

5 Tips for Contacting a Faculty Advisor for Grad School

Not sure how to start a conversation with a potential faculty advisor? Here are some tips.

1. Learn about the faculty advising structure for programs of interest.

At the graduate level, every program has its own admission and research requirements. Check your program of interest's website to learn how faculty advisors are appointed. Some programs will 1) assign you an advisor, 2) have you select one once you are in the program or 3) require you to secure an advisor before applying for admission. If you are unsure, ask a current grad student in the program or the graduate program coordinator.

If you don't need to identify an advisor before applying to the specific program, it's still a good idea to research possible faculty whose work interests you so you can mention in your application the alignment of what you want to learn and accomplish in your field with what the program is doing.

2. Learn about the backgrounds/foci of possible advisors.

Use the program's website to research and identify which faculty you would like to work with. It's not recommended to send a mass email to many faculty without investigating whether their interests align with yours or if they are even currently working with graduate students. When reaching out to a faculty member about potential research opportunities, make sure to very concisely share these things in your initial email:

- What do you like about their research or focus? How do your interests align?
- What could you bring to their program?
- How will it help you reach your future goals?

3. Include your curriculum vitae (CV) in your outreach.

Give faculty an overview of your background and qualifications. Attach a CV to your introduction email. Learn how to create a CV through the Career Development Center. Do not send research proposals, transcripts or other attachments unless they are requested.

4. Make a good first impression.

Take your time with your first email. Check the grammar and spelling. Use the appropriate title for the potential advisor (e.g. Dear Dr. Ramos is often more appropriate than using a first name.) Use an email address that is appropriate (university email or an email that is your first and last name). Mention any connections you may already have to the program. (Networking is always a good thing!) Keep in mind that impersonal copy and paste emails are less likely to be read.

5. Be patient.

Faculty often have lots of competing priorities (e.g., classes, grants, research deadlines). Allow 2 weeks before sending a follow up email after your first. In your first email, request a meeting by telephone or in-person to further discuss your research interests and opportunities. In the second email reiterate your interest. BUT then, if you do not hear from the faculty member, you can reach out to the graduate program coordinator or other centralized contact for the program and ask how to proceed instead.