

UW Microbiology Program Rotation Guide

This document is only a general guide. Each lab has different expectations, norms, and values, so discuss these bullet points with the PI at the start of each rotation. In general, the goal of your rotations should be to get to know the lab projects and the people (faculty, students, post-docs, staff).

General rules

- **Ask questions:** At lab meetings, when talking with your mentor/PI, when learning how to work equipment in the lab, when learning a new protocol, etc.
- **Put in the hours:** Your work in the lab, along with your classes and other scholastic obligations (e.g., seminars, journal club) is a fulltime commitment. Different labs have different hours, but plan to be in the lab as much as possible.
- **Take lots of notes:** This includes during meetings with your mentor/PI, at lab meeting, and while reading papers.
- **Keep appointments, attend all meetings, and be prepared:** Lab meetings are not optional: they are crucial to your development as a graduate student, and they provide an important view of how each lab functions. Respect other peoples' time when you meet individually or in small groups.
- **Interact with the PI:** You will likely be directly supervised by someone else, but make sure that you have multiple one-on-one meetings with the PI.
- **Meet with the PI at the end of your rotation to get feedback:** Schedule this in advance and be sure to have an "exit interview". The PI should provide useful feedback that will improve your next rotation. This meeting will also help both you and the PI gauge the potential of you joining the lab

In the first week

- Meet with the PI to discuss a project and general expectations.
- Meet with your lab mentor (if applicable) to discuss project details and plan around their availability
- Read background material: Some will likely be supplied from the PI/mentor. In addition, do your own literature search on your project. Ask for help if you need it. At a *minimum*, read the lab's papers that pertain directly to your project.
- Set up your lab bench and do your first experiment. If you can't do your first experiment during this week, you should at least start planning or prepping for your first experiment by learning the common techniques in the lab (e.g., cell culture).
- Introduce yourself to everyone in the lab and talk to them about their projects. This is important for identifying if the lab is a good fit and it introduces you to people that will be great resources in the future, even if you don't join the lab.
- Familiarize yourself with how the lab is run and where things are kept.

Things to ask about

- Lab hours: generally unwritten, but there may be expectations
- Lab meetings: when and where? other meetings (e.g., seminars, "supergroup", journal clubs, etc.)
- Safety: what training is required? what to do in an emergency?
- Notebook: what is the lab standard?
- Who you should go to for help
- What chores/upkeep you are responsible for (e.g., trash, biohazard disposal, reagents)
- Supplies for experiments: what is already in the lab? how do you order?

What NOT to do

- DON'T spend most of your time on things other than lab work. Your focus should be on experimental design, experiments, data analysis, reading for lab, and preparing presentations.
- DON'T socialize to the point of distraction.
- DON'T check out early, even if you are not interested in joining the lab for your thesis work. It is important to make a good impression during each rotation. Being engaged and respectful will help cultivate relationships with future colleagues, committee members, and collaborators.