



New Agrarian Program Mentor Handbook

Compiled May 2021
By Julie Sullivan (San Juan Ranch),
NAP founding mentor and Mentor Training Specialist

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Chapter 1: Welcome to Mentoring:

What it is, what it asks of you, what skills and attributes are needed

Resources: these are found throughout these notes and are also listed here for ease of reference:

- [Zoom recording](#) from fall 2020 call on mentoring and site descriptions
- [Are you a Good Fit?](#)
- [Mentor Skill Assessment and Plan](#)
- [Motivations for becoming a Mentor \(MOFGA\)](#)
- [Prior Teaching, Training and Coaching Experience\(NESFI\)](#)
- [Mentor Self Assessment \(RFC\)](#)
- [On-Farm Mentor Self-Evaluation Questionnaire \(small farm.org\)](#)

NAP contributed to the National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network (now known as F.I.E.L.D. School) Mentor Toolkit and Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit. Some material in the NAP Mentor Toolkit was originally published in these national creative commons publications. We encourage you to look over these resources, which bring together insights and best practices from apprenticeship programs throughout North America.

- [Supporting Mentors to Teach Next Generation Agrarians](#)
- [Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)

"There are many reasons for wanting to mentor. Cheap labor isn't on the list. One has to commit to the idea of practical education both for the apprentice and yourself. Remember, you are learning at least as much as the person you are teaching, just at different levels.

These people will:

- *Pester you with endless questions*
- *Break your shovel handles*
- *Burn up your clutch*
- *Spoil your dog*

They will also:

- *Give you their heart and soul*
- *Make you a much better manager*
- *Teach you how to turn anger into teachable moments*
- *Add to your life in ways that will astonish you*

Welcome to mentoring! We're sure you want to hear encouraging stories describing how young, strong, enthusiastic people helping on your ranch or farm makes you happy, rich, and well rested. But let's start with the most essential question: "Do you want to be a *mentor*?"

It isn't for everyone. You might be an inspiring, skilled teacher, a seasoned producer, and conscientious employer with decades of experience in agriculture, but none of these guarantees that mentoring will be right for you. Mentoring is an odd duck of a calling, neither boss nor teacher but a mix of the two that springs as much from *who you are* as from what you want to teach. Nor is mentorship a role you slip on at eight in the morning and take off with your boots when you come in at night.

Are you eager to bring your apprentice into your heart, mind and operation not only when everything goes smoothly, but also when there's a wreck and the limits of your own skill and knowledge crash in on you? Are you ready for the press of questions about your management decisions? How about the humility needed when the 22 year old apprentice bails you out again when your iPad crashes? Why would you add this to your already -over-full life? It isn't that you have spare time.

Perhaps it is a wish to

- Pass on what was given to you when you started--specific skills, hope and the ability to suss out a problem and find an effective, affordable solution ideally made from junk bouncing around in the back of the pickup;
- Offer someone what you *didn't* get--helpful encouragement, feedback from a trusted elder, a network of people who are learning with you;
- Revive your enthusiasm and curiosity about agriculture and the world;
- Discover that someone younger with different life experiences and education, who is committed and passionate about regenerative agriculture, can teach *you*

So before interviewing, before you even place an ad, get clear on your motivation, the skills you already have that will aid you, and what you need to work on. Here are some questions to start with, from the "[Are You A Good Fit](#)" document:

Are you a good fit?

- Why do you want to start an apprenticeship on your farm or ranch?
- What excites you about being a mentor?
- What do you want to share or teach someone?

- Who were the mentors who helped you? What did they do, how did they act, what was it that helped you?
- Do you have any experience with being a coach, teacher, or mentor?
- How flexible do you think you are, when it comes to altering your routines to accommodate teaching?
- Talk to other mentors--what is their experience and what do they think you should consider?
- What do you think is the difference between managing other people and mentoring them?

Who Mentored You?

One of the best ways to think about mentoring is to reflect on those people who helped you. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who took an interest in my welfare and development at a time when I was taking on challenges, such as a change in my business, starting a job, moving?
- Who has been an inspiring role model in my life? This can be a person you know or someone you don't -- someone you admire for their work and character. What are the key personality traits of this person?
- Who helped me uncover a talent or ability I didn't know I had? How did they help me do that?
- Who helped me face and resolve a difficult situation in my personal or professional life? What did they do that helped?
- Who challenged or supported me to acquire a new vision or take a new direction?

