

Make the Most of Mentoring: YOUR GUIDE TO THE IIDA STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM

Congratulations: You've been paired with a mentor as part of the IIDA Student Mentoring Program. Together, you and your mentor will pick one day in March 2019 for job shadowing. This is an exciting opportunity that will give you a peek into what day-to-day life as a design professional is like and help you make valuable connections.

BEFORE THE MENTORING SESSION

Get in Touch With Your Mentor

Now that you have received an email pairing you with a professional, **it is your responsibility to reach out** to your mentor first and introduce yourself via email. Your communication should include the following:

1. Tell them who you are: Provide basic information about yourself, such as what year you are in school and why you chose interior design as your major.
2. Thank them: Your mentor is taking time out of her busy schedule to give you this special opportunity. Express gratitude and enthusiasm.
3. Begin the scheduling process: As much as possible, you should accommodate the mentor's schedule. Ask the mentor which days in March work best for him. If you have specific dates that will not work for you, let him know about your time constraints (for example, you're on spring break and out of town for a week).
4. Respond to follow-up emails: Promptly respond to your mentor and confirm the date of your job shadowing. You'll also want to ask if there's a dress code or if your day will consist of anything that requires special clothing, like closed-toe shoes if you are visiting a construction site. You can also take this opportunity to find out if there is anything specific you should prepare for, such as special tours or informational meetings with coworkers.

Prepare for Your Day of Job Shadowing

You've scheduled your mentoring session and communicated with your mentor about what to expect. Now it's time to make sure you maximize this opportunity.

1. Determine your goals for the day: Are you hoping to get a better sense of one aspect of the design business, such as working at a furniture manufacturer or within a specific industry, like healthcare? Do you want to make a variety of connections at the firm? Think about why you signed up and what you hope to learn from the experience.
2. Do your research: Get to know the company. Find out about its clients, mission, structure, and other aspects of the business that interest you.
3. Practice your elevator speech: An elevator speech is a short, but clear message about who you are. You will likely be introduced to many professionals, other designers, supervisors, and potentially even clients. Be ready to give a very brief synopsis of who you are, where you go to school, and why you are excited to be there.
4. Prepare questions for your mentor and anyone else you will be meeting with. Here are some to get you started:
 - How did you decide to become an interior designer?
 - What do you like best about working in this field? What do you like least?
 - Tell me about your favorite project.
 - What skills do you feel are most important to be successful as a designer?
 - What about your education prepared you most for this career? What did you feel was lacking from your education?
 - What do you do during a typical day or week?
 - What percentage of your time do you spend interacting with people vs. working independently?
 - What is the makeup of your team and how do you work together?



DURING YOUR MENTORING SESSION

The day has finally arrived! You're probably excited as well as a little nervous, but don't worry, your preparation will go a long way toward ensuring a worthwhile experience.

Be an Active Listener and Participant

Your mentoring day could potentially include a firm, factory, or showroom tour, portfolio or resume review, client meetings, site visits, team brainstorming sessions, project presentations, review of contracts and client binders, new software demos, Q&A sessions, and more. Every mentor has something different to offer—sometimes different from what you might expect—and it's important to stay open minded about the experience. Pay attention, take notes, and jump in and help if the opportunity presents itself. Be professional, open, and friendly to every person you meet.

Ask Questions

Your mentor will probably build in some time—maybe over lunch or coffee—to talk with you. You can explore a range of career- and interior design-related topics with your mentor and/or her coworkers. Use the questions you prepared in advance to make sure you're learning as much as you can from this opportunity.

Expect Some Downtime

Your mentor will likely have a full schedule planned for you, but there may be a point when she has to take a confidential client call or spend a few minutes answering emails. Here are a few ways to use extra time:

- Ask if another employee is available to give you a tour of the office.
- Visit the organization's library. Manufacturers and design firms keep collections of design books and other media—some even have in-house libraries. Browsing a firm's collection is a great way to spend unscheduled time.
- View firm projects. Many firms display photos or models of their work around the office.
- Read the organization's brochures and other literature.

AFTER YOUR MENTORING SESSION

After a successful day of job shadowing, take the initiative to follow-up with your mentor and solidify the relationship. Keeping in touch with professional contacts can only help you as you begin your career in interior design.

Send a Thank You Note

Sit down and write a note thanking your mentor for their time while the experience is still fresh in your mind. Bonus points if you handwrite a note and send it through the mail instead of electronically. Include something specific from the day that made an impact on your understanding of the industry—it will make the note feel more personal and let the mentor know you truly appreciated the work they did to provide you with a meaningful experience.

Enter the WilsonArt Essay Competition (You Could Win \$1,000!)

Students who participate in the Student Mentoring Program have the opportunity to enter the Wilsonart Essay Competition. The winner of the competition receives \$1,000 courtesy of the Wilsonart Student Education Fund. Wilsonart will also provide the winner with roundtrip airfare and a two-night hotel stay in Chicago during NeoCon.

Your essay should be a reflection of your mentoring experience, address how your mentor inspired you, and how the program augmented your formal education. Include specific information about activities you participated in, what you learned, and what leadership qualities your mentor possessed. Each essay must be one page and a minimum of 500 words, single spaced, and written in a standard font. If you're not sure how to get started, ask yourself these questions:

- What did you enjoy most about what you observed while you were there? Was there anything you would change?
- Were you called on to perform job-related tasks? What were they? Did you like them?
- What did you think about the work environment? Could you see yourself fitting in?
- Do you feel this job would satisfy you? Why or why not?

Visit the [website](#) for submission guidelines and deadlines.

Stay in Touch with Your Mentor

Your mentoring relationship does not have to end when your day of job shadowing is over—but as the mentee, it's up to you to make the effort to keep in touch. Check out this [article](#) on the IIDA Design Matters blog for tips on how to build a relationship with a mentor.

QUESTIONS?

Contact students@iida.org