



# Mentor handbook

**– for mentors supporting students  
in higher education**

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>On the mentorship role</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The role of the mentor</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>On motivation</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The first meeting</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Setting boundaries</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Creating objectives</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Continuous evaluation</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Encouraging the positives</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Study technique and study planning</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Challenges with mentoring</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Concluding the mentorship</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>References and further reading</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Checklists</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Schedule template</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Exercise</b>	<b>51</b>

## **An equal education for all**

At the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, you receive support in the creation of universally accessible learning environments that allow all pupils to develop. We provide special education support to schools and kindergartens throughout the country, answer questions, and offer courses and conferences. We also run several special schools, allocate government grants and develop teaching materials.

## **Mentor handbook**

– for mentors supporting students in higher education  
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## Foreword

For many students, mentoring support in connection with university studies can be essential in order for them to be able to complete the studies they have begun. Both students and mentors describe the mentorship as a valuable and rewarding experience.

With this handbook, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) and Stockholm University aim to provide support for this initiative, by providing practical advice on how mentors can approach the mentorship.

SPSM distributes government grants for mentorship programs in higher education institutions to ensure that students have the right conditions to achieve the objectives of their education, regardless of their functional ability. Stockholm University allocates national funding to universities and university colleges to provide targeted pedagogical support for students with disabilities. One essential condition for Stockholm University's commission in this matter is cooperation with other universities and university colleges as well as with other authorities and organisations.

This handbook has evolved from a handbook for mentors produced at Lund University, commissioned by coordinator Christel Berg. In 2019 a website (in Swedish) was published at [www.spsm.se/mentorshandboken](http://www.spsm.se/mentorshandboken). This text is a translation of that website.

The handbook provides practical advice for mentors, drawing on the experiences of researchers, mentors and students. This advice relates to preparing for the role of mentor, beginning mentorship, setting boundaries and practical implementation, as well as discussing study technique and study planning, continuous evaluation and concluding the mentorship.

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## Introduction

Being a mentor to another student with a disability is a stimulating and rewarding undertaking. This handbook has been produced to provide knowledge and support to those who already are or want to become a mentor.

The content will support you in your role as mentor in the following tasks;

- preparing yourself for mentorship,
- initiating and planning the collaboration for the best outcome,
- supporting the student's independence,
- evaluating the work on an ongoing basis in relation to set objectives together with the student.

At the end of the handbook there are checklists that you and the student work with during the assignment. The checklists can be printed or saved to be filled out digitally. On the website of the Mentor handbook, you can also find videos with mentors and coordinators, with subtitles in English: [www.spsm.se/mentorshandboken](http://www.spsm.se/mentorshandboken).

The Mentor handbook contains various examples of situations that you may encounter in the role of mentor. These can serve as support in reflecting on what you can choose to do in a situation similar to that of the example. If you are unsure of how to act, you can always contact the coordinator for support.

Remember that behind the word "student" is a person with goals, strengths and weaknesses – just like you.

*"Being a mentor is extremely enjoyable – it's a way of helping someone else. It's particularly enjoyable when you see the results! At the same time, it's also a source of self-development."*

Kim, mentor

*"Without mentorship, I probably wouldn't have completed my studies."*

Robin, student

## On the mentorship role

Mentoring gives more students access to higher education. It is important for creating equal conditions and opportunities to study for people with disabilities. It is the student themselves who applies for mentoring support.

The support that you as a mentor can contribute makes a difference. In the survey conducted by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools in 2018, 82 percent of students with mentors indicate that mentoring has helped them achieve better study results than if they had not received this support.<sup>1</sup> Other researchers write that students who act as mentors usually understand other students' problems better than lecturers and teachers do.<sup>2</sup>

Read about Karima Kandi's experience of having studied with the support of several different mentors. In the web-based version of the Mentor handbook, there are videos where mentors talk about their experiences.

### One student talks about her experience

**"Being calm, friendly, collected and structured are important characteristics for a mentor." This is the opinion of Karima Kandi, who has received support from five different mentors. During her studies, she has taken freestanding courses in behavioural science subjects at four different higher education institutions. Here, she provides the student's perspective on mentoring support.**

Coordinators within pedagogical support assess what support a student can receive. They also function as support for both students and mentors. But how good the support will be depends on the willingness, ability and capacity of teachers and course coordinators to create good conditions for adaptation, as well as how the learning process evolves in the mentoring support.

"I needed support in taking notes because my disability means I can't use my hands and arms. This also affects how long I can sit and study or work at a computer. I received support with note-taking in conjunction with lectures, but also adapted study resources in the form of Legimus and TorTalk which allowed me to listen to reading materials. My mentors have also supported me with study technique, planning and structure. Since I underwent treatments during the study period, I needed support to keep up. I was not able to participate in exams for a period of time and was therefore given access to adapted measures that included oral examination sessions. In that case, it was the teacher who decided whether I should receive that support."

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1 6 STA-2019/15, 2018

2 Monte, A., Sleeman, K., & Hein, G, 2007

### **What is important to you in the mentoring support?**

Anyone who chooses to become a mentor needs to understand the vulnerability of the student, who is dependent on support for their studies to run smoothly. Emotional intelligence – it is important that the mentor wants to understand and asks about what experiences the student has had before.

“It can be good if a mentor has acquired knowledge about what mentoring means. When things have gone well between me and my mentor, it has involved people who have been calm and showed kindness and consideration. At the first meeting, it can be good to listen and ask ‘where do we start?’”

For Karima, openness, trust and creative solutions are important for effective support. It is often a case of trial and error. Mentors are paid for their assignment, but the job is not for everyone. It must be a person with the ability to be kind and who has the right intention. Being able to take responsibility and initiative is also of great importance.

“The mentor must understand the consequences different things have with regard to the study conditions for the student. If my mentor is ill, I need to know how it affects my situation. It is also important to understand the consequences for the student if you want to end the mentoring, and be considerate by telling them well in advance.”

### **Three pieces of good advice**

“Ask yourself why you want to become a mentor! You need to want to help. Ask what works for the student and get feedback from them about whether the contact between you is working well. The mentors who worked really well for me are the ones who wanted to help. They were good at listening and caught me when I couldn’t catch myself.”

