



HERDWORK HUMANITIES

HERDWORK HUMANITIES MENTOR RESOURCE

Mentoring Together

A Comprehensive Guide for Site and Faculty Mentors

Combined guidance from the August 2025, January 2026, and September 2026 HerdWork Humanities Mentorship Workshops.

Fall 2026 edition

College of Liberal Arts, Marshall University

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Purpose of This Guide

This guide combines the practical mentor guidance developed through the August 2025, January 2026, and September 2026 HerdWork Humanities mentorship workshops. It is intended for internship site mentors and faculty mentors who want a clear framework for the developmental work of mentorship.

The guide focuses on mentoring practice. It complements, but does not replace, the official program, site, academic, and administrative expectations that apply to a particular internship role.

CORE PRINCIPLE

Quality mentorship does not remove every challenge. It helps the student navigate the next one with greater judgment.

1. Mentorship Goes Beyond Supervision

Supervision and mentorship overlap, but they are not identical.

Supervision helps answer...	Mentorship also asks...
What needs to be done?	Why does this work matter?
When is it due?	What is the student learning along the way?
What standard should it meet?	What should be explained, modeled, practiced, or revised?
What training or access is required?	What form of support is needed now?
How will we know the task is complete?	When is the student ready for greater ownership?
What was produced?	How can the student explain the contribution, process, and growth?

In HerdWork Humanities, student agency does not mean that the intern no longer needs help. It means the student is becoming more able to ask informed questions, communicate early, use feedback, make appropriate decisions, explain a contribution, and recognize when additional support is needed.

DEVELOPMENTAL STANCE

Treat the intern as a developing colleague: someone who needs context, training, feedback, and boundaries, but who also brings insight, ability, and the capacity for increasing responsibility.

2. Understand the Mentoring Team

Role	Primary contribution
Site mentor	Workplace orientation, meaningful tasks, organizational context, regular feedback, norms, confidentiality, and progressively greater responsibility.
Faculty mentor	Academic integration, reflection, progress reports, Experience Portfolio and Showcase support, disciplinary connections, and career-ready language.
HerdWork leadership	Program requirements, Humanities at Work or Ambassador Pathway, timekeeping, stipends and honoraria, placement support, mentor alignment, and escalation.
Intern	Preparation, questions, early communication, follow-through, documentation, reflection, use of feedback, and ownership of appropriate decisions and next steps.

Clear role boundaries protect the relationship. Site mentors do not need to teach the Blackboard course, and faculty mentors do not manage daily site work. Both can help the student connect the parts of the experience. When a concern crosses roles or remains unresolved, bring HerdWork in early.

3. Begin With a Shared Conversation

Early in the experience, discuss what the intern and mentor each hope the intern will gain. Share the mentor's hopes as well as asking about the student's goals; this signals that the relationship is intended to be formative, not merely transactional.

- What do you hope to learn or experience?
- What skills would you like to practice or strengthen?
- What would make this experience feel successful?
- What kind of supervision helps you do your best work?
- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- What support would help you ask questions or raise concerns early?

Begin With Context Before Asking the Intern to Choose

An intern cannot make an informed choice about projects without first understanding the organization. Explain the mission, community role, structure, programs, current priorities, available projects, and how the intern's work can contribute. Then invite exploration within a real framework.

Make Expectations, Boundaries, and Workplace Customs Explicit

Discuss schedules, attendance, time recording, deadlines, quality standards, communication channels, meetings, dress, titles, personal devices, remote-work practices, questions, confidentiality, social media, decision authority, and what the intern should do after completing a task or making a mistake.

TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Everyone owns their own story. Explain what may be shared, what should remain within the organization, and when permission is needed.

4. Design Meaningful and Manageable Work

A strong assignment serves a legitimate organizational need and gives the intern a recognizable accomplishment that can be explained to future employers, graduate programs, fellowship reviewers, or professional contacts.