(adapted from *Mentoring Pocketbook*, by Geof Alread and Bob Garvey)

A Little More on Mentoring:

An apprentice-mentor relationship differs from a conventional education or employment relationship in a few key ways:

- Learning happens in a real-world situation rather than in isolation or a classroom.
- Education is a shared responsibility between mentor and apprentice. Apprentices thrive when they are actively involved in planning and implementing their learning.
- Mentors not only serve as teachers in the normal sense of the word, passing on knowledge and training apprentices in specific skills. Mentors are also guides, offering support and challenges that are tailored to the specific apprentice.

- And most importantly, an apprenticeship is most effective and meaningful when the mentor and apprentice are invested in each other as people -- not just as boss and employee, not just in professional context.

In short, as a mentor you are offering an education to the whole person: professional training to be sure, but also offering advice and encouragement when the apprentice is tired and overwhelmed with all the new things to learn and how hard it is to learn them. Your commitment to your apprentice educationally and personally is the greatest compensation and gift you give and is the core of mentoring.

What makes a mentor effective?

Ask any group of apprentices, interns, mentors, or experts in this field, and you'll come up with a list of skills and attributes that looks pretty much the same. The main skill everyone says they want in a mentor may surprise you: it isn't knowledge or expertise of their field. It's *Listening*.

Other skills/ attributes commonly noted:

- Asks good questions of me
- Challenges me when I need a 'kick in the pants'
- Supports me when I make mistakes
- Patience
- Able to give advice that is professional and personal
- Open and trustworthy
- Shares their own questions, mistakes, and learnings
- Coaches me on skills I need to learn
- Cares about me as a person, not just as a worker
- Knowledgeable about their business and all that goes into it

Another way to think of this is that a mentor is someone who has the ability to:

- Listen and hear what is said
- Question and challenge their own thinking and the thinking of others
- Summarize and reflect back
- Give and receive constructive feedback
- Point out connections and contradictions
- Display empathy and understanding
- Encourage problem solving and seek solutions
- Recognize and acknowledge emotions
- Trust others and be trusted by others

- Be open and honest with self and others

If you want to know more about how these attributes pertain to mentoring, check this list of the basic skills or activities of a mentor, adapted from *The Mentor's Guide* by Lois J. Zachary

- **Building and Maintaining Relationships:** We often focus attention on the initial stages of a relationship and then assume it will take care of itself. Mentors continuously monitor and invest in creating strong relationships with their mentees.
- **Coaching:** Coaching that occurs within a mentoring relationship is the mentor training a mentee on a specific skill or filling a gap in their knowledge.
- **Communication:** This is key to a good mentoring experience for both parties. Communication is more than sharing knowledge; it is asking prompting questions to find out how your mentee is doing, listening without judgment to their concerns and needs, and communicating your expectations and teaching clearly and in a manner that the mentee can understand.
- **Encouragement:** this takes many forms. Mentors get to know their mentee well enough to know when they need to talk through a problem, get a push to try harder, and cheer when they try something new or hard even if they don't succeed.
- **Facilitating Learning:** Mentors look for ways to teach in the moment, involve the mentee in planning learning, and create positive environments where mistakes are seen as learning, and where questions are welcome. If your mentee likes podcasts, try to find some that are pertinent to your operation. If your mentee needs to have several sessions to learn a skill thoroughly, make time for that to happen and be patient about it.
- **Conflict Management:** Conflict will happen and most of us come to adulthood with limited comfort or ability to engage in conflict constructively. Most mentors find this is an area where they need support and growth themselves.
- **Providing and Receiving Feedback:** Feedback is crucial for your mentee to know if they are on track, if they aren't meeting expectations, are making critical errors, or are doing very well. Many of us in agriculture grew up in families where we only received feedback when we did poorly, so we aren't very skilled at saying "thanks for a good day today", or "you are really improving with your cattle handling". It is essential that mentors offer both constructive criticism that is timely and specific, and encouragement when effort is made by your mentee (even if the end result isn't always great!).
- **Reflection:** Some of us are naturally reflective: we tend to review how a day

went, what went well and why, what we could do or say to make it better. Others don't do this very often, or may even think it is a waste of time. But reflection is part of learning, for you as a mentor and for your apprentice. This is when you take a moment to consider how you might approach a problem differently, or ask different questions, or listen first and then offer your ideas. Some activities to help with this are listed below.

Assess your current skills

You naturally have personality traits and habits that will make you a good mentor; likewise, everyone finds some parts of mentoring hard or puzzling. Maybe you excel when teaching someone how to look for a calf in distress, but are taxed when giving useful feedback both constructive and celebratory. Or maybe you bring humor and fun into a workday but struggle to find time to teach a focused welding lesson.

