

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
GROUP MENTORING GUIDE

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What is group mentoring?

Mentoring is an old, tested method that is used to pass on the experiential knowledge and wisdom of an experienced, older mentor to a younger, more inexperienced actor who is eager to develop. The aim is to facilitate the career management and the professional and intellectual growth of the person being mentored.ⁱ

Mentoring is essentially a very simple method. Mentoring is led by an actor, who poses questions to a mentor. The actor's questions, topics of interest, and goals determine the contents of mentoring. Learning is done through the dialogue between the actor and the mentor, i.e. discussion that aims for mutual understanding and learning. This involves an open, confidential interactive relationship where both the mentor and the actor learn from each other.ⁱⁱ

In group mentoring, a mentor or a mentoring pair instructs a small group of actors. The actors discuss the questions that they wish to focus on during the mentoring process. The group must collectively identify their aims and the contents of their activities and work as a team that is responsible for mentoring together, even though individual actors may also have various mentoring goals of their own. During group mentoring, actors receive peer support from each other in addition to support from the mentor.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mentoring has long been used in work life to transfer tacit knowledge and particularly to expedite learning and support the career development of managers and experts, among other purposes.^{iv} Mentoring programs for students, on the other hand, have provided new perspectives toward career planning and the future.^v The University of Helsinki organizes group mentoring to support students as they move on to work life or further studies.

A mentor helps in many ways

A mentor can help an actor in many different ways. The mentor can guide the actor by serving as a role model. The mentor can be a sympathetic listener, a sparring partner, and a coach. The mentor can also be a friend who provides critical feedback, inspiring the actor to think in new ways and question assumptions and established mindsets. The mentor can also act as a bridge-builder who guides the actor deeper into work life and expertise.^{vi}

The mentor is not an employment agent, a sponsor, a manager, a work or student counselor, an orientor, a tutor, or a therapist. The mentor's task is to simply share his/her personal experiences and knowledge, not make decisions on the actor's behalf or strongly guide the actor toward a particular direction. In addition, the mentor

should not criticize the actor's choices, although the mentor can encourage the actor to think about things in new ways. The actor is personally responsible for his/her learning process and how he/she makes use of what he/she has learned during mentoring later in life.^{vii}

Mentor was a friend, protector, teacher, and advisor to the king's son

The word 'mentoring' is inspired by Ancient Greek mythology. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, placed his friend, Mentor, in charge of his son, Telemachus, when he went to the Trojan War. Mentor was supposed to serve as Telemachus' protector, teacher, friend, and advisor, so that the boy could one day follow in his father's footsteps as King of Ithaca.

Mentoring is beneficial to both parties

Studies show that mentoring provides major benefits to actors. The mentor can use his/her experience to guide actors as they consider their career alternatives. The mentor is more aware of potential job opportunities, employers, and tasks than the actors. He/she is familiar with the issues and people in his/her own field. Mentoring enhances the professional identity of actors and boosts their belief that they can cope in work life. Mentoring also strengthens the actor's belief in his/her own future and clarifies plans.^{viii} Mentoring can also help the actor identify and develop his/her own competence, goals, and opportunities. Actors can also expand their personal networks and receive feedback and support with their choices.



Mentors, on the other hand, receive new ideas and thoughts from actors during the mentoring process. Mentors can often analyze their own careers better after mentoring and consider their own plans for the future from a new perspective. Working as a mentor is a valuable experience that can provide mentors with genuine

pleasure from being able to help someone.^{ix} Simultaneously, they receive a direct connection to students and current university studies.

Mentoring can also develop the interaction and leadership skills of a mentor and teach him/her a new working method. The mentoring experience also provides provisions for knowledge management, which may be useful in work life when, for example, developing the competence of subordinates and organizing performance appraisals.

Activities of a mentoring group

The starting point for mentoring is always provided by the goals set by actors. In group mentoring, each actor determines his/her personal goals already during the application stage. Why do I want to take part in mentoring? What do I expect from it? Mentoring groups are formed and students' goals are used as the basis for inviting mentors to participate.

Learning diary and self-reflection facilitate learning

Actors can e.g. keep a learning diary or compile a career portfolio to facilitate learning during the mentoring process. The learning diary can include the key issues raised during sessions and particularly how these issues have affected the actor's personal life planning. The learning diary can be used to facilitate learning and the achievement of goals of each individual actor. The career portfolio can provide a similar tool and include thoughts about personal strengths, dreams, goals, and hopes. Mentoring goals can also be considered in the career portfolio, and actors can agree on what the team members wish to collect in the portfolio during the mentoring process and the learning experiences that they hope to achieve from mentoring. The career portfolio can also serve as a collection of various alternative CV and application templates on which actors can request for e.g. comments from their mentor.

Group goals are recorded in mentoring agreement

Group mentoring begins with a joint session for all groups where both mentors and actors receive information and support for launching group activities. Group members meet each other for the first time in this joint start-up event. Each group decides on its own meeting schedule during the start-up event.