Assignment design question	Why it matters
What is the purpose, audience, or organizational need?	Context helps the intern understand why the work matters and who will use it.
Is the scope realistic for the placement?	The work should be completed, meaningfully advanced, or responsibly transitioned.
What will the intern learn or practice?	The assignment should support skill development as well as task completion.
What may the intern own or decide?	Bounded ownership creates real agency without asking the intern to invent the entire role.
What resources, models, access, and milestones are needed?	Clear supports make challenge productive and allow concerns to surface early.
What evidence may the intern retain or describe?	Plan for the Experience Portfolio, Showcase, resume, and interviews while protecting confidentiality.

Balance Structure With Exploration

Insufficient direction can leave an intern confused, while excessive control can limit learning and ownership. Begin with manageable responsibilities, observe the intern's interests and support needs, then increase responsibility as readiness grows. Even when the organization has a specific need, the intern may be able to personalize the approach, audience, format, research questions, or final product.

Use Clear Goals and a Written Work Plan

Clarify the intended outcome, purpose, deadline, quality standard, resources, milestones, decision boundaries, check-back points, and what the intern should do when an obstacle arises. SMART goals - specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound - are useful only when mentors return to them, recognize progress, provide correction, and identify the next step.

Treat the Intern as a Developing Colleague

Invite the intern to appropriate meetings, explain how decisions are made, ask for observations, introduce colleagues and partners, credit contributions, and provide context rather than isolated tasks. Collegial treatment does not erase the power difference; it means using authority responsibly while trusting the intern to grow into greater responsibility.

WORKSHOP INSIGHT

Create expectations that are high, but then give people the tools to get there.

5. Choose the Right Mentoring Move

CENTRAL QUESTION

The question is not "How much help?" It is "What support now?"

Mentoring move	What it looks like
Explain	Make the purpose, standard, context, or unwritten norm visible. Use this when the student lacks information they could not reasonably be expected to know.
Demonstrate	Show what successful work or a professional interaction looks like through a model, think-aloud, sample email, observed meeting, or first example.
Practice	Try the skill together in a lower-stakes setting. Rehearse a call, role-play a conversation, review the first record, or draft the opening together.
Coach	Use questions, feedback, and reflection to guide the next move without supplying the whole answer. Ask what the student notices, what options they see, and what they recommend.
Step back	Transfer an appropriate decision or responsibility, with a clear boundary and check-back point. Stepping back is not disappearing.

Select the Move by Considering

- Task familiarity: Has the student done something comparable?
- Confidence: Is the uncertainty about ability, expectations, or both?
- Stakes: What could happen if an error is made?
- Clarity: Does the student understand the purpose, standard, authority, and deadline?
- Progress: Is the current support producing learning and movement?

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Choose the least directive move that still supports safe, successful learning. Then observe, ask before assuming, agree on a next step, and check back and adjust.

Support is not a one-way ladder. A student may need more independence in one area and more explanation or practice in another. The goal is increasing discernment: knowing what to own, what to ask, and how to participate actively in the relationship.

6. Build a Predictable Mentoring Rhythm

Stage	Mentoring focus
Start Weeks 1-2	Clarify schedule, communication, goals, confidentiality, deliverables, feedback, decision authority, file systems, and check-in cadence.
Build Weeks 3-6	Provide context and feedback, name emerging strengths, increase responsibility, and address small concerns early.
Align Mid-semester	Compare site and faculty perspectives on strengths, current work, communication, workload, hours, support needs, final materials, and priorities.
Synthesize Final weeks	Help the student identify evidence, protect confidential information, complete or transition projects, prepare final materials, reflect, and plan the next professional step.

A weekly or otherwise consistent site-mentor check-in is recommended. Faculty mentors should generally connect weekly or biweekly, adjusted for the student, course, and situation.

Five Questions That Turn a Check-In Into Mentoring

Focus	Question	Purpose
Wins	What went well since our last check-in?	Helps the student notice strengths and progress.
Challenges	What was difficult, confusing, delayed, or different from what you expected?	Creates room for early clarification.
Learning	What are you learning about the work, the organization, the community, or yourself?	Moves the conversation beyond task completion.
Next step	What is the highest-priority goal before we meet again?	Creates continuity and forward movement.
Support	What feedback, clarification, resource, introduction, or decision would help?	Makes support more concrete than "let me know."

