

MIT Graduate Student Council Better Advising and Research Ethics sub-committee

How to Find an Advisor

You are embarking on an important and at times difficult journey. Your choice of mentor and guide may be your most important decision in your research and career. Some self-assessment, a little research, and a lot of questions can help you make a good decision.

1. **Self-Assessment** -- The first step to finding what you want, is knowing what you want. Consider the important topics below personally. If you're not sure what you're looking for in a particular area, reflect on previous experiences. For example, what is common in experiences and professional relationships that you have liked? Disliked?
2. **Research** – Find the faculty members doing work in areas of interest to you. Be open to opportunities in new areas as well. Find out who is doing work you might be interested in by asking graduate students and faculty members, searching department and research group web pages, and other department publications. Don't forget to look in related departments [interdisciplinary research is quite common at MIT]. Read recent publications of possible advisors.
3. **Questions** – Ask many questions before deciding. If you don't have many, then look at the ones below and ask fellow graduate students for advice. Don't forget to ask questions of the faculty's group members as well. Allow yourself time to make a decision. Most faculty will give you time to consider your decision.

Sample Topics of Discussion with Potential Advisors and their Students

- Research Topics
 - Current areas of research
 - Plans for next 5-10 years
- Funding
 - Current funding availability
 - Funding outlook
 - Backup funding options
- Advising style
 - Frequency of individual and group meetings, formal and informal
 - Advisors view of his/her role
- Mutual Expectations
 - Work expectations
 - Non-research tasks performed by lab students (Lab cleanup, equipment maintenance, computer administrator, supervising undergrads, etc.)
- Other
 - Typical graduation time
 - Where have your recent graduates found employment?
 - Are the advisor's students happy? Are the group dynamics good?

Preventing and Resolving Difficulties

The best experiences of advising have resulted when there is openness and direct communication between the faculty and the student. If you have concerns or are not sure about any particular issue/topic, discuss it with your advisor in an open, professional and collegiate manner.

However, there are many resources available at MIT if you need additional help or support.

For additional information on advising at MIT, see the websites below.

1. Graduate student Roles and Relationships – <http://web.mit.edu/gso/gpp/roles/>
2. MIT Graduate Student Council – <http://gsc.mit.edu>