In the study situation, the teacher and the course coordinator also have an important role to play. They also need to have a good understanding of the conditions for studying with a disability. The coordinators within pedagogical support at the higher education institutions can contribute knowledge.

“For me, all aspects of the support were essential in some way. If I were forced to prioritise, the adapted examination format and support with taking notes were crucial. And the support with structure was also very important. Sometimes my needs were greater than the support I had access to, but I did not want to be sick-listed. Sure, my arms don’t work, but the rest of me does. Just because some of my abilities are different from other peoples’ doesn’t mean I can’t be active in my studies – I just have to do it in a slightly different way.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why are mentors needed?**

The reasons why students are offered mentoring support are varied. It usually involves disabilities that make it difficult to plan and structure the studies. Mentorship manifests in a variety of ways as different people have different needs. You and the student will create your own mentoring relationship with your own structure. But despite the differences, there are similarities involved with mentorship.

*Reading tip!* In the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools' learning package Studiepaket vuxen (only available in Swedish), you will find out more about how the support in the study situation can be adapted depending on what kind of disability a person has. It includes, among other things, videos with students who talk about what learning disabilities, neuropsychiatric disabilities or mental illness entail. Visit [www.spsm.se/studiepaket-vuxen](http://www.spsm.se/studiepaket-vuxen).

### **What kind of relationship do you as a mentor have with the student?**

Mentorship is about providing the student with support in developing skills that are important for successfully completing their studies. Bear in mind that you should act as an advisor and a discussion partner. A mentor role is not equated to being a friend. Nor is it a substitute teacher or a therapist. The most important thing you can contribute is your outside perspective on the student's studies. Read more in the sections The role of mentor and Setting boundaries.

### **What do we do if the mentorship isn't working out?**

Sometimes mentorship does not work and the student is not as successful in their studies as you would have hoped. Then it is important to try to resolve the situation. If you are unsure about some situations or in your role as a mentor, you can use the contents of the Mentor handbook. Make use of the tips and advice contained in the texts and videos that have been produced in collaboration with experienced coordinators and mentors. You can also contact the coordinator or study counsellor at your higher education institution for advice and support. Read more about what to do when things do not go as planned in the section Challenges with mentorship.

### **What other types of support are available?**

Universities and university colleges have the opportunity and the obligation to adapt the study situation and offer different support measures. The aim is to provide all students with equal opportunities to study, regardless of disability. It is the higher education institutions themselves that decide on the support measures available to the student. It is not possible to demand a specific adapted measure. Below is a short list of examples of support measures that

may be available in addition to mentoring support. If you want to know exactly what measures are available, you can search on your institution's website or contact the coordinator.

Examples of support measures in addition to mentoring support:

- Adapted examination format. For example, the student may be given a longer time to write their exam, be allowed to sit in another room with fewer students, or be allowed to do an oral exam instead of a written exam.
- Support with information and communication technology, ICT. Students with disabilities can have their studies adapted using several digital tools installed on their computer, for example, enabling them to listen to text or access spelling support.
- Note-taking support. This support may, for example, entail that the student has access to another student's lecture notes or is given the opportunity to record lectures in order to be able to listen at a later date.

Visit the website [studera.nu](http://studera.nu) to read more about life as a student with a disability, to obtain information about how the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test can be adapted for individuals, and to get information on student grants and loans.

### **What are the potential effects of mentorship?**

Mentoring programmes in higher education are common across the world. In Sweden, more than 1,200 students are granted mentoring support to varying degrees each year. Some students receive support several times a week while others meet their mentor only when needed.

Mentoring programmes have been shown to have positive effects by, among other things, improving students' study results<sup>3</sup> and by reducing the number of students dropping out.<sup>4</sup>

Another aspect of mentorship is that the assignment is rewarding and inspiring for the mentor personally. Mentors successfully complete their own studies to a greater extent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Larose, S. et al., 2011

<sup>4</sup> Eby, L. T. et al., 2008

<sup>5</sup> Yuen Loke, A. J. T. & Chow, F. L. W., 2007

## The role of the mentor

You need to reflect on the role you have as a mentor before you start your work. You also need to think about what exactly you bring to the assignment.

Mentorship is a relationship between two people with different ideas, expectations, goals and ways of working. You should now reflect on what you are bringing to the mentorship so that you and your student get off to a good start with your relationship.

Bear in mind! Your role as a mentor is not about being a friend or a substitute teacher. It is the student themselves who carries out their studies. You are to be there for them as support.

- Give suggestions based on your own experiences and act as a sounding board.
- Motivate and support the student, based on the student's own situation and level.
- Make sure that what you tell each other stays between the two of you.

## Five questions about you

It is important that you reflect on who you are and what you want out of the mentorship before you meet your student for the first time on your own. These five questions will give you an understanding of what your contribution to the upcoming collaboration might look like and what to pay attention to when working with the student. It will also make it easier for you to be clear about your requirements and boundaries for the assignment further on if you formulate answers to these questions at this early stage.

Write down a few sentences in response to each question, for your own sake.

### 1. Why did you choose to become a mentor?

There may be different reasons for becoming a mentor. <sup>6</sup> The motivation for taking on the assignment can generally be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors are feelings such as self-fulfilment, growing as a person or perhaps psychological well-being. The external factors may be, for example, that mentoring is good experience for your future professional life, that it also creates structure in your own studies, or that you are passionate about seeing others succeed.

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<sup>6</sup> Lennox Terrion, J. & Leonard, D., 2010

Whatever driving forces and motives you have for choosing to be a mentor, it is important that you are aware of them – they may affect your work as a mentor. No one driving force is better than another. By identifying your own source of motivation, it can be easier to persevere in your assignment, even if the mentoring work is not proceeding as you had intended or in the way that you and the student had agreed.

- Think about why you want to become a mentor. Is your main driver one of the above, or is it something else?
- Write down a few sentences about your reasons for becoming a mentor.
- Also put into words what expectations you have for the mentorship, as this is closely related to your motivation.

### **2. What are your weak and strong points?**

Reflect on how you handle weaker aspects of yourself. For example, does it happen that you reveal more than you should about things that you have been told in confidence? Does it happen that you are careless with time planning? Do you sometimes get too eager to take on assignments that you do not always manage to complete? And how do you react when others do not take a joint assignment as seriously as you do?

