

# Example Scenarios for Providing Feedback



## Part 7: How would you respond?

Below are a set of scenarios to practice how you'd react, offer feedback, and make the most of these difficult situations. There is not one right answer—but, we hope our responses provide some ideas and helpful suggestions.

### A Needy Student Who's Oblivious About Your Time and Availability

**A scenario exploring time management, encouraging mentee independence, and setting boundaries**

You really like Lewis. He is friendly and works hard. The problem is that Lewis is needy. It seems he is always dropping in your office to “talk things through,” or stopping you in the hallway to have you help him solve a problem. You feel that Lewis is bright enough and experienced enough to handle most of the problems he brings to you on his own. You are not sure if Lewis lacks confidence, or if he just wants someone to talk to. Lewis seeks you out so frequently that you have started to find ways to avoid him.

*How can you help Lewis step up and start solving problems on his own, and come to you only when really necessary?*

**RockEDU Potential Response:** Schedule a formal meeting to discuss the boundary issues with Lewis, being sure to give a snippet of what the meeting will entail. You could say:

*Hi Lewis, I appreciate that you are putting a lot of effort into your work with me, and your willingness to talk through our protocols and related lab work. I think you're ready to take on a bit more independence in finding a solution to some of the problems that arise. I'd like to see you try to solve more things on your own, as opposed to coming to me as soon as you encounter a challenge. How does that sound to you?*

You might include some specific ways in which Lewis can try to work things out, such as where to find protocols, googling tips, or other questions.

You can also tell Lewis that you are happy to take his questions, but since you also have to make progress on your projects, that it would be helpful if you could set a time for checking in, or maybe ask Lewis to write all q's down on a post-it that you can review at the end of the day

### When Your Mentee Gives YOU Feedback



### **A scenario exploring feedback and reflection, communication, and relationship dynamics**

Julie is a postdoc who is mentoring an eager high school student, Kate. Kate is new to research, but is willing to work hard to learn as much as possible. Julie believes in the idea of mentoring, and genuinely wants her students to succeed. While Kate is extremely open to correcting course, she isn't finding Julie's feedback helpful, and is confused on how to adjust so that she is meeting the research goals. Nervously, Kate sets up a meeting with Julie to talk about how she is feeling, and conveys that she is not connecting with how Julie is explaining the techniques.

*You are Julie. How would you respond in this situation?*

**RockEDU Potential Response:** Kate, thank you for sharing this with me. I see that you are nervous, but I want to tell you that this is a partnership. It is important that we are on the same page, so telling me is a good thing. As I think about how I can adjust how I am teaching you these skills, it would be helpful to know the ways in which you like to receive information. For example, do you like things written out? Do you prefer visuals? ... OK, great. I will look into this, and hope that you can feel comfortable letting me know when things aren't landing.

### Addressing a Toxic Lab Environment

### **A scenario exploring power dynamics, communication, feedback and reflection, organization, and relationships**

Samantha is Andrea's summer mentee. Samantha has grown accustomed to weekly meetings with her mentor, and feels confident in her success and quality of work. Yet, she consistently sees tense exchanges between two labmates, and it is impacting the productivity of the lab. Seemingly "out of the blue," the HOL approached Samantha while she was at her bench and asked her if she believed that the lab was well run. Samantha loves the work that she is doing, and worries about jeopardizing her professional relationships by giving critical feedback about the often tense environment, and out in the openness of the lab lab. She also wants to provide a thoughtful and insightful response, rather than just saying "yes" or "no."

*How would you advise Samantha to reply to this question?*

**RockEDU Potential Response:** This is definitely a question that requires a bit of thought and diplomacy, and is probably a conversation for behind closed doors. As such, it might be helpful for you to suggest that you think you have useful feedback, but would like an opportunity to gather your thoughts. You can say "I really enjoy being here, and definitely want to think about this question so i can give you my best answer. Do you mind if we schedule a meeting for later so I can put my thoughts together so I can be most helpful?"

Then you can take your time to craft an answer, thinking of ways to best describe the conflict and how it is impacting the lab. Language could be:



*I feel that you are giving me incredible support, both as a person, and as a scientist. I appreciate the resources that you are providing, and your openness to helping me troubleshoot. However, sometimes I feel a little stifled by lab dynamics between X and Y, and I think there is a general consensus among others in the lab. [add 1 or 2 specific examples of what is happening, and their consequences] I think it would be really helpful if you could potentially address this, and in general, do more to help manage some of the interpersonal dynamics going on.*

## Giving Feedback in the Moment

### **A scenario exploring providing feedback in the moment and giving instructions at the bench**

Kennedy is working at the bench setting up a restriction enzyme digest that hasn't worked the 1st few times they've done it, even after going over the protocol several times with them. You decided to check in one day while they're working on this experiment and realized that they've been pipetting 20 uL instead of 2 uL (and also using the incorrect pipettes). Kennedy has confidently expressed that they knew how to properly use the pipette, but now you realize they do not. As a mentor, you're frustrated because it's two weeks in and you see that they lack some of the fundamentals to perform the experiments correctly.

*How can you provide feedback in the moment without expressing your anger and frustration?*

**RockEDU Potential Response:** (RockEDU offers classes the first week of SSRP for students that covers the fundamentals like pipetting, making solutions, operating lab equipment, etc)

*Oh Kennedy, I think I know why the experiments have not been working. \*Brings over a p20 and p200 pipette\* It's super easy to get confused with volumes and these pipettes, especially when we're not paying close attention. I've also made this mistake before. \*goes over the differences in both pipettes and the different volumes that we use them for\* Even though it may seem like a silly mistake, it happens to the best of us. But if you are unsure about something feel free to ask again."*

A lot of times our apprehension can lead to weeks of failed experiments that could have been avoidable, it's always better to be safe than sorry.

## Managing the Expectations of an Overachiever

### **A scenario exploring managing expectations, communication, and relationship dynamics**

Claire is a high functioning high school student, and has taken every science class in her school with high proficiency. One of the units in her research class focused on CRISPR, and after learning that you will be her mentor, Claire gets in touch with an outline for a CRISPR project. She is very assertive with her request. Your work does not have a CRISPR component, yet you feel pressured by Claire's assertiveness. You try to think of ways you can map out a project for Claire that involves CRISPR, but given your



lack of experience with this technology you are feeling uneasy about incorporating it. You want to tell Claire that this isn't feasible, but do not feel comfortable with confrontation.

*How can you convey to Claire that you do not have the ability to include CRISPR in her summer project?*

**RockEDU Potential Response:** (In general, high school students have had limited exposure to the disciplinary breadth of biomedical research, and don't know what they don't know. Sometimes when a student is drawn to science, they can latch onto an idea or concept that is introduced to them, and don't get that, at their stage, experiencing the research process and cultivating a relationship with you — the writer of any potential letter of rec — is more valuable than conducting a specific research activity. Also, the techniques that you are including in her project are more appropriate for the SSRP timeframe, and represent fundamental principles that she might encounter in future lab experiences)

*Claire, thanks so much for creating this fantastic research outline. I really appreciate that you have put thought into your work with me. The project I have outlined for you does would not involve CRISPR technology, but would give you a great window into [xyz]. However, we have a ton of seminars on campus where scientists talk about using CRISPR. Let's be sure to attend those together, and talk about these talks afterwards, too.*

