

Good Practice Guidelines for University Students

These notes have been written for university students taking part in a mentoring scheme supported by a Virtual Learning Environment. To know more about such scheme, please read about the project conducted between LSE and AMR.TC.

[return to mentoring index page]

[1.05 case study]

1. Good Practice for Face-to-Face Mentors

What is expected of you?

- Weekly visits to the school (approximately 1 hour plus travel time).
- Familiarise yourself with the curriculum and have an idea of how you will approach each lesson.
- Support your virtual tutor partner by giving them weekly updates.
- Attend training session, interim review meeting, final review meeting, and fill in two questionnaires.
- Follow instructions fully and in a timely fashion.
- Make a genuine effort to help your students.

Commitment

- Face-to-face mentors should be totally committed for the duration of the scheme. If, however, they are having doubts or are unable to continue, they should let the student co-ordinator know immediately.
- If the mentor is unable to make a visit, they should give as much notice as possible to both the teacher and the student co-ordinator.

Communication with co-ordinators

- Open communication is critical. Don't keep things to yourself.
- It is important that mentors understand and follow instructions. If they are confused about what is expected from them, it is their responsibility to make this known to the relevant person ASAP.
- The development and quality of the scheme depends highly on feedback from the face-to-face tutors, who are in the best position to understand its successes and failures. Thus, they should be prepared to make contributions to the interim and final review meetings and questionnaires. Furthermore, if an issue arises outside this time, they should bring it to the attention of the student co-ordinator, in a order that it can be resolved in a timely fashion.

Communication with virtual tutor partner(s)

- You are expected to contact your virtual tutor after every visit to let them know who you worked with, what you did, where you posted a message.
- You will know the students better than the virtual tutor, so make him/her feel involved by giving them anecdotes, information etc... about the students as you get to know them.
- You and your virtual tutor are a team. Support each other. Give each other advice.

Communication with students

- It is important to build a rapport with your students. You will have your own style of doing this, but the following pointers might help...
- Be friendly. Students are not going to be enthusiastic or stimulated by a grumpy person. On the other hand, being smiley and light-hearted really breaks the ice.
- Try to appear relaxed and confident. This will inspire trust, respect, and calm.

- Show them respect. These are young adults, so don't treat them like children and don't make them feel stupid or embarrassed. Remember teenagers can be very sensitive!
- Expect respect from them. Don't let students walk all over you. It is a slippery slope and eventually you will lose control and be unable to teach them. Set limits, and if they cross them let them know that it's unacceptable.
- Ask them lots of open-ended questions. If you show interest in the students as whole individuals, they are more likely to trust and like you.
- Be patient. This is very hard, but the only way to maintain a respectful, productive relationship.
- Try to be encouraging and supportive. Praise them for their good work. Try to build their confidence.
- Don't do all the work for them. Firstly, ask them to do it themselves. If they can't, give them hints, questions, etc... to help them along.
- For further tips, see handbook.

Promoting further education

- One of the aims of the project is to change preconceptions about university, and to let students know that it is a realistic, worthwhile option for them to consider. So, please take the opportunity to discuss why you chose to go to university, what you like about it, and how they might benefit too.
- Don't give it the 'hard sell', but make your students aware of their options.

Promoting languages at GCSE and beyond

- Another aim is to promote the study of languages at GCSE and beyond.
- A common misconception is that the study of languages is only useful if you want to be a language teacher.
- Try to break this down by explaining why you study a language and the benefits it brings, e.g. travel, career, learning about other cultures.

Support

- It is normal to feel anxious at first. Seek support from other tutors, your virtual tutor partner, student co-ordinators or teachers.

2. Good Practice for Online Tutors

What is expected of you?

- Two visits to the school
- Weekly responses to online messages posted by your students
- Attend training session, interim review meeting, final review meeting, and fill in two questionnaires.
- Follow instructions fully and in a timely fashion.
- Make a genuine effort to give the most possible support to your in-person mentor partner and your students.

Commitment

- Online mentors should be totally committed for the duration of the scheme. The fact that the time commitment is lower does not mean they are any less crucial to the project.
- If, however, they are having doubts or are unable to continue, they should let the virtual mentor co-ordinator know immediately.

Communication with co-ordinators

- Open communication is critical. Don't keep things to yourself.
- It is important that mentors understand and follow instructions. If they are confused about what is expected from them, it is their responsibility to make this known to the relevant person ASAP.
- The development and quality of the scheme depends highly on feedback from the face-to-face tutors, who are in the best position to understand its successes and failures. Thus, they should be prepared to make contributions to the interim and final review meetings and questionnaires. Furthermore, if an issue arises outside this time, they should bring it to the attention of the student co-ordinator, in a order that it can be resolved in a timely fashion.