Build Reflection Into the Experience

Encourage a journal, notebook, phone note, or other dependable "memory bank" for questions, observations, accomplishments, feedback, changes in perspective, names, and examples that may later support professional materials. Reflection should occur throughout the experience, not only at the end.

- What surprised you, and who did you learn from?
- What did you bring to the situation?
- What changed after feedback or another attempt?
- How did the work connect to the organization's mission or community?
- What are you ready to try independently next?

7. Help the Intern Learn From the Whole Community

The designated mentor is an important guide, but does not need to be the intern's only teacher. Meaningful learning may come from coworkers, other interns, volunteers, clients, board members, community partners, visitors, and people whose work initially seems unrelated to the intern's assignment.

- Explain how different roles contribute to the organization's mission.
- Invite the intern to observe appropriate meetings, projects, and interactions.
- Offer shadowing when work is too complex or sensitive for the intern to lead.
- Introduce the intern to people across the organization and professional network.
- Debrief what the intern noticed, which skills or values were demonstrated, and what questions remain.

WORKSHOP INSIGHT

Open to being surprised by who they learn from.

Support Relationship Building and Professional Participation

Interns may feel intimidated when meeting professionals or may assume networking requires self-promotion. Prepare them for introductions, explain why a connection may matter, help them develop one or two thoughtful questions, invite them into appropriate conversations, debrief afterward, and encourage professional follow-up. The goal is participation in a professional community through curiosity, listening, reliability, and follow-through - not simply collecting contacts.

Develop Contextual Thinking and Empathy

Community-based work often involves people whose experiences, needs, or communication styles differ from the intern's. Help the intern ask what information may be missing, what circumstances may be shaping the interaction, whether communication should be adapted, and how to respond with empathy while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Understanding context does not require excusing harmful behavior.

Recognize That Mentorship Is Reciprocal

Mentors bring experience and organizational knowledge, while interns may bring academic learning, technological abilities, creativity, fresh questions, and perspectives that benefit the mentor and organization. Ask what was clear or unclear when the intern first encountered the organization, what surprised them, and what their academic background adds.

8. Give Feedback That Builds Agency

Feedback should preserve both accountability and dignity. Explain how feedback will be given, clarify that feedback about a task is not a judgment about the student as a person, and invite the student to ask for clarification.

A Developmental Feedback Sequence

1. Name the observation: describe the work or behavior without labeling the student.
2. Explain the purpose or standard: clarify why the change matters.
3. Identify a manageable next step: state what should happen now.
4. Invite the student's thinking: ask what they notice, recommend, or need clarified.
5. Set a check-back point: agree on when the revision or next attempt will be reviewed.

FEEDBACK FRAME

What is working? What needs attention? Why does it matter? What comes next? What support is available?

Make Difficulty Discussable

- What is not going as expected?
- What remains unclear?
- Where are you feeling stuck?
- What are you worried might happen if you move forward?
- What feedback are you unsure how to apply?

Normalize Practice, Revision, and False Starts

An unsuccessful outreach attempt can still build communication skills, and a project may require several revisions before it is ready. Help the intern distinguish between an unsuccessful result and an inadequate professional process. Maintain standards for preparation, communication, follow-through, and good-faith effort while reminding the intern that competence develops through repetition and that it is acceptable not to be good at a new skill yet.

Support Challenges Without Taking Over

Help the intern identify the problem, consider what has already been tried, develop possible solutions, and communicate with the appropriate person. The goal is to build agency and judgment, not solve every problem for the intern. Persistence must not be confused with tolerating harassment, abuse, discrimination, unsafe conditions, or inappropriate treatment; bring serious concerns to HerdWork Humanities promptly.

9. Make the Invisible Visible

Replace vague expectations with observable actions.

