honest and proactive: *"I haven't made as much progress as I hoped on [goal]. Can we discuss what's realistic and adjust the timeline?"*
- Focus on solutions, not excuses

If your goals have changed:

- Explain your reasoning: *"I've realized my interests are shifting toward [X]. Could we discuss how to adjust my research direction?"*
 - Propose concrete alternative goals
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Remember

- **You are the driver** of your own development, your mentor is a guide
- **Be prepared** so you make the most of limited meeting time
- **Be flexible** and open to feedback, but also advocate for your needs
- **Follow-up** consistently; check-ins should happen at least once per semester
- **Update your IDP** after each meeting while the conversation is fresh