We all can improve as mentors. Take a look at the skill assessment activities below: these will help you identify elements of mentoring that come naturally to you as well as elements that you feel could improve. If possible, ask someone you've mentored or supervised (or someone you work with) to rate their experience with you: this can yield great insight you can act on right away. Then identify 1-3 skills you want to improve, based on the results.

- [**Mentor Skill Assessment and Plan**](#)
- [**Motivations for Becoming an On-Farm Mentor \(MOFGA\)**](#)
 - A super-short but illuminating set of questions regarding your motivations
- [**Prior Teaching, Training & Coaching Experience \(MOFGA\)**](#)
 - A quick summary of any prior experience you have that's pertinent to mentoring
- [**Host Farmer and Mentors Self-Assessment \(Rogue Farm Corps - RFC\)**](#)
 - A great tool to figure out where you are a 'natural' and where you may need to gain some skills and tools to be the mentor you want to be
- [**On-Farm Mentor Self-Evaluation Questionnaire**](#)
 - Another great self-assessment tool, especially useful if you have had employees, interns, apprentices, WWOOFers now or in the past

Chapter 2: What Do You Offer and Who Do You Want? Writing Your Mentor Site Description

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from fall 2020 NAP Mentor Training
- [New Agrarian Apprenticeships](#) page on the Quivira Coalition website
- NAP contributed to the National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network (now known as F.I.E.L.D. School) Mentor Toolkit and Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit. Some material in the NAP Mentor Toolkit was originally published in these national creative commons publications. We encourage you to look over these resources, which bring together insights and best practices from apprenticeship programs throughout North America.
 - [Supporting Mentors to Teach Next Generation Agrarians](#)
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What do you want to offer?

You've decided to leap into mentoring an apprentice, so now it's time to consider what you want to teach. It isn't just hands-on skills you'll offer, you're also sharing your land management philosophy, what you choose to raise and why, and immersing your apprentice into the daily rhythm and seasonal challenges of a ranch or farm such as yours.

Before writing your application or seeking applicants, take time to answer some of the following questions. We strongly encourage you to write your responses: these become the foundation of your site description. They'll also help you:

- Clarify what you most want and need in an apprentice, and how you see that person fitting into your operation.
- Determine what questions you want to ask in interviews
- Identify any skills you absolutely require an apprentice to have, in order to apply

More than likely, many of these questions will have been explored in your application to mentor with NAP. It's useful to revisit them, in case anything has changed in your operation, and as you learn more about NAP mentor requirements you may have new ideas.

There's another benefit to spending time clarifying details regarding your operation. The more potential applicants know about what they are signing up for, the more likely you'll receive applications from people truly interested in what *you* do, not just people looking for a chance to work anywhere with anyone. The effort you put in now, to really dive into who you are and what you do will save you from wading through too many applications from people who aren't right for you, and lessens the

chance that you'll hire someone who isn't happy with what they are learning at your ranch or farm.

Read a few of the [current mentor site descriptions in NAP](#) for inspiration and ideas.

Description and History

Start by writing a page or so about your ranch or farm. Stick to basics; later in the process we'll ask about your philosophy and values as they relate to your work.

- What do you produce?
- Describe your location, basic climate, ecosystem and region
- What are your main focuses and areas of agricultural expertise?
- When did you start your operation?
- Why did you start it (or choose to continue if you inherited)?
- How has your ranch or farm evolved over time -- how is it different now from when you began?
- What is your community like? if you are remote or rural, describe how far it is to a grocery store, hospital, etc. Isolation has been a big factor for apprentices new to agriculture and rural life

Philosophy, Mission, Values

Consider the importance of working with a like-minded apprentice, someone who shares or at least is curious about your philosophy with land and animals. Even if you welcome someone different from yourself, making clear how your values play out in your management can help applicants either choose your site or realize that isn't a good educational fit for them and they'll choose otherwise.

- What's your philosophy, your land ethic--what guides your practices? For some it's permaculture, Holistic Management, food access and direct marketing, maybe soil health goals--young people want to know this about you and your operation
- How do you define land health?
- How would you describe your management style with land? Animals? People?
- What are the most important considerations in your everyday work?
- What are your top values?
- What are your top goals for your operation?
- Why do you care deeply about what you do?

What They'll Learn and Who is Mentoring

- What are you most excited to teach/share?

