

Quick-Start Guide: Individual Development Plan (IDP)

What is the IDP?

The Individual Development Plan is a simple planning tool that helps PhD students think intentionally about goals, growth, and support. It is designed to help students connect long-term aspirations with practical next steps for the semester and the year.

Who should use it?

This resource is intended for all PhD students (with emphasis on first-year PhDs) in engineering. It is also useful for advisors and mentors who want a clear structure for developmental conversations.

When should I complete it?

Use the IDP early in the academic year, then revisit it at mid-year and again at the end of the year. It should be treated as a living document rather than a one-time assignment.

How to get started

1. Read through the full template once before writing.
2. Start with your long-term goals and career interests.
3. Complete the self-assessment honestly so you can identify growth areas.
4. Set a few realistic goals in research, professional development, teaching, and wellbeing.
5. Identify one immediate next step in each major area.
6. Schedule time to discuss your plan with your advisor.

Tips for success

- Be specific rather than writing very broad goals.
- Focus on progress, not perfection.
- Choose goals that are realistic for your current stage.
- Use the IDP to support conversations, not just paperwork.
- Revise the plan as your priorities change.

Suggested advising conversation prompts

- What goals matter most this semester?
- Which skills do I need to strengthen first?
- What milestones should I prepare for this year?
- What resources or connections would help me most right now?
- How often should we revisit this plan?

Final reminder

The IDP works best when it is used regularly. A short, honest draft is more helpful than a perfect document that is never revisited.