Instead of...	Try...
"Show more initiative."	"When you finish a task, send a brief status update and propose one possible next step."
"Use good judgment."	"You may make routine decisions within the agreed plan. Ask before public-facing, financial, confidential, or high-stakes decisions."
"Do not wait too long to ask."	"If you have been blocked for more than 20 minutes, send a focused question explaining what you tried."
"Come prepared."	"Bring one progress update, one question, and one proposed next action."

Remote and Hybrid Placements

- Confirm where files belong and how they should be named.
- Clarify how progress will be made visible.
- Identify primary and backup contacts.
- Define meeting, response-time, and availability expectations.
- Explain which project has priority and when the student may continue independently.

10. Separate Observation From Interpretation

EXAMPLE

Observation: "The student completed the assigned task and waited for another assignment."

Interpretation: "The student lacks initiative."

The interpretation may point to a real growth area, but other explanations are possible. The student may not understand what can be done without approval, may be trying not to overstep, may have missed a message, or may believe that waiting is the professional choice. Begin with what you observed and ask for the student's understanding before assigning a trait or motive.

USEFUL OPENER

I have noticed that your work is careful and complete, and I also notice that you often wait for me to assign the next step. I would like to understand what makes it difficult to move forward without direction. Then I can clarify where you have room to act.



11. Coordinate Mentors Without Losing the Student's Voice

The site-faculty mentor connection is an alignment point, not a private performance evaluation. Site mentors, faculty mentors, and HerdWork leadership may each see a different part of the experience. Compare information that helps the student succeed while avoiding unnecessary disclosure of personal information.

Useful Topics for Alignment

- Strengths, current responsibilities, and emerging professional interests.
- Communication, follow-through, and feedback needs.
- Workload, internship hours, project scope, and priorities.
- Academic progress, reflection, and support needs.
- Experience Portfolio, Showcase, and final-weeks priorities.
- Confidentiality, public-sharing permissions, and appropriate documentation.

Keep the Student Visible

- Ask the student about the situation before mentors draw conclusions.
- Determine whether the student can communicate the concern directly.
- Tell the student why mentors are connecting and what information will be shared.
- Invite the student to participate when appropriate.
- Share only what is necessary for support.
- Explain what was decided, who owns the next step, and when follow-up will occur.

STUDENT VOICE

We want to make sure the student does not disappear from the conversation.

Bring HerdWork In Early When...

Communication repeatedly breaks down; a concern affects hours, workload, scope, access, safety, wellness, placement expectations, or program completion; the concern crosses mentor roles; or a reasonable direct conversation does not resolve the issue.

Protect Trust, Confidentiality, and Ownership of Stories

Explain public-sharing boundaries, ask permission when appropriate, and share only what is needed for support. Participation in a project does not automatically authorize public use of every image, quotation, story, or work sample.

12. Help Students Turn Experience Into Evidence

Students may complete meaningful work without recognizing what it demonstrates. Help them move from a task description to a statement of purpose, contribution, skill, result, and learning.

Task-only description	Evidence-based description
"I helped with social media."	"I created and revised audience-specific digital content that supported the organization's public communication goals."
"I entered information into a spreadsheet."	"I organized and verified program data that helped the organization maintain accurate records and prepare reports."
"The outreach did not work."	"Although the outreach did not produce the hoped-for response, I practiced professional communication, follow-up, and adapting a strategy."
"I attended meetings."	"I observed how staff and partners weighed competing needs, communicated decisions, and coordinated community work."

Questions That Reveal Evidence

- What did you contribute, and who used or benefited from it?
- Why did the work matter?
- What decisions, research, communication, interpretation, or problem-solving did you contribute?
- Whose perspectives did you consider, and how did you adapt?
- What changed after feedback, revision, or another attempt?
- What could you explain in an interview?
- What work sample may be shared, and what must remain confidential?