- Write a few sentences about each person who will be a mentor to apprentice or intern --your background, family, what is most important to you about what you do
- What will they DO no matter what-- what are the daily and seasonal tasks they will definitely do. Example: on a cow-calf ranch, they will learn about health issues with newborns and mother cows, calving distress, etc.
 - *These are the foundation of your educational offering--they are built-in learning opportunities*
- What specifically can the apprentice expect to learn while on your operation? Do you have a large hay operation? Low-stress livestock skills? Soil health? Monitoring? Direct sales? Basic business skills like quickbook?
- Do you want to include them in business conversations and decisions, introduce them to some management-level issues? Some people want to teach these things, others don't or the business structure makes it hard to include an apprentice in such things

Now that you have fleshed out what you do and what you want to teach, you can draft a description that will appeal to the kind of person you'll be happy to see and excited to mentor. The NAP Coordinator can help you write your description once you have these details.

Next Steps:

Above, we dove into the core of what you do and why you want to mentor. Now it's time to clarify nuts and bolts details, as these elements are also part of your site description.

- **Start/end date:**
 - Consider your production calendar and build some cushion into start and end so you have time to do both orientation and a celebration/exit interview
 - **Start Date:** By what date do you need an intern/apprentice to be fairly useful? Plan your start date to be a week to 10 days before that, to orient the person to your operation and location.
 - **End Date:** NAP apprentices end their apprenticeships formally in November at the annual Quivira Conference.
 - The apprenticeship is officially 8 months in length, but if you need them to come a little earlier or stay later, that is something to consider and make clear in your description.
- **Compensation:** NAP requires mentors to pay a monthly stipend, and provide housing and some form of partial board. You are also required to

carry Workers Compensation insurance.

- **Room and Board**
 - Describe the housing you offer: are utilities and internet covered? Are there laundry facilities? Will they need to drive from housing to work every day? What's your policy on apprentice bringing pets, spouses, having visitors, cleanliness in housing, etc?
 - Board: do you offer the midday meal? Is it a food stipend paid monthly and if so, what's the amount? Or do you provide food from your operation?
- **Stipend**
 - NAP sets a minimum stipend but you are welcome and encouraged to pay more than this. Be sure to clarify the amount, or the stipend range if you are basing it on incoming experience level of the apprentice
 - Payroll: NAP apprentices are considered employees. This is covered more fully in later chapters but be prepared to set them up on payroll, so you can withhold income tax, Social Security and Medicare, and pay your portion of Social Security and Medicare.
- **Other things to clarify:**
 - Time off: The best thing you can do for YOU is to give THEM a day off! this really helps with attitude and wellbeing so good to give apprentice a regular day off. At NAP at least 1 regular day off a week is required, and an additional week of time off for family functions, workshop attendance, etc. is recommended and to be discussed with mentors at least a month in advance and accommodated if possible.
 - Are there skills that the apprentice **needs** to have (e.g. driving a stickshift, horsemanship skills, ability to lift 50 pounds, exposure to allergens, etc) vs. **desired** (examples: Spanish speaker, backing up trailer).
- **Photos!** Many applicants will be curious to see what your landscape, buildings, dogs, tractors and you look like. NAP includes photos in the site descriptions. Here are some photos to consider providing:
 - The mentors
 - People doing things that apprentices will be doing often (example- don't show horse pictures if you don't let apprentices ride)
 - Landscape - what does your operation look like? Give a sense of your place.
 - Livestock, trees, crops
 - Apprentice housing

Some final thoughts

It may seem like overkill, all this thinking and writing and planning. You may not have thought about what you do, and why you do it for some time. An apprentice will come to you not only to learn how to grease a tractor, put up hay, and keep livestock healthy, but also to learn what makes you tick, what keeps you going, and why you are willing to work this hard. Communicating these things in your description will draw the right person to your apprenticeship.

Chapter 3: Evaluating written applications

Criteria, process and inviting to interviews

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from the fall 2020 NAP mentor training
- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#)
- [Blank applicant overview spreadsheet](#)
- ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#)
- [Questions for References that elicit more detailed information](#)
- Email templates for communicating with applicants:
 - [Decline to Interview](#)
 - [Invitation to interview](#)
 - [Maybe/awaiting further developments](#)
 - [Decline post Interview](#)
 - [Congratulations Accepted](#)

Once applications open, you may be flooded with early eager applicants, or applications may trickle in. Some of the best apprentices were those that applied at the last minute, having rewritten their application numerous times in order to make it as perfect as possible.

The right apprentice for you not only meets your criteria, but is looking for the specific type of livestock, crops, management practices and philosophies you utilize in your operation. Evaluating applications includes determining the applicant's motivations and goals: what aspects of agriculture are they excited to learn? What values or information are driving their desire to apply? You might receive an application from a dynamic person with two years of experience, but if they want to learn about direct marketing and you don't do that, they may not be the best choice for you.