Communication with your in-person tutor partner

- Your partner should send you an update each week. Probe them. Ask them about the students interests, likes, dislikes etc... so that your responses can be of most use.
- Check that your language is at the right level.
- Try to be as supportive as possible: you are a team.

Posting good messages

- If you know your student has a particular interest, ask them about it. E.g. if they like dancing, what style? If they like football, what team? Why?
- Keep your language as simple as possible, but the students don't have to understand every word, as they will be supported by the face-to-face mentor.
- Insert photos, films, newspaper clippings, sound bites etc... You can get online content and insert it into your messages. E.g. if you write 'I like music. My favourite artist is Eminem', you could insert a picture, video clip, or excerpt from a magazine. If you write 'I like travelling', insert a picture of you on holiday.
- Don't just ask about them, tell them about you. What do you like to do? Do you have any funny stories? What are your memories of school?
- Be unpredictable. Be weird. Be funny. Get their attention.

3. Good Practice for Face-to-Face Mentor Co-ordinator

What is expected of you?

- Recruit volunteers
- Assist with training
- Liaise with staff and online tutor co-ordinator
- Support and advise mentors
- Distribute instructions to mentors
- Make weekly visits to the school
- Get feedback from volunteers for improving the scheme
- Take responsibility for problems that arise
- Be enthusiastic and reliable and use your initiative

Recruitment

- Good sources for recruitment include university language classes, university societies and clubs (e.g. French Society, Spanish Society), general student body (via universal email or posters around campus).
- This is a sales pitch. You are asking people to give their time in return for satisfaction, CV boosting, and new experiences. Make sure you point out all the benefits. Be enthusiastic and professional.

- Remember to be clear about what you expect in return (commitment, enthusiasm, etc...).
- Always let them know the 'next step'. If they are interested, what should they do? Email you? Attend a meeting?

Assist with training

- If you have experience, tell mentors/tutors about it.
- Be reassuring. Let them know exactly what they should do if they have a problem.
- Don't forget the details. Will you meet at the school or at university and travel to the school together? Should they keep bus tickets for reimbursement? What should they do if they are unable to attend?

Initiative and responsibility

- Take ownership of your responsibilities. It is up to you to use your initiative in solving problems.
- If you say you're going to do something: do it. If you can't do it, be honest. You must be reliable.
- Be confident about your abilities.
- Ask for support when needed. Don't try to do everything yourself.

Communication with face-to-face mentors

- There are three main routes of communication: email, meetings, and weekly visits.
- It is a good idea to send regular emails. They may seem superfluous to you, but they are reassuring to mentors.
- At meetings, you should let mentors know about any issues that have come up, how you tried to solve them etc... Make them feel involved, and utilise their full potential. Often they will think of great solutions that hadn't occurred to you.
- It is imperative that all mentors know what they will be doing each week at the school. It can be difficult to communicate this verbally to each mentor as you'll end up repeating yourself a lot. A good solution is to print out a short handout each week, reminding them what they should be working on, any changes in plan, any problems, tips etc...
- Remind mentors to contact their online partners weekly with a summary of their visit.
- Be clear in what you want from mentors. Encourage and support them. It is a lot easier to manage the project if the mentors like and respect you.

Relationship with online tutor co-ordinator

- You will be working together closely. Find out from the mentors how they feel about the support given by online partners, and let their co-ordinator know how it can be improved.
- Share problems, and find solutions together.
- Meet regularly, and let them know what you are doing via regular emails.

Organisation

- You must be well organised. Manage your time carefully. Plan well in advance. Keep your eyes on the details (e.g. did you book a meeting room? Did you photocopy the handouts?).

3. Good Practice for Online Tutor Co-ordinator

What is expected of you?

- Assist with training
- Liaise with staff and face-to-face mentor co-ordinator
- Support and advise online tutors
- Distribute instructions to online tutors
- Make two visits to the school
- Get feedback from online tutors for improving the scheme
- Partner online mentors with face-to-face mentors
- Take responsibility for problems that arise
- Be enthusiastic and reliable and use your initiative

As with face-to-face mentor co-ordinator, plus:

- Bear in mind that online tutors can feel less involved in the scheme than face-to-face mentors. It is probably a good idea to send out weekly emails to let them know what's going on and to boost morale. Remind them that their role is important and how it benefits students.
- Make sure the online tutors understand perfectly what is expected of them and how to use the software. You should train them in this, using actual computers.
- Online tutors may go astray. Make sure you keep track of who is involved, who has changed their mind. Chase people up.
- Check the message boards weekly. Read messages posted, and consider whether they are of the right quality. If you think they can be improved, let the face-to-face mentors know. Also, check that online tutors are fulfilling their responsibilities. If they aren't, contact them immediately.
- Make sure the online tutors and face-to-face mentors are co-operating closely.