In the mentor role, you need to both be able to listen to yourself and try to look at yourself objectively. This knowledge is essential when interacting with others. Developing and learning new things is not always easy, it can be really difficult, but most of the time the pay-off becomes clear when some time has passed and new perspectives have been gained.

Think about the strengths and experience you bring with you. Have you served as a mentor or worked with homework help or the like before? Have you had a relevant summer job or worked as a sports trainer or instructor in some other context? Personal experience means a lot in the role of mentor. You do not need to have worked with anything directly related in order to have relevant knowledge.

### **3. What do you bring to the mentorship?**

Think about how you perceive yourself, both as a person and as a student. For example, do you require everything to be perfect, or do you think that good enough is okay when performing a task? Which role do you prefer to take in group work? How do you reward yourself when you are satisfied with your study efforts? How does it work when your studies are getting you down?

#### **4. What does your study technique look like?**

Think about what your own study technique looks like in practice. When and how do you learn best?

- What challenges have you yourself encountered as a student? Do you find it difficult to cope with a certain type of task? Is it hard to get an overview of your studies? Or do you tend to overwork tasks?
- Do you sometimes find it difficult to plan or limit how much time you spend on your studies, or other important things that you do?
- How do you make your everyday life as a student sustainable and predictable?

Try to find real examples based on your experience. They can be useful in your mentoring work.

#### **5. How flexible are you?**

There are practical questions that are good to ask yourself before mentoring starts. How flexible are you about times? Think about what works for you.

- What days of the week work best?
- What times of day?
- When can you find the time to prepare yourself for the mentor meetings?

It is often good to determine a specific time and day for when to meet. If the student has difficulty remembering or adjusting the time, it can be good if you as a mentor can send a reminder one or two hours before the meeting via text message or the like.

Making time available for mentoring work is important for how successful the mentoring is.<sup>7</sup> You and your student must be able to align your schedules with times when you meet. Already at the first meeting, it is good to talk about how much time you can set aside. This can be determined in advance to a certain extent. But be aware that your mentoring role changes when there is a change in the student's needs.

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<sup>7</sup> Lennox Terrion, J. & Leonard, D., 2010

## On motivation

The work as a mentor is largely about providing the student with support in maintaining their motivation, even when it is an uphill struggle.

Most people find it fun to learn new things, especially in an area of interest. Therefore, having a personal interest in the subject usually means that learning becomes both easier and more fun. But naturally there are always parts of a course or programme that are perceived as less fun, interesting or relevant. In your role as a mentor, it is therefore important that you have the tools to support the student through these parts as well. In this respect, knowledge of the person's motivation and driving forces is of great importance.

During your first meeting, it is therefore good to ask the student about the following:

- What are the reasons and the objectives behind the choice of this particular course or programme? Try to identify both aspects that relate to personal interest and ones that have to do with professional life or further studies.
- What objectives has the student set for themselves on a personal level? This may involve things as basic as getting up and about in the morning because of difficulties with sleep.
- In what situations does the student feel strongly or poorly motivated? Why?
- How does the student reward themselves?

Does the student have any personal role model who can serve as a motivator? This may be a person who has succeeded in something difficult despite major challenges, or someone who gives the student inspiration to fight on. Maybe it is someone that the student has felt seen by, like a former teacher or sports leader? It can also be a historical or fictional person. If you do not come up with a role model during the first meeting, you can ask about it again at a later date, as a role model may have come to mind at this point.

It is important that you as a mentor accept the answers to the questions without placing a value on what is said. On the one hand, they help you to understand and support the student better, and on the other hand you can remind the student of the motivational factors during times of struggle.

## Realistic objectives are motivational

When you and the student set objectives, it is important that the objectives are formulated on the basis of the student's own driving forces and objectives. If the student's objective is to pass a course, setting objectives that are too high can be counterproductive. Unrealistic plans are difficult to implement and can lead to postponement behaviour or negative thought patterns. Each accomplished objective is an important motivating factor for the student, so remind them of that.

## When planning breaks down and motivation runs short

Everyone faces motivation issues at times, even if the subject is fun and interesting. There is so much else going on in student life, things that can interfere with concentration and lead to a downturn in study results. When the student has failed to do what was planned, it may be good to try to identify the causes. Ask about what obstacles have arisen, but avoid going too deep into the underlying causes. Your job as a mentor is not to be a therapist but rather to act as an advisor and a discussion partner.

If it is difficult to verbalise what the problem is, leading questions, with possible answers to the question posed, can be used as support. Always steer the conversation towards factors that can be influenced:

- Was there anything in the study environment that disturbed your concentration, such as other people chatting, mobile notifications or an uncomfortable work posture?
- Was there something that happened just before you started working?
- Was it difficult to get away from something fun or important – friends, computer games, an extra job?
- Did anyone ask for help with something that was hard to say no to?

The more the student themselves can identify the obstacles or situations that affect their studies, the greater their ability to one day be able to study without your support. After all, the goal of mentorship is for the student to learn strategies to manage their studies and be able to use this knowledge in their future professional life. Answers regarding how to overcome these obstacles can only come from the person themselves. It is easy to offer good advice, but it is not so easy to take it. Your assignment therefore entails being a good discussion partner who shows a continued interest in helping the student succeed and who reminds them of the motivational factors when needed.

What you as a mentor can also think about is to try to link the planning ahead to the obstacles that the student has previously encountered, for example, by suggesting that the student should study in the library instead of at home.

## The first meeting

The first meetings between you as a mentor and the student require planning and reflection in order to be as good as possible.

The first time you meet the student, the coordinator is often involved, but then it is your turn to shape the mentorship together. Focus on creating a good foundation for your collaboration when you first meet on your own. A positive experience at the beginning of the collaboration is more important than trying to fit in all the parts of this section in one meeting.

### The importance of the first meeting

Past mentors and students say the following:

*“You shouldn’t start working right away. Instead, the first meeting should be all about getting to know each other a bit, and having personal contact. Then you can start talking about how to structure the work and what your objectives will be.”*

Kim, mentor.

*“I want to find out who the person is before beginning our cooperation. It’s important to me to feel secure and comfortable. And I think it’s important for the mentor to know who I am, too, more than simply the fact that I need help with my studies.”*

Alexis, student.

*“My answers to the questions about myself were good to keep in mind during my first meeting with the student, because I found examples of things that I myself struggle with. I’m just an ordinary person too, not a super student!”*

Mariana, mentor.