NAP has a specific process for evaluating applications that you tailor to your criteria. The program needs to be sure that all applications are given a fair review and applicants receive timely notice of whether they will be considered for the position or not. The following timeline gives an overview of the application process

Application Timeline

Mentors are strongly encouraged to stick with the timeline NAP staff outline each year, as apprentices apply to multiple NAP sites (as well as other jobs). For the 2021 season, this was the general schedule:

Date	Event	Notes
Nov 1 - Dec 15	Applications open and close	Read and review as they come in
Dec 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Select and contact applicants to invite to interview, decline or place on hold</i> • <i>Determine your interview schedule for 1st round</i> 	Determine your top 4-6 semi-finalists, use NAP email templates to send notice to <i>all</i> applicants as to their status
Jan 4	Deadline for notifying all applicants as to whether they are invited to interview, won't be invited, or are in the holding pattern	You may contact applicants sooner to set up interviews. <i>You must respond to all applicants by Jan 4.</i>
Dec 26 - Jan 15	First round interviews- please note that some mentors may move to their 2nd round of interviews during this time period	Prepare interview script and specific questions for semi-finalists; do interviews
Jan 15 - Jan 31	Complete 2nd round interviews	Complete 2nd round interviews and make offer to your top choice

Determine your Criteria: What do you want and need in an apprentice?

Mentors find that a clear process with criteria determined in advance helps them be thorough and find a hidden gem of an applicant. In the past, mentors realized that without this they tended to be less thorough if they liked a few things right away in an application. A checklist of required skills and desirable traits can help you read between the lines to see positive characteristics in a novice or a 'red flag' issue in an applicant with some appealing skills and experience.

- What do you NEED, and how is this different from what you WANT. Most mentors hope for applicants with experience, but personality, proven long-term dedication to an extracurricular activity, or land ethic may be a better indicator of a great apprentice
- Remember, they are coming to learn, not just work, so genuine curiosity and commitment to regenerative agriculture might be more beneficial than years of experience.

- Do you have minimum requirements: is it essential that they have horse skills, heavy equipment experience, sales or customer service? These would be skills they must have upon arrival, rather than things they can learn as they go
 - This can differ year to year: for example, in 2017 past mentor site Ranney Ranch was focused on increasing their direct market so they wanted an apprentice with customer service and a cheerful and gregarious personality. In 2018 they had lots of infrastructure projects so they hoped for applicants with equipment experience.
- What personality traits you think will help them thrive at your location - humor, well read in relevant subjects, demonstrated self-study/initiative, etc.
- Applicants often don't have much experience so look for ways to assess their stick-to-it-tive-ness: athletics, anything like 4H, playing an instrument, or some other hobby, volunteering or extracurricular activity that demonstrates a multi-year commitment.
- How isolated is your operation, how easily will your apprentice be able to meet people in town, get involved with the community? You'll want to ask them about this during the interview, so consider this as you review applications.
- Are you able to consistently make yourself available to teach and review their learning, or will they need to be proactive in reminding you to do check ins and skill sheet meetings? What kind of student is best for the kind of teacher you are?
- If you anticipate a more stressful year with your business or your personal life (drought adaptation, a new baby in the family, etc) consider what skills and traits will help your apprentice thrive when you have a split focus--adaptability may be more important than tractor mechanics, for example
- You are trying to assess their strengths, weaknesses and whether what **you** offer is a good fit for **them**

Design your Evaluation Process: Who is included, what's your timeline, how will you keep track?

Scoring System

We strongly recommend that you create a clear scoring, note-taking system for reading and reviewing applications. Your criteria can be the basis for this, and NAP also has two score sheets mentors find useful, so look these over and adapt one to suit your criteria.

- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#)

Read as they come in or at the end?

You can read them as they come in or wait until applications close. Many mentors do both. A first read is done when the application comes in and initial sorting into categories like *Interested*, *Maybe* and *No Thank You* can occur. A second read of all the *Maybe* and *Interested* applications is done when applications close, more thorough notes and scoring occurs, so that a decision can be made as to who to interview.

- Tip: Some people find it useful to have a spreadsheet to keep track of applications: a table includes Name, Address, Ag experience, Your preferred skills/characteristics, Other Pros and Cons. Here's a blank spreadsheet for you to consider using: [Blank applicant overview spreadsheet](#)

Who to Include

It's useful to have more than one set of eyes read and review applications. A manager has a different perspective than a co-worker, so even if you are the only official mentor, seek out input from others. If your family or employees will have interactions with the apprentice, get their input on what is most important to them.

