Scholarly Mentoring in Family Medicine Mentor Toolkit

Purpose: Prepare experienced faculty authors to mentor colleagues through the scholarly publication process, with particular attention to equity, hidden curriculum, authorship, feedback, and sponsorship (using one's own influential position to advocate for a colleague). We aim to support equitable pathways to developing scholarly independence, inclusive of identifying/developing a scholarly idea, choosing an appropriate scholarly product and journal, writing and revising a manuscript, adhering to publication standards, responding to peer review and rejection, and navigating authorship.

Toolkit objectives: mentors will be able to:

- Give feedback that builds the mentee's independent scholarly skills
- Identify structural barriers and use sponsorship to expand opportunity
- Navigate authorship, expectations, and power dynamics proactively
- Describe the mentor's role as teacher, coach, connector, and sponsor – not ghostwriter
- Use a repeatable framework for scholarly mentoring conversations

1. Mentor mindset

You already know how to publish. Scholarly mentoring is about helping someone else to navigate publishing. Think of a piece of publishing knowledge you learned only after making a mistake or receiving informal advice; examples may include:

- How to turn an interesting idea into a publishable question
- Which projects are feasible with limited time/resources
- How to select a journal and recognize a poor fit
- How authorship conversations actually work
- How to interpret reviewer comments
- Who to ask, when to ask, and how to build scholarly networks

These are the kinds of tacit knowledge you possess that may not be obvious to newer scholars. Unequal access to this information can create unequal access to scholarly opportunity. Your mentor mindset should aim to:

- Teach the process; do not simply improve the product.
- Make hidden academic norms[1] explicit.
- Ask before telling; coach before correcting.
- Give prioritized feedback rather than exhaustive edits.
- Create opportunities for the mentee to make decisions.
- Use your network to connect and sponsor[2] when appropriate.

- Revisit expectations as the project changes.

2. Mentoring skills and feedback

The following is a list of skills to frame working with a mentee[3] on a project.

1. ALIGN — goals, project, roles, timeline, definitions of success

2. EXPLORE — ask before telling; surface the mentee's reasoning

3. SCAFFOLD — provide tools, examples, models, and introductions

4. FEEDBACK — prioritize 1–3 high-value changes; teach the reasoning

5. TRANSFER — progressively return decisions to the mentee

6. REFLECT — what did the mentee learn to do independently?

A mentor's ultimate goal should be gradual transfer (#5) of increasing autonomy to the mentee. A mentor may start by modeling these skills but should eventually ask the mentee to lead.

Mentorship communication may also take practice. For example, the statements below in the first column can be re-worded to a coaching question for mentees. Instead of just correcting, work on developing your mentee's skills.

Instead of:	Perhaps:
"Your discussion needs to be rewritten."	…"What are the 2-3 main findings you want the reader to remember?"
"This journal won't take this."	…"What makes you think this journal is a good fit? Let's compare its scope and recent articles."
"I'll fix this section."	…"Let's identify the problem first. What would you change if you were reviewing this?"

Review each brief case below and consider the following questions.

Case 1: The Enthusiastic Mentor

A junior faculty member brings a manuscript draft. The mentor returns it covered in tracked changes and rewrites several paragraphs.

The mentee is grateful—but at the next meeting says, "I still don't know how to write a discussion."

Discuss:

• What did the mentor do well?

• Where did mentoring become doing?

• What could the mentor do differently next time?

• How could the mentor convert the edits into a learning opportunity?

[Takeaway: extensive editing can produce a better manuscript while producing little learning. Mentor should edit less and explain the reasoning behind selected edits; maybe identify 2-3 high-value edits, explain why, and ask mentee to revise.]

Feedback framework: Use the 3-question sequence before editing:

1. What is the author trying to accomplish here?

2. What is working and where did you get confused?

3. What is the single highest-priority change?

Then ask: "Would you like me to model one example, or would you like to try a revision first?"

Case 2: Authorship and Power

A mentee develops a QI project, analyzes the data, and drafts the manuscript. A senior leader supplied access to the clinic and says they should be first author because "the project couldn't have happened without me."

Discuss:

• When should authorship have been discussed?

• What contributions merit authorship?

• How can the mentor protect the mentee without escalating conflict?

• What documentation could prevent ambiguity?