At the first meeting, the focus should be on you and the student getting to know each other and planning your work. Avoid rushing through the meeting. If you do not have time to finish with the planning, you can continue with this during your second meeting. It is more important during the first meeting to zero in on the essentials than to address the most urgent problems directly.

## Structure for the first meeting

On page 38 you will find a checklist as support for the implementation and documentation of your initial meetings. You can fill in the checklist digitally or print it. If the student agrees, you can also send it to the coordinator.

### 1. Presentation and expectations

Start by introducing yourselves. Mentoring is based on mutual trust, so take your time to get to know each other. This is important for both of you to feel secure and for the student to take that step towards being honest with you.

Tell each other about your respective personal qualities and experiences that you bring to the mentoring. Has one of you had or been a mentor before?

Also talk in detail about what expectations you have.

When talking about expectations, it is important for the student to put their thoughts and expectations into words. It is not enough just to give a response like “I think the same way as you do”. In order to clarify expectations, you as a mentor can take the initiative in the conversation by asking open-ended questions:

- What do you think about ...?
- How could we ...?
- In what ways do you usually ...?
- How often do you want you and me to ...?

Later in the conversation you can talk more about your own thoughts. Then adjust what you want to say based on what you have been told.

### 2. Motivation

The most important of all is what the student wants to learn or achieve during their studies. So: what motivates the student?

This is the starting point for much of your work, so listen carefully to the student and ask follow-up questions. You will benefit from having a detailed, personal picture of the student’s motivations. In practice, your assignment will often be about reminding the student of these motivations and highlighting them in context. Read more about this on page 12.

### 3. Current situation

Establish a common overview of the student’s current study situation. What do the syllabus and timetable look like? Are there current assignments that have not been submitted or given a passing grade? Are there other activities or aspects of everyday life that may affect the work with the studies? Does the student receive other support in addition to mentoring support? What are the

student's success factors and strengths in their student life? What works well? Can this approach be applied to other areas? What practical elements limit the student's opportunities to study? For example, it may be a question of not having time or energy to study in the evening because the need for recovery is more important. In this regard, you as a mentor will benefit from having worked through "Five questions about you" under the section The role of mentor.

Do the exercise regarding time thieves on page 51 together. Discuss which study methods the student likes or dislikes. Are colourful post-its or bullet point-lists preferred? Does it work better to talk about the study subject or to read and write about it? Also refer to the section on Study technique and study planning on page 26.

#### **4. Boundaries**

Boundaries relates to two things.

Firstly, how and when should you contact each other and meet? It is generally a good idea to meet regularly, on the same time and on the same day of the week. Deciding meeting times as you go has been proven to be less successful. However, follow-up can be more flexible in nature. An example of an arrangement could be that the student and the mentor meet at the beginning of the week to plan, and then follow up on how things have gone at the end of the week. Make sure you write down what you have agreed upon. Different types of communication provide different opportunities. For example, you can quickly check how it is going with a text message or email once a week. Have longer meetings on one occasion per month or per exam period where you actively work together. Be aware that certain disabilities may entail that the student has a great need for clear planning. It is therefore important that you as a mentor are sensitive to your student's needs. Also remember that it can be difficult for the student to express these needs. Decide what counts as arriving late and how to get in touch if you are delayed or have to cancel the meeting. Reach a common agreement on these issues. Allow time for this conversation to avoid problems at a later date.

Secondly, boundaries are about what you can expect from each other. What can the student expect to receive from you in terms of support? And how do you deal with things that you are told in confidence? Read more about this in the section Setting boundaries on page 18.

#### **5. Objectives and subsidiary objectives**

When you have obtained an overview, it is time for you to create objectives and subsidiary objectives for the mentoring work. A subsidiary objective breaks down the primary objective into lesser parts. Support in this endeavour can be found in the section Creating objectives on page 21.

## Setting boundaries

In order for mentoring to be effective, it is important to set boundaries and rules for your cooperation. Set boundaries at the beginning of the collaboration by reaching an agreement on where the lines are drawn and deciding on common rules. The description of the boundaries should include the issues you have addressed and what your roles involve and do not involve as mentor and student. It may relate to practical issues or what the student can expect to get help with and how you talk to others about issues concerning your collaboration.

### Write down what your boundaries are

Discuss your boundaries and rules. Write them down in the checklist for the first meeting, or in another document.

This is appropriate to do during the second meeting between you and the student. Make sure to:

- Formulate clear boundaries for your role as a mentor. Also include the guidelines that the institution has for the assignment.
- Talk openly about the boundaries from time to time. Do not take them for granted. Check at intervals that they still work for you both.
- The boundaries are there to provide a sense of security and predictability for you both. You, in your role as mentor, have an additional responsibility to maintain them.

### If the boundaries are exceeded

If you need to remind the student of the boundaries, do so in a positive and respectful way. Be direct, clear and empathetic.

- Indicate exactly what you mean by highlighting what you have both agreed on in the documented rules and boundaries.
- Relate the points agreed upon to the situation you are in right now. Verbalise what you mean.
- Identify what is behind the situation that has arisen by asking a few open-ended questions. Emphasise that the boundaries are there to be adhered to. Naturally, there will be occasions when the boundaries themselves need to be reformulated.

## **Two examples**

At times, students require a different kind of support or more assistance from the mentors than was intended, for example when it comes to written assignments. In this instance, you may have to remind the student by saying “I can’t help you write the text, you have to do that yourself.”

The boundary between providing specific help in the studies and serving as a support can sometimes be difficult. Another example that illustrates this could be if your student asks you about things related to the education. A question such as “Can you quiz me about the atomic structure of calcium sulphate and isotopes?” is closer to what providing support entails than, for example, “Can you explain the atomic structure of calcium sulphate to me?” It is important that you remind the student of your role and clarify it if necessary. This will benefit you both in the long run.

Open-ended questions like these illustrate how the student can find solutions:

- Which person should you ask if you have a query about that assignment?
- How do you contact that person?
- If you don’t know which hall to go to when you have a lecture, how do you find out?

## **A relationship of trust**

Mentoring is a relationship of trust. You and the student must create a clear common picture of what you can share or not share with others regarding this assignment. What can you say to your friends? If you would meet by chance, do you greet each other? How?