Group mentoring groups should meet roughly once a month during the program, or about four times in total.

Each mentoring group plans its activities together, which is why actors should openly discuss their personal goals with each other and their mentor at the very beginning. A

shared notion of the group goals should be recorded in the mentoring agreement no later than the first group session.

The mentoring agreement contains the group's own schedule as well as the goals, contents, and rules of group activities. The agreement ensures that the members of a group have a shared notion of what the group is trying to achieve.

A group mentoring group observes confidentiality. Group discussions may not be disclosed to outsiders without mutual agreement. A mentor or an actor needs to give his/her consent before an opinion, question, or concern presented by him/her can be shared with outsiders.

Planned and documented sessions

It is important that the topics of each group session are planned in advance. This way, the mentor and the actors can orient themselves for the session, and the time together is not spent "just chatting". The sessions can be informal, but planning guarantees that there is enough time to discuss the topics agreed upon together.

The main responsibility for planning each session lies with the actors. The themes of the first session are planned during the start-up event. At the end of each session, the actors plan the topics that will be discussed during the next session. The actors take turns to write a short summary of the group session and deliver a session memo describing the contents of the session to the other members of the group. The memo can be attached to the learning diary or career portfolio.

Pitfalls of mentoring

Not enough effort is put into introductions and grouping. As a consequence, group members do not have the courage to speak openly or trust each other.

Confusion about goals or operating principles. No mentoring agreement has been prepared. Groups lack a shared notion of what they are trying to achieve.

Form before content. Participants cling to the mentoring instructions and the formal aspects of the process instead of the contents.

Actor's passiveness, unwillingness to ask questions and learn.

The mentor has a patronizing or dismissive attitude toward actors.

Not enough time is reserved for mentoring.

Distances are too long. It is difficult to arrange sessions.

Lack of confidence.

(Source: Lilia 2000, 35-39)

Tips for mentoring sessions

The members of each mentoring group decide the themes and topics that they wish to discuss in their sessions. The goals that the group has agreed on provide the contents and the form of activities. If they wish, the group members may utilize the assignments and questions of the log during their discussions. For instance, the following questions may be discussed during the group mentoring process:

1. Questions related to the actors' career planning:

What kind of work-related expectations and hopes do the actors have? What kind of tasks are they interested in? What kind of work environments do they find enjoyable? When discussing this theme, the group can utilize the comparison assignment in the log.

2. Transfer from studies to work life

What has influenced the study choices of the actors and the mentor? What makes university studies interesting? What it is like to transfer to work life? How can one utilize the things one has learned during studies at work? What kind of things should one study at work and alongside one's work after graduation?

The mentor can describe his/her own career history when this theme is under discussion. The map assignment of the log can also be done in connection with this theme. All parties can work on their own map during the session and possibly add to it later.

3. Opportunities, challenges, and development trends of work life?

How do the group members see the development of work life at the moment? What kind of job opportunities and future prospects are offered by the field that the actors are interested in? What kinds of networks should the actors try to form? What kind of job-hunting channels and techniques are effective? How can one improve personal well-being and endurance at work?

The group seeks answers together

It is a good idea to remember that nobody has the "correct answers" to all the possible questions. It is crucial that the actors openly describe issues that they are concerned about and that the actors and the mentor together consider these issues in light of their personal experiences.

The mentoring group may utilize e.g. the Career Services or career follow-up surveys in terms of their own work or organize visits to interesting workplaces. The mentor may also instruct actors to directly contact experts in the mentor's network, if these experts may have answers to questions that the actors are interested in.

Everyone speaks and everyone listens

The contents of mentoring consist of interactive dialogue, guided by the topics of interest and questions posed by the actors.

Although the themes of each session are planned in advance, discussion itself should flow freely through the questions posed by the actors.

The mentor is not an introducer or a teacher, but one of the speakers in the group.

In a successful session, everyone speaks and listens – and learns from each other.

End of group mentoring

Group mentoring ends with a joint event where acknowledgements are given and where actors and mentors can assess the outcomes of the program and discuss their experiences. Actors and mentors also have the chance to provide feedback to the organizers of group mentoring and thus help develop group mentoring.

Actors may, if they wish, continue to meet among themselves and/or with the mentor even after the program ends, but the decision to continue cooperation must be made together.^x There is no obligation to remain in contact.

Actors keep their personal learning diaries/career portfolios and can continue to reflect on their life planning by using these tools. Learning diaries can be distributed among other group members in order to receive peer feedback and tips

Actor application to the mentoring program

Application to the program should be done by filling in the form with your personal details, including your phone number.

In addition to your personal and study details, the application form includes the following questions. We hope that applicants will answer them clearly and provide reasons for their answers. These answers are extremely important, because the formation of mentoring groups is based on the applications.