[Takeaway: ICMJE Recommendations 1/2026 provide a framework for authorship and contributor roles[4]: https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/ Authorship is about contribution and not hierarchy. Discuss authorship early, and revisit as a project evolves[5]. A simple project agreement can be created for the expected scholarly project, anticipated contributors/authors, likely author roles, who owns data/drafts, timeline and communication expectations, what happens if someone disengages…]

Sample: Project Contribution Agreement

Scholarly product: _____

Mentee's primary role: _____

Other contributors: _____

Anticipated author roles/order: _____

Data access/ownership: _____

Draft ownership and version control: _____

Target journal(s): _____

Key milestones/dates: _____

Communication expectations: _____

How will authorship be revisited if contributions change? _____

Case 3: The Invisible Barrier

A talented faculty member from a background historically underrepresented in medicine has several good ideas but has never published. They say:

"I don't really know what counts as a publishable project, and I don't know who I'm supposed to ask."

Discuss:

• What knowledge are we assuming they already possess?

• What could be taught explicitly?

• What introductions or sponsorship might change access?

• How do we avoid framing the problem as a deficit in the mentee?

[Takeaway: caution against assuming exposure to academic norms. Explicitly teach journal selection, project feasibility, networking, authorship, and submission mechanics. Network access, informal invitations, protected time, and sponsorship are potential structural factors affecting ability to publish[2].]

Mentors can take on several roles[6-7], depending on the context:

- MENTOR — teaches skills and provides developmental feedback
- COACH — helps the mentee reason through decisions
- CONNECTOR — introduces people, communities, journals, and opportunities
- SPONSOR — actively uses influence to open doors when appropriate

Case 4: Rejection

A manuscript receives a rejection with mixed reviews. One reviewer is harsh; another says the study is potentially useful but needs substantial revision.

The mentee wants to abandon the project.

Discuss:

• What should the mentor do first?

• How can you separate reviewer tone from actionable feedback?

• When should you revise vs. submit elsewhere?

• What should the mentee learn from the process?

[Takeaway: rejection is not the same as failure. Rejection is normal and can be turned into a structured learning event; guide mentee in separating reviewer tone from actionable feedback. Categorize comments and decide on revise/resubmit vs finding new journal.]

A mentor can use an article peer review or the manuscript itself as a curriculum. At each stage, the mentor may ask the mentee to make the first pass:

- Question → "What is the gap?"
- Design → "What is the strongest design you can realistically execute?"
- Reporting → "Which reporting guideline fits?"
- Journal → "What is the audience and why this journal?"
- Revision → "Which reviewer comments are actionable, and why?"

3. Mentor-Mentee meetings

Before the first meeting

- Clarify your role and boundaries
- Review the mentee's goals/project
- Identify likely scholarly pathway and resources
- Consider power dynamics/conflicts of interest

First meeting checklist

1. Scholarly goals: What would you like to be able to do in 6–12 months?

2. Experience: What have you already done? What feels unfamiliar?

3. Project: What question/product are we/you working toward?

4. Roles: Who is doing what? What decisions belong to the mentee?

5. Authorship: What are our/your current expectations?

6. Timeline: What is the next concrete milestone?

7. Communication: How often, by what method, and what preparation is expected?

8. Independence: What will you own by our next meeting? What decision should you make independently before our next meeting?

Ongoing

- Ask before editing
- Give prioritized feedback
- Make the hidden curriculum explicit
- Connect/sponsor when useful
- Revisit authorship and timeline
- Gradually transfer decisions to mentee

End/Transition

- Document what the mentee can now do independently
- Identify next scholarly opportunity

Mentor self-check after each meeting

☐ Did I ask before telling?

☐ Did I explain the reasoning behind at least one piece of feedback?

☐ Did the mentee make a meaningful scholarly decision?

☐ Did I make an implicit rule explicit?

☐ Did I create or identify an opportunity/network connection?

☐ Did I leave the mentee with a clear next step?

Meeting close: transfer of responsibility

Today I (mentee) learned: _____

My (the mentee) next action: _____

The mentor's next action: _____

The decision I (mentee) will own before our next meeting: _____

Next meeting/date: _____

4. Publication pathway checklist

□ Define the scholarly question/product

□ Confirm appropriate ethics/QI/research determination

□ Identify study/reporting guideline

□ Clarify contributors/authorship

□ Identify target audience

□ Select journal based on scope, article type, audience, and recent publications

□ Build manuscript outline

□ Draft and revise

□ Internal review

□ Submission requirements/cover letter

□ Peer-review response plan

□ Revise/resubmit or select next journal

□ Capture lessons learned for the next project

5. Equity check

□ Have I assumed the mentee knows an unwritten academic rule?

□ Have I explicitly explained how opportunities are found?

□ Does the mentee have access to relevant networks?

□ Have I offered introductions that could reasonably help?

□ Is the mentee receiving meaningful scholarly ownership?

□ Am I disproportionately doing the writing/editing?

□ Have I discussed authorship without relying on hierarchy?

□ Have I considered barriers such as protected time, competing clinical demands, or unfamiliarity with academic processes?

6. Key resources

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