Think about what you as a mentor actually need to know and not know about the student in order to carry out your assignment. You probably need to know quite a bit about the student’s disability and the practical consequences of it, but your role never corresponds to the role of a psychologist, counsellor or other profession. Sometimes determining where the boundary lies is difficult, and if you feel you need support, you can always talk to the coordinator at the institution.

## Setting your own boundaries

As a mentor, you often have to find a balance between what help the student actually needs in order to develop and what help you can and should offer. You must stay within the scope of the assignment even if you could and would like to do much more.

Your mentoring should never adversely affect your own studies. Mentoring is an extracurricular activity. It is easy to get too involved with the student or to value the additional income it provides higher than your own studies. It is good to continuously reflect on your situation and also set boundaries for yourself in your assignment. This makes it easier for you to evaluate whether the assignment is about to take up too much space in your own life. If you feel that the mentorship is taking too much time for some reason, you should contact the coordinator at the institution at an early stage to discuss your situation. You should also pay attention to what your own stress reactions are. If you are affected by stress, you should reflect on your situation. Is there anything you can change that would reduce your stress?

## Creating objectives

Creating objectives and subsidiary objectives is necessary to be able to see where you are going and understand why you are doing what you are doing. Clear objectives that are easy to evaluate serve as a support for progressing in your work.

The objectives you create should be realistic and clearly defined. This type of objective is easier to work towards. If the objectives are well formulated, it helps when you regularly check how things are going.

A good tip is to create subsidiary objectives that lead to one or more primary objectives. Focus on both the short-term and long-term aspects of the primary objectives. Use the Checklist for objectives on page 41 to document your objectives. If you are working towards multiple objectives, you create a checklist for each one.

### Formulate SMART objectives

One method for setting clear, motivating targets is called SMART. This method will help you create objectives that are specific, measurable, adapted, relevant and time-bound.

**Specific objectives** means that you know exactly what the objectives do and do not consist of.

**Measurable objectives** means that you agree on how you will measure whether or not an objective has been achieved. You should be able to answer this with a yes or a no. For example, submitting assignments or passing courses are good measurable objectives.

**Adapted objectives** means that objectives are adapted according to the student's abilities. They should be achievable without being too easy.

**Relevant objectives** means that objectives should be relevant to the student's development in their studies.

**Time-bound objectives** means that a deadline has been set.

### Test whether the objectives are SMART

Feel free to test the SMART method in practice by formulating some smart objectives based on a part of your own studies. It can be good to formulate the objective in the first person by using an "I" structure. An example of an

objective that is specific, measurable, time-bound, adapted and relevant can be formulated as follows: “I have finished and submitted my home exam on 5 May. I have answered all questions and used at least two examples from the course literature in each question. My objective is a passing grade.”

## **Reformulate the objectives when needed**

While it is important to set objectives for your work, it is also important to be open to changing these objectives if needed. Be responsive and respectful to the student, and discuss whether any subsidiary objectives need to be changed. It may relate to time or content in order for the primary objective to be realistically achievable. Focus on one thing at a time, such as the subsidiary objectives during an examination period.

You can think of mentoring as a process. Having to change the objectives you set in the beginning does not have to be negative for the collaboration in any way. Instead, it can provide new insights into how you can handle the situation when faced with setbacks or changes that affect the studies. If either of you experience setbacks or down periods in life, it is advisable to try to lift your perspective and look ahead. Discuss what the consequences will be on this specific occasion. Also talk about how you should handle the situation in order to achieve the primary objective in a different way than you had previously planned.

## Continuous evaluation

Schedule continuous evaluation together. It is important to see whether the mentoring is having an effect and is beneficial to the student.

As the student develops her or his skills and gains more experience in managing things on their own, the need for support changes. Think about what areas can be developed, both in your collaboration and in the student's own work. Also adapt your mentoring to meet any new challenges.

Continuous evaluation can be likened to a staircase with five steps.

1. Discuss the current situation together: What does the student experience as difficulties in their current study situation? What works well?
2. Analyse the current situation: How are the subsidiary objectives and timetable working? Does any objective need to be adjusted? How is your approach working?
3. If necessary, do some new planning.
4. The fourth step is execution. To support the student, you can check in on them halfway through the assignment to see how it is going.
5. The fifth step entails a change to the current situation. If the planning has not worked out, you need to discuss and analyse the cause. Make a new plan based on your mutual analysis.

Once you have worked together for a while, it is important to carry out a more comprehensive evaluation of the subsidiary objectives and the methods that you have chosen. Also consider whether there are other ways to achieve the primary objective.

The following are included in your responsibilities as a mentor:

- Continuous evaluation.
- Identify appropriate occasions for evaluations, at least after each examination period.
- Update the planning or make a new plan for the further work.
- Inform the coordinator regularly about how the mentoring is going, for example, using the checklist on page 48.

Questions that might be good to ask:

- What has worked well?
- What could work better?
- Are the objectives still realistic or do they need to be adjusted?

## Encouraging the positives

Highlight aspects that are working well. It is important for the mentoring to feel meaningful to both parties, and for the student to develop in their role.

Strive to provide the student with support in developing their own abilities and strategies for successfully managing their studies.

## Independence

The student may need more support in the beginning of your collaboration, but remember to ensure that they assume their own responsibility. In doing so, you lay the foundation for the student managing on their own in the future.

It is easy to get too involved as a mentor. Although this may sound strange, it is one of the most common pitfalls. A mentor can often get caught up in their student's successes and setbacks and want them to succeed. There is a risk that the mentor will help the student so much that managing on their own becomes difficult.

*"I have to do it myself, even if it takes time. If everything comes served on a plate, it's hard to take it all in. The mentor should support you in doing things rather than doing it for you."*

Robin, student.

## Self-confidence

A building block when it comes to independence is self-confidence. To strengthen self-confidence, it is good to be direct, clear and empathetic with your feedback.<sup>8</sup>

A useful principle in providing feedback can be the "three to one" principle. That is, give three times as much positive feedback on what has been accomplished as you do on things that need improvement.

Provide support by highlighting what works well. All students do something that works well in their study situation. Highlight it as something positive that the student can be satisfied with. What you choose to highlight will be something that the student will do more of. Praise them for something concrete that the student has done, for example: "It's great that you took

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<sup>8</sup> Margolis, H., 2005

notes in the lecture. It seems that it was much easier to read the book now”.  
Be more careful about suggesting improvements.

