

## Advisor Selection

Some departments have a highly formalized advisor selection process, while others are more laid back and leave it to you to take initiative. Bear in mind that you should try to know at least three professors well by the time you graduate. It would never hurt to peruse the faculty listing for your department or relevant labs and earmark a few that you would be interested in having. If you're ambitious, send them each an email to gauge what kind of advisor they would be. You might even consider asking one to be your departmental advisor!

Questions you may want to think about when choosing your advisor:

- How much contact does he have with his advisees? How does that compare to my needs?
- How many advisees does he have? Am I going to be getting the attention I need?
- What are his research interests?
- Does he have any hobbies?
- How helpful or responsive is he?

## Scheduled Meetings

Professionals keep a detailed appointment book. It may be easiest for you to schedule your next meeting on Reg Day for a lunchtime "midterm checkup" to get in his appointment book early. There's no harm in asking, and you can always reschedule. You are encouraged to meet more than twice per term to develop your relationship with your advisor. Even if your advisor does not initiate contact, don't be afraid to approach him and schedule a meeting.

## Dropping In

Emails are easily missed or ignored. If your advisor is unresponsive to your attempts to talk to him, try contacting his administrative assistant to get an appointment. You may need to drop in to his office unannounced. Just knock and be polite and brief:

"Hi, I've been trying to get in contact with you by email but I'm not sure if they're going through. I was just wondering if you had time to schedule an appointment this week or next to talk about grad school?"

## Phone Calls

Don't be afraid of giving your advisor a phone call. Unlike email, it's more difficult to miss and you get a response instantly.

## Email

Email is a quick and effective tool to communicate with people. When using email in a professional environment, it's important to maintain a polite candor.

### Do

- Use good punctuation and spelling
- Be appreciative and professional
- Think about how the email will look from the professor's point of view
- Give several ways to contact you
- Be short and to the point

### Don't

- Bother mentors repeatedly
- Send one line emails

## Sample Email

To: bigprof@mit.edu  
From: scep@mit.edu  
Subject: Advising for Next Year?

Hi Big Prof,

My name is SCEP and I'm a freshman considering majoring in physics. Next term I need to select my advisor in the department. I was curious if you were available next year to be an advisor? If so, do you have many advisees right now, and how much contact do you have with them during the year?

Thank you very much for your time.  
Hope to hear from you soon!

Cheers, SCEP

## Different Types of Advice from Different People

Getting advice from different outlets can offer you different perspectives on problems. It's also important to build an academic network that includes professors, staff, and friends. Always remember that advice is only advice: think critically about what will and will not work for you.

### Freshman Advisors

- Transitioning to MIT
- GIRs and scheduling
- MIT's support mechanisms

### Peer and Associate Advisors

- Insider information (good professors and classes, used books)
- UROP connections
- Summer internship experiences

### Departmental Advisors

- Suggested classes for different disciplines and career paths
- Departmental support mechanisms
- Career advice

## Switching Advisors

There may be circumstances that force you to search for a new academic advisor. It's not ideal, but if you see early warning signs that you don't get along, don't hesitate to make contact with your undergraduate office to discuss the possibility of switching.

General warning signs that you may want to switch advisors include:

- No response to emails
- Being short with you or mean
- Poor knowledge of undergraduate requirements

Be sure, however, to think carefully before switching advisors. Beware of antagonizing someone whose class you need to take or whose lab you may want to work in later on.

## Recommendations

After having an advisor for two years, he should know you well enough to prepare a strong recommendation. To help him with this, start building a relationship early on and maintain it through your time at MIT.

Part of being a professor or teacher is writing recommendations, so you should never feel too timid to ask! When asking someone for a recommendation, always give that person a way out. For instance, ask, "Do you feel like you know me well enough to write a strong recommendation?"

If someone writes you a recommendation, always be sure to thank him. A gift may be appropriate as well.

## About SCEP

The Student Committee on Educational Policy, SCEP, is a UA Committee that works to address educational issues that are important to you. We are working on teacher feedback systems, advising quality, and student-faculty interactions. We also provide an anonymous way for students to report term regulation violations by faculty members. Please contact us at [uascep@mit.edu](mailto:uascep@mit.edu) with any questions, comments or concerns.

<http://ua.mit.edu/committees/scep/>



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