- They can read the applications of people you are most interested in and give their comments
- Create a short summary of the pluses and questions for your top picks and ask others to review and give input.
- Have them contribute to your criteria so their concerns are embedded in your selection process from the start

Your NAP Coordinator can help you sort out which applicants are the best fit for you so ask for their assessment.

More than one mentor? Including others?

A number of mentor sites have more than one mentor, or include an employee, foreman, or second-year apprentice in the application review process. Here's one way to do this:

1. The mentor team, including returning apprentices and/or foreman, determine collectively what issues or specific work this year will influence the list of preferred skills and traits in the apprentice.
2. Everyone in the mentor team does their own first read for overall sense of candidate; then a 2nd read to take notes
3. Some people like to print out the application and take notes right on the paper so they can refer to it during an interview with an applicant

4. Rank with the SJR score sheet, 0 to 5 scale, 0 is low, 5 is high: [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#)
5. Team shares comments/scores. Honest discussion occurs regarding different assessments of the applicants and who each person likes best. This review can illuminate blind spots in individual review
6. Don't forget to ask for input from your NAP Coordinator, especially if you have strong and varied opinions on your applicants and are struggling to narrow down your list.

Contacting References

The NAP application asks for 2 professional and 1 personal reference. We recommend that mentors call them at some point in the process. You can call when first reading applications to help determine who to phone interview, after phone interview, or any other time in the process.

- There is value in waiting to call a reference until you have had the first interview, so that you learn about the applicant directly, initially, and then can formulate more specific questions for the reference.

[Here's a list of potential questions](#) to ask references, to generate more detailed information.

Applications Close; Choose your Semi-finalists

In the week after applications close, schedule at least half a day to read/revisit and discuss applications right after the deadline.

- If you haven't already sorted them into Yes, Maybe, and No piles, do that now
- Ideally you'll have 4 to 6 top semi-finalists to interview
- Discuss any difference of opinion in the team as it relates to an applicant -- are there red flags for some and not for others?
- If you feel you need more information to determine if an applicant should advance to the interview stage or not, consider sending them a follow-up email to suss out details related to their work experience and long term goals as these apply to your apprenticeship. Here are some possible ["Tell me more" questions](#) (these can also be used during interviews).

Next Steps

NAP asks mentors to do phone/video interviews of their 4-6 semi-finalists, in January, with finalist interviews in late Jan-early Feb, for a March start date. Historically, the

second interview was a site visit interview, but due to Covid and costs, many mentors now do the second interview as a video interview.

Create an interview schedule with at least 8 slots, each 1.5 hours, no more than 3 interview slots in a given day. Be sure to include options at different times of day (including early morning and later evening), to accommodate candidate work schedules.

→ If you are a new NAP mentor, schedule your dates and times with your NAP Coordinator

Communicating with your Applicants

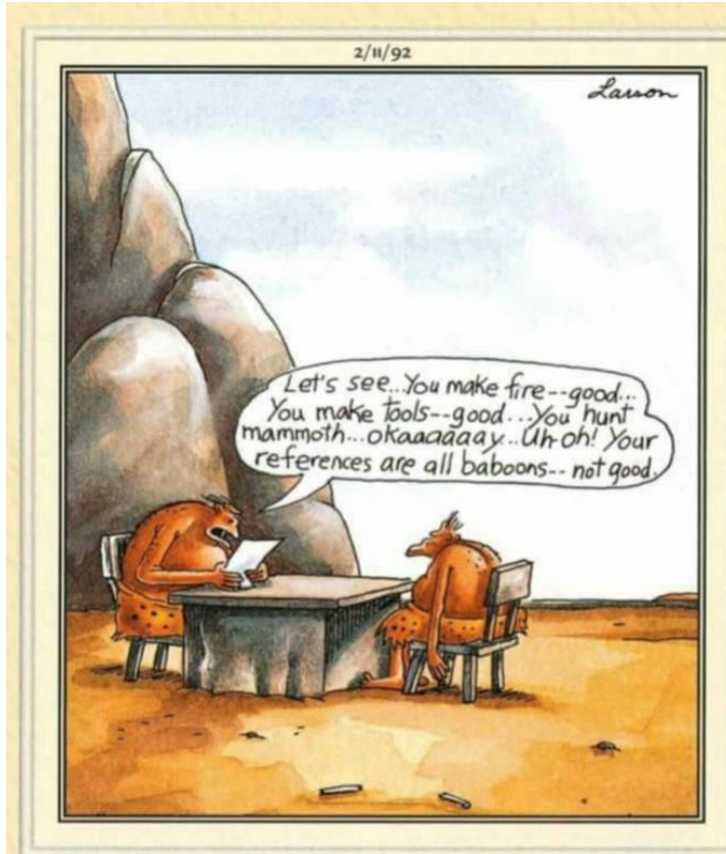
Once you have decided who to interview, who you won't interview, and who is a "maybe I'll interview", send the appropriate email to each applicant by the date set by the NAP staff.