Be sincere and specific. Provide feedback on behaviour and situations that favour the student’s continued studies. What behaviour is good for the student to continue with in order to succeed? Even small things can be worth noting since it can lift and motivate the student.

Show that you as a mentor see your student’s efforts and give them encouragement. When you encourage the positive developments that you observe, you must think about how you do it in the role of mentor in the relationship with your student. Your feedback and encouragement must focus on the student’s performance, not their personal characteristics. Focus on the positive, even if your student has failed to achieve the objectives you have set. At the same time, you can discuss strategies for how the student can achieve these objectives in the future.

## Adopt a coaching approach

If a setback occurs, it is important to express an understanding of the student’s disappointment. Also try to highlight the things that went well. Employing a coaching approach means that you both highlight the positives while working with the student to identify things that did not go according to plan. It is good if you also discuss what you can do next time for a better outcome.

Use open questions, that is, questions that begin with what, why, when or how:

- What did you do to find out ...?
- What did you think was the hardest or easiest thing about ...?
- When does it work better for you to work with ...?

## Study technique and study planning

Having a strategy for study technique and study planning is good for everyone, but it can be extra important for those who need support due to a disability.

We are all different when it comes to how we learn new things and how much time and energy is spent in the process. Study planning must therefore be based on individual needs.

In individual study planning, time is often a key factor. What is considered enough time to finish an assignment or complete an entire course varies from person to person. Remember: achieving the primary objective is the important thing, not how long it takes to get there.

Please use the schedule template on page 50 as support.

### Study techniques for you to try out

Sometimes it is good to test new ways of doing things. Here are some suggestions for various techniques that can facilitate the studies for the student.

1. Go through the suggestions together.
2. Discuss which suggestion or suggestions seem good to test right now. Help each other formulate what the objective is with testing this particular suggestion. Express in words what is going to be changed and document this in the checklist for objectives. An example of objective formulation could be: “By writing down the book’s headings and making my own summaries of the chapters in a document, I should get a better overview of ...”.
3. Choose one or a few suggestions and test these in practice. Test them several times. Decide when and how you follow up on how it worked.

## Use visual support

Pictures, videos, symbols, diagrams and other visual aids serve as good support both for storing information in memory, and for recalling this knowledge later on. Taking photos during lectures and labs can be an effective method for those who need visual support.

Make sure to:

- Ask if taking photos is permitted.
- Not save all pictures. Choose the ones that are most important right after the lecture and discard the rest.
- Use the pictures you have saved. Copy them into your notes and write your own captions or support words for them. You can also print the most important pictures and put them on the wall.

Here are more suggestions on how to use visual support. Feel free to combine some of the suggestions:

- Search the internet for pictures and videos which cover the area you are studying.
- Draw in your notes, on your computer or on paper. Use symbols that mean something to you, such as arrows, pyramids or stars.
- A text is also a good visual aid. Read with the pen in your hand. Underline important words and scribble comments and questions near the text. Print out important texts. Use fonts, font size and line spacing in a way that suits you.
- Colours can be used in different ways. Examples to test: colours such as dark grey, purple or red can symbolise something negative, or something you need to investigate more. Yellow can stand for something that is possible or semi-finished. Green can stand for something that is positive or complete, while blue can stand for something that is neutral in the context. Computer programs like Excel often have built-in support for sorting content into tables by colour.
- Create your own diagrams, charts, tables and timelines. There are many different types of charts and diagrams that are useful for visualising different things:
  - Bar graphs show differences in quantity.
  - Pie charts show the distribution between different categories.
  - Venn diagrams can show both similarities and differences using two or three overlapping circles.
  - Tree diagrams show a division into categories and subcategories in several levels.

You can find additional information on charts and diagrams as well as their usage here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diagram>.

## Make the material meaningful for yourself

Compare new knowledge with what you already know about the subject. This activates your long-term memory and creates new connections. Creating your own associations and inner images can also serve to support your memory.

Giving the study material meaning for you can provide both memory help and motivation. Try to formulate sentences where you connect the new knowledge to what you already know, your objectives and your motivational factors:

- “These new perspectives give me broader knowledge of ... and a deeper understanding of ...”.
- “If there is a question about this on the exam, I will address these three things in my answer.”
- “I have now read another student’s essay. This is the first step on the way to writing my own essay.”

## Clarify in-built structures and categories

It is easier to remember and reproduce something that is arranged according to a clear structure, for example:

- A **chronological** structure is arranged according to time factors: “First you do A, then you do B, and then C.”
- A **hierarchical** structure is arranged according to how important something is: “The most important thing is A, the second most important thing is B”.
- **Cause and effect:** “If we do A then we get the effect B”.
- **Grouping and categorisation means** arranging things according to their similarities or differences: “This is true for A and B, but not for C. Instead, this applies to both B and C”, “On the one hand A, on the other hand B”. Often there are also subcategories in several levels, like in this example: “Felines are a subcategory of mammals. Lynx, domestic cats and lions are subcategories of felines”, and so on.

All the subjects or areas you study have several of these basic structures built in. Learn to identify and recognise the most important of them. Make the structures clear to yourself by using visual support. Repeat them until they remain in your long-term memory. Then it will be easier for you to both understand the subject and recall what you already know when adding new knowledge or presenting the knowledge in some way.

## Read faster and smarter

These suggestions relate to, for example, reading speed and reading strategies. Being able to read and absorb the content of a text is both about being able to decode the words and also understand what you are reading – reading comprehension. A disability can entail difficulties with either decoding or reading comprehension, or both. Being able to easily decode a text does not automatically imply good reading comprehension. The reader may still need support in their reading strategies, for example, through planning their reading. One way to absorb text is by listening to it. Many books have been recorded, which can be helpful.

Keep in mind that all strategies may not work for all people, so test and see what works best for you.

### Plan the reading

Prepare yourself before you start reading a book or a longer text. Otherwise there is an increased risk of you not understanding or having the energy to finish the assignment. In addition, it is not always necessary to read the entire book; there may only be certain parts that are relevant to the assignment you are working on.

