Canned Questions for Advisor-Advisee Meetings

The following are general question structures that can be used during a meeting with an advisor. Effective meetings occur when the following take place:

- The advisee clearly communicates what their desired expectations are to their advisor.
- The advisee can distill what their advisor's expectations are for them.
- The advisee strategically negotiates compromises in situations where advisor - advisee expectations are mismatched.

1. Questions for communicating your desired expectations:

a) [Insert statement]. Does this sound reasonable to you?
b) [Insert statement]. Do you have thoughts or suggestions about this proposed plan?
c) I am hoping to [insert statement]. Does this align with your expectations?

2. Questions for distilling an advisor's expectations:

a) Just to clarify, you're asking me to [your understanding]. Is that correct?
b) I'm still trying to wrap my head around understanding how your suggestions fit into my work. Would you be able to offer some more clarification on [unclear point]?
c) So, if I do [statement], would that satisfy what you're asking?

3. Questions for negotiating with an advisor:

a) I understand your suggestion to proceed [this way]. Would it be possible to also incorporate [your desire] along the way?
b) If I were to pick a single priority from my perspective, it would be [this]. Would it be possible to fit this into the path forward?
c) I believe my suggested path would bypass some challenges associated with [advisor's suggestion]. Could I perform an initial analysis to see if this is true to inform what the best path forward is?

Stringing together multiple general forms of the above canned questions can be effective too. For example, combining canned questions 2a and 1c results in a complete train of thought that is both seeking clarification of an advisor's expectations and communicating your desired expectations:

> Just to clarify, you're asking me to [your understanding]. Is that correct? I ask because I am hoping to [insert statement] and I'm wondering if it aligns with your expectations.

The key to finding success with the above canned questions is to always maintain a level of respect in your communication with your advisor. Being mindful of your tone and using positive language can be the difference in making an effective versus ineffective meeting.

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RES.16-9960 The Engineering Student's Guide to Effective Technical Communication

Spring 2026

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