

## How to find a Mentor for your Science Project

A good mentor can make such a difference for you and your science project. This should be a scientist with a bachelor's degree (or higher) in some science. This person can help you see if your testing is scientifically sound, help you understand the intricacies of testing so that you can eliminate as many variables as possible, and they often will loan you equipment or help you build your testing apparatus. Some students even get in to the mentors' labs and get to work with advanced scientific instruments. Several students enjoyed working with their mentors so much that they were hired to work in the labs for summertime jobs. What a great opportunity!!

When you are looking for a mentor, you will have to put yourself on the line. This is no time to be shy. You will need to contact possible mentors and put your ego aside if they are not interested in working with you or simply don't have the time at the moment. Keep trying, and you will find one.

The mentor should be a non-family member who is a scientist. I would like you to have the experience of finding a resource person outside your comfort circle (family members), as this is what you will end up having to do many times in your life. Why not start now?

There are many places to find mentors. You can try calling UCSB or City College. You can try calling Raytheon or any of the many scientific companies who base their operations in Santa Barbara, Goleta, or Carpinteria. You can find mentors on the Web and set up email contact and exchange digital information and photos instead of meeting with your mentor (if they are not in the area).

Here's how your search might go: You have a question or problem you are trying to solve involving sea life (like the mussel project example on the science project information sheet). You call up UCSB's Marine Science Department and talk with the secretary. "Hi, I'm Joe Royal and I'm a high school student doing a project on the effects of bacterial pollution on mussels. Could you give me the names and contact information of several graduate students or professors who might be willing to answer some questions about my project?"

Next step, you email them or call them. Leave messages. Try again in a couple of days if you don't hear back. If you don't hear back then, find another mentor. Several are better than none. Be very specific in what you are asking. Tell them:

1. Your name and that you're doing a science project at San Marcos High School
2. Your problem or question that you're interested in doing. You need to be as specific as you can. It's not the mentor's job to come up with this. They can help you clarify your question, but don't ask them to come up with it – they'll probably not want to help you if you ask this of them.
3. What you would like them to help with. Explain that you're looking for a mentor to help answer questions and give you some guidance on your project. You'd like their help in making sure your experimental procedures are scientifically sound. Their role can be minimal, but their guidance and expertise can be priceless.

Finally, be very gracious with your mentor. After all, they are volunteering their time, without pay, to help you out. Thank them often. Tell them that you really appreciate their help and guidance. Heck, bring them cookies or something now and then. Write them a "Thank You" note when you're done with your project. What goes around comes around.....