Name Humanities and Career-Readiness Skills

Connect workplace responsibilities to research, close reading, writing, editing, interpretation, language study, creative work, communication, critical thinking, contextual thinking, collaboration, perspective-taking, cultural awareness, organization, initiative, adaptability, creativity, and professional judgment. Move beyond broad claims by asking what the student actually did, what decision was required, and what result or learning followed.

Create Opportunities to Present Learning

Ask the intern to explain, demonstrate, or present what was learned through a staff update, project summary, written resource, completed product, reflective conversation, Showcase, or public presentation. Explaining the experience helps the intern select what matters, organize the learning, name personal contribution, and communicate clearly.

SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

A strong mentoring experience should leave the intern feeling that they advanced in skills important to them - perhaps even skills that surprised them - and that they made a meaningful contribution to the organization.

13. Common Situations and Useful First Responses

Situation	A mentoring first response
The intern says everything is "fine."	Ask, "What has been more difficult, confusing, or different from what you expected?"
The intern waits for another assignment.	Ask what the intern understands the next step to be, then define decision authority.
The intern is not showing enough initiative.	Define initiative in observable terms before evaluating it.
The intern misses a deadline.	Name the missed deadline, ask what happened, explain the effect, and agree on a recovery plan.
The intern makes a mistake.	Separate the error from the person, repair the work, identify the learning, and establish the next step.
The intern is anxious about a conversation.	Help the student prepare three key points, identify the desired outcome, and rehearse the opening.
Site and faculty mentors see different patterns.	Compare observations, ask the student, identify missing information, and agree on follow-up.
A concern affects hours, scope, safety, wellness, or repeated communication.	Contact HerdWork leadership early.

Mentor Quick-Start Checklist

At the beginning

- Explain mission, structure, culture, and priorities.
- Clarify schedule, communication, response expectations, and backup contact.
- Discuss learning interests, goals, supervision, and feedback preferences.
- Define initiative, decision authority, confidentiality, and public-sharing rules.
- Establish check-ins, file systems, and how progress will be shared.

During the placement

- Ask about learning as well as completion.
- Give timely, specific, standards-based feedback.
- Adjust support as the task and student change.
- Name strengths, contributions, and evidence as they emerge.
- Address small concerns early and coordinate transparently.

Near the end

- Complete or transition projects responsibly.
- Identify accomplishments, growth, and evidence.
- Review what may be shared publicly.
- Support Portfolio, Showcase, resume, and interview language.
- Discuss future goals, relationships, and next steps.

A Mentor's Final Test

At the end of a quality mentoring experience, the student should be better able to ask informed questions, communicate changes early, use feedback and revise, make appropriate decisions, explain contribution and learning, participate in professional relationships, and know when and how to seek support.

REFLECTION

Is the student more able to act, reflect, communicate, and seek support than they were at the beginning?

Final Perspective

Successful mentorship does not require the intern to complete every task perfectly or the mentor to prevent every difficulty. It requires a relationship in which expectations are clear, learning is intentional, feedback is honest, problems are addressed, the student remains visible in decisions, and the intern is trusted to grow into increasing professional responsibility.

Mentorship does not require a perfect response in every moment. It asks mentors to observe carefully, ask before assuming, choose a useful form of support, and remain willing to adjust.

Source Note

This combined guide was prepared from the following HerdWork Humanities mentor resources:

- August 2025 Mentorship Workshop: Mentorship Guide for Mentors.
- January 2026 Mentorship Workshop: Mentoring Humanities Interns - A Practical Guide for Site and Faculty Mentors.
- September 2026 Mentor Resource: Mentoring Together - A Practical Guide for Site and Faculty Mentors.

Those resources synthesize the August 2025, January 2026, and September 2026 workshop transcripts, participant discussion and chat, workshop presentation materials, and current program role guidance. Quotations and examples have been lightly edited or condensed for clarity while preserving their intended meaning.

PROGRAM CONTACT

Kelli Crabtree, Internship Experience Director
HerdWork Humanities, College of Liberal Arts, Marshall University
kelli.crabtree@marshall.edu | 304-696-4720 | marshall.edu/herdwork