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 their 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 work best for them. If you have specific dates that will not work for you, let them know about your time constraints (for example, the certain times a day you’re in a virtual class.)
4. **Respond to follow-up emails:** Promptly respond to your mentor and confirm the date of your virtual mentoring session. You can also take this opportunity to find out if there is anything specific you should prepare for, such as informational meetings with coworkers. You’ll also want to agree upon a tool or app to use for your virtual session—ask your mentor what they have been using to work remotely.

Prepare for Your Virtual Mentoring Session

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 feedback on your resume or portfolio? 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, clear message about who you are. Be ready to introduce yourself with 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/why 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 in your education?
   - What do you do during a typical day or week? How has that changed?
   - What percentage of your time do you spend interacting with people vs. working independently? How has that changed?
   - What is the makeup of your team and how do you work across disciplines?
5. **Set up for your virtual session:** Do a test run of the program or tool you will be using. Make sure you have the equipment and software needed, and find a quiet place where you can set up for the allotted time. Make sure to dress professionally for the virtual meeting, and use a clean space clear of distractions.

**AFTER YOUR MENTORING SESSION**

After your virtual mentoring session, 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.

- Stay connected through LinkedIn and/or other social platforms
- Follow their company on social
- Sign up for their newsletter or email list to stay up-to-date on industry news

**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. This can be electronic or sent through the mail. 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 are encouraged 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 in 2021.

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 during the program? 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 [iida.org](http://iida.org) for submission guidelines and deadlines.

**Stay in Touch With Your Mentor**

Your mentoring relationship does not have to end when your virtual mentoring is over, but it’s up to you to make the effort to keep in touch. [Check out this article](http://iida.org) on the IIDA Design Matters blog for tips on how to build a relationship with a mentor.

**QUESTIONS?**

Contact [students@iida.org](mailto:students@iida.org)