- Read the text on the back cover and the table of contents first. Take your time. Focus on the chapter headings: What does it say? What do you think it will be about?
- Activate your long-term memory: What do you already know about this subject? What do you recognise from the lectures or your own notes?
- Read a little bit at the beginning and end of each chapter. Read any summaries.
- Make a strategic choice on how to proceed with the reading. There may be some chapters that seem to be less important right now, for example, chapters that provide an introduction to the subject for those without any prior knowledge. You can skip these for the time being. Concentrate your reading on what is most important right now.

A reading log is an easy and good way to work with reading. Write down all the headings in a document and add summaries, questions and comments to the text there as you read. Later, when it is time for revision, these notes will be a useful tool.

### Avoid “jumping back”

You will get a better overall understanding if you just read linearly. During the first reading, the most important thing is to grasp the larger picture. Therefore, do not go back if you have missed a word or detail.

Try to see several words at a time, that is to say, avoid fixing your gaze on each new word. One goal can be to only fix your gaze three or four times per line. Use a pen, a finger, a piece of paper, or a ruler under the line to help avoid any jumping back.

Practice by moving the pen at an even pace under the lines: line by line in a forward direction. Since your eye will follow the pen, it will prevent you from jumping back. After a while you can try to move the pen to the middle of the next line, always forward and downward.

At first, it often feels unusual not being able to jump back. It may be a feeling that you might be missing something. But you probably miss more if you read too slowly than too fast, because it takes a lot of energy and concentration to read that carefully.

If you do one jump back per line in a 300-page book with 40 lines per page, and each jump back takes one second, that means three hours of extra reading.

## Model for problem solving

This is a model that supports problem solving.

**Define the problem:** What are they asking for?

**Investigate the problem:** What information is available relating to the problem? Have you seen anything like this before? Can you better understand the problem using pictures or other visual support? What designations or quantities can be used for the different parts?

**Plan:** How do you use the information to solve the problem? Can you simplify the problem? Can you divide the problem into sub-problems? Is there any known formula, rule or other correlation that can be used here?

**Act:** Solve the problem. Write down the steps that lead to the solution.

**Look back:** Check if the answer is reasonable. Analyse the path to the solution. Could you, for example, have solved it in a simpler way, using some other formula or rule?

## Academic language actions provide support in understanding the problem

In order for you to solve a problem, it is important that you understand what it is all about. A good approach is to always read the problem twice and look for all instructional words, which we refer to as academic language actions. These are terms that you need to understand the meaning of in order to know what is expected of you in your studies. Keep in mind that the words can have a somewhat different meaning if you use them in a more general linguistic context.

**Analyse:** Break down and divide up the central parts of the subject. Examine, discuss and interpret each part thoroughly. Focus on the “how” and “why”.

**Argue:** State reasons that speak for and against the subject.

**Describe:** Describe the subject in a detailed and descriptive way by outlining characteristics, distinguishing features and perceptions, among other things.

**Define:** Formulate an exact, specific and well-founded meaning, primarily within a specialised field. List important distinguishing features. Illustrate, possibly using words or pictures.

**Discuss:** Examine the subject thoroughly: investigate, debate or argue in favour of the subject’s advantages and disadvantages. Note contradictions within the subject. Compare and contrast by conducting a detailed line of reasoning.

**Explain:** Give a detailed explanation with related causes. Justify by showing logical consequence, or by giving examples, alluding to causes and highlighting results.

**Illustrate:** Explain or clarify by giving concrete evidence. For example, through comparisons, pictures, charts, statistics or parallels to other subjects.

**Compare:** Describe similarities and differences.

**Contrast:** Describe the differences between two or more subjects.

**List:** List several different aspects of the subject, create a list of characteristics, distinguishing features and causes.

**Problematise:** Illuminate the subject from different perspectives or viewpoints. What are the advantages and disadvantages? What are the strengths and weaknesses? Highlight different perspectives.

**Explain:** Describe and explain in detail.

**Reflect:** Reason regarding the subject based on different perspectives and aspects. Start with questions like: What does this mean? What might it look like? How can it be understood? What problems are there?

**Relate:** Indicate how subjects are related or similar.

**Reason:** Draw your own conclusions based on given facts.

**Summarise:** Make a concise, summarised and concentrated presentation of the subject, that is to say, outline central perceptions or events. Include conclusions, but exclude unnecessary details.

**Interpret:** Express in your own words. Use examples.

**Evaluate:** Assess and evaluate the subject. Note the advantages and disadvantages. Give your opinion or quote an expert. Support with reliable facts in the form of statistics, quotes, examples and various conclusions.

## Checklist for examination

### Before the examination

- Start preparing for the examination already on the first day of the course. Make a timetable where you schedule your revision sessions: set aside at least one hour per week for revision.
- Find out what kind of exam it is and what course material will be covered.
- Summarise what you have studied in your personal way. Use visual support and associations to anchor the knowledge.
- Prepare yourself for how the exam questions may be formulated by reading through old exam questions. The glossary Academic language actions on page 31 is a useful reference.
- Do some practice exercises.
- Try to formulate conceivable questions of your own and answer them within a limited time.

### During the examination

- Read through all the questions and divide the time between easy and difficult questions. Start by answering the easy questions.
- Read through the whole question before you start writing the answer. What are they asking for? Make use of the problem solving model on page 30. Also use the glossary of academic language actions to understand what is expected when you are to describe, explain, or discuss different things.

## Mentor handbook

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- Only provide an answer to what is specifically asked for.
- Start by writing keywords. Continue by writing one or a few summarising sentences per keyword. You can then elaborate on the answer if time allows.
- Check the answer: Did I forget something? Does the answer reflect what I mean?

## Challenges with mentoring

Sometimes mentoring does not work as you and the student hoped. Here you can read about the possible options when this is the case.

Both you as a mentor and the student always have the opportunity to contact the coordinator to ask for advice.

Below are some examples of problems that may arise and suggestions for how they can be handled.

**If the student does not attend the meeting:** In the checklist for the first meeting or in another document concerning your boundaries, you have written down what applies, for example, regarding delays – if you as a mentor should call or if the student should make contact. If an agreement has been broken, you should discuss it with the student right away and explain briefly how it affects you and your collaboration.

**If the student reacts to something during your meeting:** Be responsive and attentive. Keep in mind that the student may not be able to articulate what happened during the actual meeting. In this situation, it may be good to agree that the student can e-mail or tell you what happened in some other way after the meeting.

