

Aligning Expectations

Adapted from [CIMER's Mentoring Up curriculum](#)

The Slow Writer

I am a postdoc mentoring a fourth year undergraduate working on their capstone project which will be their writing sample for graduate school applications. At the beginning of the year, I set multiple deadlines that we agreed upon:

- Submitting the departmental form for a capstone paper
- Creating internal deadlines together for each chapter
- Reaching the department's final submission date for a capstone defense

While the student submitted the departmental form, she missed two of the internal deadlines we already set. Another student I mentor already wrote an entire chapter for their capstone project and submitted a paper. Luckily, over winter break, the "slow writer" had a breakthrough and produced a fairly reasonable chapter draft. However, because she produced it so close to another planned draft deadline, she is now behind.

I agreed to let her write one less chapter and to ensure that she meets the deadlines to graduate on time and defend her capstone project, I have taken the lead to provide her the list of books to frame the research on her remaining chapter and now meet with her each week to write the outline of her remaining chapters.

I know for my mentor to graduate and feel confident in a graduate program, she must write the capstone herself, as well as future papers and theses herself. Setting deadlines for detailed outlines and section drafts hasn't worked. Communicating the importance of completing the capstone to earn honors and have a writing sample for applications hasn't worked. Encouragement hasn't worked. Veiled threats don't seem professional or productive. Other than being patient, what should I do?

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

1. What are the main themes raised in this case study?
2. What could have been done to avoid this situation? What should the mentor do now? What should the mentee do now?
3. How do you find out what expectations your mentee has of you and for their research experience?