Ramírez Lab

# What to bring to a meeting with your advisor[1]

All advisors have different mentoring styles and different personalities. Despite these differences, everyone is busy and wants to get the most out of individual meetings with their lab members. Here are a few things that I think would help increase the efficiency of meetings within any lab.

1. Think of meetings as your one-on-one protected time with your advisor. These are (hopefully) free of distraction, so you have the undivided attention of your PI on you and your project. Don't wait for your PI to initiate the discussion and ask you questions. Take the lead and come to the meeting with your own agenda for what you hope to accomplish.

2. Start the meeting with a recap of what you discussed previously and what you're currently working on. While you have been thinking and working exclusively on your project, your advisor has been thinking about your project along with projects of at least half a dozen other people. That's not including percolating grants, teaching and other responsibilities. I often find that I sometimes can't immediately recall details of what was discussed with someone 24 hours previously. If you start the meeting with a brief mention of the previous discussion and a reminder of the strategy that was put into place, this will prevent your PI from wasting the first half of the meeting trying to get oriented.

3. Keep the amount of time allocated for the meeting in mind. If you have a 30 minute meeting scheduled, it is unlikely that there will be time to discuss everything on your mind. Pick the top three issues that are pressing or holding you back so that those are sure to get covered during the meeting. *Important: This will force you to decide what you can/should figure out yourself and what you absolutely need input on from your PI.* Never waste your meeting time on asking questions you can easily look up yourself or that you really need to read/learn/understand before discussing with your PI. If you are coming in with data, what is your interpretation and thoughts about how to proceed? If the experiment or simulation failed, what is you view about why it failed and what might be improved next time? What are any exciting new ideas you have been thinking about? Be prepared and come to the meeting with an opinion. Your PI may not always agree with you but will be thrilled to argue/discuss with you in detail.

4. In addition to your top scientific questions, remember to bring up any other issues that are pertinent to your progress, career advancement or well being. Are any issues in the lab (lack of resources, disruptive colleagues, logistical issues) slowing you down? This is not a gossip session but if something is affecting your progress or happiness in the lab, your PI wants to know/help. Are you concerned about whether you are on track to achieve the next step in your career path? Do you have a personal issue that your advisor needs to know about? Do you have question on how best to strategize for a particular goal? There may not be time to cover all issues, but you can set up another dedicated meeting if needed.

5. Often, people think of meetings as a time when they update their PI on what they've been doing to show they've been working/working hard. While your advisor may or may not be making this determination, this is not the purpose of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss data and exchange information so that your project can progress more smoothly. Remember you and your advisor are on the same team. You both are excited about your project and want it to succeed. Both learning and progress are goals in the relationship with your mentor. I never recall being disappointed in an experiment that didn't work if something was learned. I never recall being disappointed in progress if intellectual growth is evident.

In summary, remember that meetings are your protected time with your advisor and that there is much in your control that can make them as useful and efficient as possible.

[1] Taken and adapted from Avasthi Lab