**If you find that the student is not making any progress:** It takes time to get to know each other. Try different strategies to come up with how planning and execution can be done most effectively. By creating trust and confidence, the student can also feel able to speak up when the strategy is not working. Are the subsidiary objectives too ambitious? Try dividing them into micro-objectives. If you still feel that things are not progressing, do not hesitate to contact the coordinator. It is not your responsibility to ensure that the student succeeds in their studies.

**If the student spends a lot of time talking about their problems:** Make sure from the start that you have set boundaries for your cooperation by using the checklist. Be clear and focus on the study situation in the conversation and indicate that this is the nature of the support you are providing. Other forms of support should be sought elsewhere. The coordinator can also be available to you as a discussion partner.

**If you cannot continue mentoring:** There may be various reasons why mentoring cannot continue. You may have received a job offer, you and the student may agree not to continue, or the student may wish to change mentor. Keep in mind that you are not alone in bearing the responsibility for ending the mentorship. It is good to talk to the coordinator before you and the student have your final meeting. You can always ask the coordinator to take part in a meeting with the student.

## Concluding the mentorship

Before concluding your mentorship, it is important to summarise and evaluate your collaboration. Talk about what worked well and what you could have done differently.

Sooner or later, your mentoring will come to an end. Your mentorship will no doubt have involved a great deal of hard work, which hopefully will have developed both of you. You should have evaluated your work on an ongoing basis, but the time has now come for the summary and concluding evaluation.

Instead of just thanking each other and saying goodbye, it is important to illustrate what you have achieved, what has worked and what could have been done differently. This ensures that you can take this knowledge with you and benefit from it in the future.

Use the checklist for concluding evaluation on page 45 as support in the conversation.

## References and further reading

In our work with the Mentor handbook, we have used the sources listed here. We have also made use of the proven knowledge and experience found within the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools and among the coordinators at the higher education institutions who contributed to the content.

### References

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## **Websites**

In Writing Guide you find practical advice on the writing process, how to manage sources and references, and how to publish your thesis:  
<http://writingguide.se/>

Studiepaket vuxen contains information in Swedish about studying with a disability:  
[www.spsm.se/studiepaket-vuxen](http://www.spsm.se/studiepaket-vuxen)

The English version of Studera.nu contains information about higher education in Sweden:  
<https://www.studera.nu/startpage/>

Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM:  
[www.mtm.se](http://www.mtm.se)

# Checklist for your first one-to-one meeting

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Names: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Presentation and expectations

Describe yourself as individuals and students. Describe your experiences and characteristics.

Describe your expectations for this mentorship.

## 2. Motivation

Describe what motivates the student the most and how the mentor can help keep the motivation up.

## 3. Current situation

Describe the student's study situation right now.

Describe which study methods the student prefers.

Describe things that can hinder or limit the student, as well as the “energy thieves”.

Describe the most important thing the student wants help with.

#### **4. Framework for maintaining contact.**

Describe in detail when and how you will be in touch. What counts as a delay or as arriving late? Who contacts who in that situation?

When will the continuous evaluation be performed?

What should the mentor do or not do?

What is okay to tell others regarding your mentoring?

# Checklist for objectives

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**Test:** Is the wording of the objective SMART?

S	specific
M	measurable
A	adapted
R	relevant
T	time-bound

1. Primary objective

2. Subsidiary objectives

Subsidiary objective 1:

Subsidiary objective 2:

Subsidiary objective 3:

### **3. Planning of working methods**

Describe how you will work to achieve the objectives.

### **4. Time management**

Make a simple schedule for your work towards achieving the subsidiary objectives and the primary objective. Include continuous evaluations in the schedule.

# Checklist for continuous evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Last evaluation took place: \_\_\_\_\_

Next evaluation will take place: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Are the objectives achievable?

Does any objective need to be adjusted? Write a short comment here and fill in a new Checklist for objectives.

## 2. How is the schedule working?

## 3. How is your mentorship collaboration working?

Answer with a number on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very good.

What has worked well?

What do you need to change in your working methods?

#### **4. New planning**

If you need to make a new schedule or change your working methods, write your new plan here:

## Checklist for concluding evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist should be filled in once for the student and once for the mentor. The idea is that each can benefit from their lessons in the future.

1. What is the reason for ending the mentorship?

2. What primary objective(s) have been achieved?

3. What has contributed to your success?

4. What has worked well during the mentorship?

5. What could you have done differently during the mentorship?

6. What have you learned?

7. What can you work on in the future?

# Checklist for reporting to the coordinator

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Primary objective

*Example: "Structure the essay."*

## 2. How will this be achieved?

Describe subsidiary objectives and timetable, including for continuous evaluations.

*Example: "Create a mind map. Find keywords. Develop the arguments. Evaluation every other Friday."*

## 3. Framework for your contact

Describe how and when you stay in touch.

#### **4. Your way of working**

Describe your working methods.

*Example: "First, the student sends the supervision of their paper and the supervisor's comments to me."*

#### **5. Other**

*Example: "The student wants to go on the study trip. I support her in the contact with the faculty."*

## Schedule template: What do I do over the course of a week?

Fill in this schedule every night for a week so you get a detailed picture of how you spend your time. Fill in what you actually did, not what you intended to do. Use your own abbreviations, colours or “codes”.

	Måndag	Tisdag	Onsdag	Torsdag	Fredag	Lördag	Söndag
06-07							
07-08							
08-09							
09-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-13							
13-14							
14-15							
15-16							
16-17							
17-18							
18-19							
19-20							
20-21							
21-22							
22-23							
23-24							
24-01							
01-02							
02-03							
03-04							
04-05							
05-06							

## **Exercise: Identify the time thieves**

How much are you affected by the following factors when studying on your own? Enter a number for each situation, where 0 means not at all and 10 means very much.

“I’m interrupted by the phone: text messages, e-mails, reminders and so on.”

“It’s a bad study environment where I am.”

“I occupy myself with all sorts of things to avoid sitting down and seriously starting the assignment.”

“I watch too much TV.”

“My friends want me to join them in doing things.”

“I’m social and often chat a lot with others.”

“I play computer games or surf the internet.”

“I postpone difficult things for another day.”