1. What do **I** wish to achieve from mentoring?
2. What kind of a mentor do **I** want?

During the application process, it is a good idea to emphasize that actors are not applying for a job or taking part in the recruitment process of a workplace, but only applying for mentoring. If the mentoring program is directed to international degree students, the application form may also include questions about the student's English and Finnish language proficiency and the motivation to stay in Finland after graduation.

Can I become a mentor?

- you are a professional in your field with some experience and wish to share your experiences and knowledge about work life
- you are interested in professional development and are ready to listen to the needs of actors

As a mentor, you will receive:

- thoughts related to your personal professional development
- a fresh perspective toward work life and new thoughts about work
- knowledge management skills, which may be useful when developing the competence of subordinates and conducting performance appraisals
- the opportunity to become acquainted with students who are about to graduate
- new kind of information about university studies and new degree structures
- contacts with the university and other mentors

University of Helsinki model

The group mentoring program has been developed in cooperation with the **University of Helsinki faculties and subjects, Career Services, the Helsinki University Centre for Research and Development of Higher Education, and alumni activities**. Head of Development *Aino-Maija Evers*, who organizes management mentoring programs at the University of Helsinki, has also been involved in the development process of group mentoring.

Immediate support for mentoring groups is provided by a contact person in the faculty or subject.

The university's Career Services is responsible for joint events in addition to helping the faculties in all stages of the process.

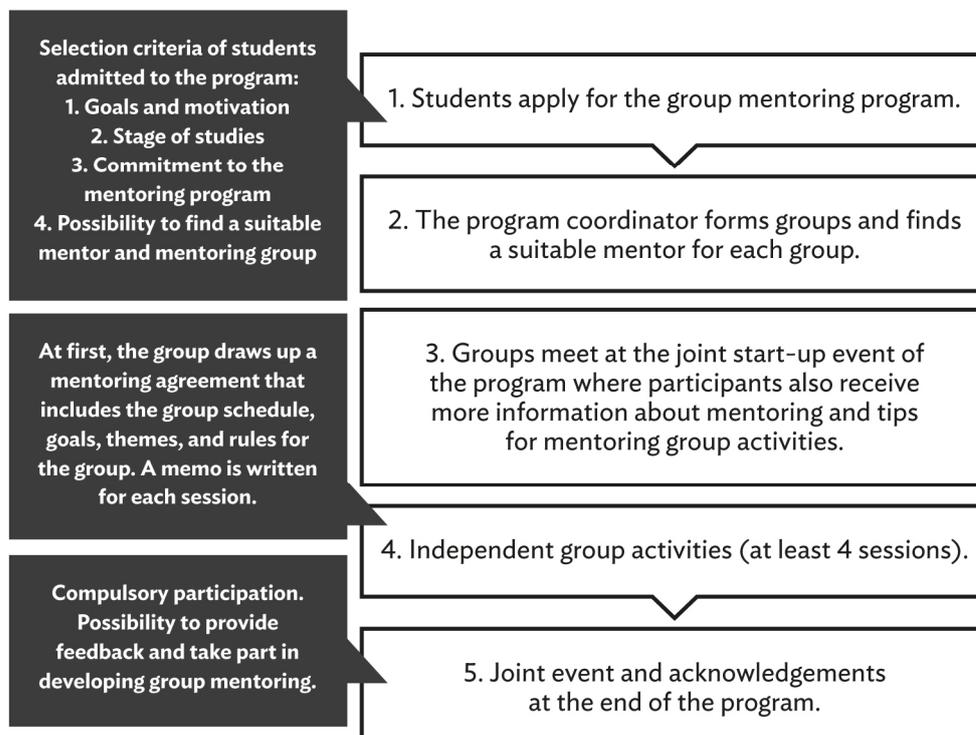
Alumni activities are involved as a link toward alumni and mentors.

The Centre for Research and Development of Higher Education (YTY) studies the results of mentoring through the above-mentioned logs.

More information about the program: urapalvelut@helsinki.fi.

The group mentoring program in a nutshell

(duration about 6 months)



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ⁱ Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 6; Lilia 2000, 14; Abramova 2007, 3–6.

ⁱⁱ Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 6–10; Lilia 2000, 14–15, 26–30; Abramova 2007, 6–10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dansky 1996, 6–9, 11–12; Ritchie & Genoni 2002, 69–70; Abramova 2007, 9, 28; Sarkki 2010.

^{iv} Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 6, 11–12, Lilia 2000, 7–11.+

^v Abramova 2007, 3–4, 11–12.

^{vi} Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 6–10, Lilia 2000, 26–30.

^{vii} Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 14–15, 26–27, 34; Lilia 2000, 26–30.

^{viii} Dansky 1996, 6–7; Evers 2000, 103, Abramova 2007, 11–14.

^{ix} Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 28–29; Lilia 2000, 33.

^x Esim- Nakari, Porenne, Mansukoski & Huhtala 1998, 17.