- Send the "[Decline to Interview](#)" email to anyone you are sure you don't want to interview: i.e. you would rather not have an apprentice than take that person
- Send the "[Invitation to Interview](#)" email to those you will be interviewing for the first round
- Send the "[Maybe](#)" email to those who are your "B" list: people you might want to interview if your top picks end up not being a good fit.

Once all semi-finalists are signed up for an interview, draft another email to provide instructions for how to use whatever video platform you plan to use (Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts) and be sure that platform works for you. If you aren't familiar with these, ask your NAP Coordinator to help you choose one that works for you.

Guidelines for your interview process, plus sample interview questions and scripts are in the following chapter on interviewing.

Chapter 4: Effective Interviews



It's been borne out repeatedly in NAP, as well as other apprenticeship programs: Every hour of time you spend preparing for and conducting interviews pays off. Thoughtful questions that get to the core of an applicant's motivation for applying to your position means you'll hire someone well suited to what you offer. Helping the applicant relax into the interview means you'll experience a true picture of who they are and how they'll meet your needs for the position.

The NAP process is on the long side, so it is thorough. Engage with each step, and it is unlikely you'll choose an apprentice who is unhappy with you, and unable to meet your expectations.

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from the fall 2020 NAP mentor training call
- [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#)
- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#)
- Email templates for communicating with applicants:
 - [Decline to Interview](#)
 - [Invitation to interview](#)
 - [Maybe awaiting further developments](#)
 - [Decline post Interview](#)
 - [Congratulations Accepted](#)
- [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions, from the AqALN Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)
- [2nd Interview Fun Questions](#)

- [Questions for References that elicit more detailed information](#)

In 2020, Ana Guevara from Adams State University in Alamosa, CO hosted a Mentor Training Call on “Bias Prevention in Hiring” for NAP mentors. Here are the [slides](#) and the [Zoom recording](#). Ana provided detail on various state guidelines and regulations that are extremely useful.

Historically, NAP has a two-step interview process: a first video/phone interview with your 4-6 semi-finalists, then a site visit/work interview for your 2-3 finalists. In 2021, the site visit interview was replaced by a second video interview. Suggestions for conducting a second video interview will be noted later in this chapter.

For the 2021 apprenticeship season, applications opened November 1 and closed December 15, 2021. Interviews began in late December and concluded in late January 2021, with offers made throughout January. Most apprenticeships begin in March, and as your apprentice will need at least a few weeks to transition from their current job and housing situation, completing hiring by early February gives them (and you) ample time to prepare for the upcoming season.

Mentors are strongly encouraged to stick with the timeline NAP staff outline each year, as apprentices apply to multiple NAP sites (as well as other jobs) and you risk missing out on a top candidate if you delay your initial interviews.

For the 2021 season, this was the general schedule:

Date	Event	Notes
Nov 1 - Dec 15	Applications open and close	Read and review as they come in
Dec 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Select and contact applicants to invite to interview, decline or place on hold</i> • <i>Determine your interview schedule for 1st round</i> 	Determine your top 4-6 semi-finalists, use NAP email templates to send notice to all applicants as to their status
Jan 4	Deadline for notifying all applicants as to whether they are invited to interview, won't be invited, or are in the holding	You may contact applicants sooner to set up interviews. You must

	pattern	respond to all applicants by Jan 4.
Dec 26 - Jan 15	First round interviews- please note that some mentors may move to their 2nd round of interviews during this time period	Prepare interview script and specific questions for semi-finalists; do interviews
Jan 15 - Jan 31	Complete 2nd round interviews	Complete 2nd round interviews and make offer to your top choice

Deciding who to Interview

Hopefully you used a score sheet or matrix, or made detailed notes when you first read applications. That pays off now, as you consider your applicants and choose those you wish to interview, those you definitely will not interview, and who are you “maybe” candidates. These score sheets are in the earlier chapter, “Evaluating Written Applications” and are also here:

- [San Juan Ranch Applicant score sheet](#)
- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)

Over the years, NAP mentors discovered that the following steps yield the most thorough and thoughtful decision:

- Review your notes. Elicit input from any employee or family member who will have regular contact or mentoring duties with the apprentice.
 - The more eyes and brains in the process the better, according to most mentors
 - Ask for input from your NAP Coordinator - they often have had personal conversations with applicants and can help you determine who is a good fit for your mentoring style and operation.
 - Encourage all members of your team to be honest and frank with concerns, priorities, and which applicants they feel are best suited. See “Evaluating Applications” for more on this
- Prepare specific questions for each candidate, based on elements in their resume/application that you want to hear more about, or things they don’t mention (check out: ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#))
- Really try the score sheets. Using numerical scores in categories of the score sheet helps you 1) remember everything mentioned in a resume and application; and 2) practice objectivity in assessing applicants

- It is quite easy to read an application and feel positive about the person, and forget to clearly assess their skills, aptitude and fit for your operation.
- It's normal to feel drawn to one applicant over another, but be wary of how this can cloud your judgment -- the score sheet and your team or NAP Coordinator can help you see the "blind spots" in your assessment of an applicant you instinctively like
- This can help when you need to pair down your list of potential interviewees to a reasonable number - we recommend between 4-6, 7 is usually ok, but more than that can become hard to fit into your schedule and do more than a cursory interview

Communicating with your Applicants

Once you have decided who to interview, who you won't interview, and who is a "maybe I'll interview", send the appropriate email to each applicant by the date set by the NAP staff.

- Send the "[Decline to Interview](#)" email to anyone you are sure you don't want to interview: i.e. you would rather not have an apprentice than take that person
- Send the "[Invitation to Interview](#)" email to those you will be interviewing for the first round
- Send the "[Maybe](#)" email to those who are your "B" list: people you might want to interview if your top picks end up not being a good fit.
- You will also find the post-interview email stating that the person won't be moving to the 2nd stage of interviews, and a sample Congratulations email for your top pick.
 - [Decline post Interview](#)
 - [Congratulations Accepted](#)

Preparing your Interview

NAP recommends that you create a basic script for all of your interviews. There are two good reasons for this: 1) you won't forget to ask something; and 2) it guarantees that you give everyone the same opportunity to share why they want to apprentice with you and what they have to offer.

- To date, NAP has never had any applicant file an unfair hiring claim against a mentor, and no one wants this to occur. The best protection against this is for you to have a script that you follow, so you can prove you gave everyone the same basic interview
 - Sample script: [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)

- In addition to the basic questions you ask everyone, it is fine to add a number of questions specific to that applicant. These two documents offer some ideas:
 - ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#) has suggestions on how to create questions based on the applications
 - [Sample Interview Questions, from the AqALN Aq Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)
- Include a brief description of your operation-- no more than 5 minutes. You can ask them about their questions about the operation later in the interview.
- Have ready whatever note taking or score sheet you are using. Here are the 2 template NAP offers to mentors, but feel free to make your own based on what you are looking for: [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#), [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- Practice using Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, whatever video platform you will use

What you CANT ask

Some questions **can not** be asked or implied during an interview. This is a federal regulation and NAP does ask you to abide by all laws related to bias in hiring. ***You cannot ask about age, marital status, religion, political leanings, specific health conditions (this includes mental health), or sexual orientation.*** In addition, your state may have other topics that cannot be discussed in an interview.

Because the apprenticeship is a physically demanding position requiring the ability to live and work in extreme weather and isolated areas, mentors can feel challenged to learn what they need to know to safely hire a person qualified and capable of the position. There are some legal ways to clarify the requirements of the position in order to be sure your applicant understands that they must meet these requirements.

- Be frank in your written site description on the NAP web page, and in your interview about the physical requirements of the job, exposure to allergens, distance to medical professionals. For example: "This position requires ongoing work in subzero weather: how would you manage that?" "The apprentice will be exposed to animal dander, pollen, dust, and other allergens regularly and will need to be able to work safely in these conditions."
- You can also clarify how your values influence your business and work environment: that you go to church on Sunday so the apprentice will need to do chores that day, or it is a day of rest for all; that you believe climate change is real and discuss this in your management decisions; etc.
- You can ask "is there anything we should know that would come up on a background check?"

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Interview pointers

Determine what is ***most important*** to you to learn during the interview: personality, experience, interests, passion, etc. Ask questions that will help you learn more about these things. Look at the questions in the [“Tell Me More” Questions for Interviews](#) document.

- Avoid “selling” yourself. You want the best person for you, and you need to find out if *you* are a good fit for their goals and needs. It’s like matchmaking: they are interviewing you too
- Reiterate that there are no silly questions: tell them that they can ask whatever they need to in order to find out whether your position is right for them
- Bounce back and forth between you talking, and leaving room for them to ask their questions
- You might need to prompt them for their questions, if they are nervous or shy. Prompts are included

First Interview Process

- Use Skype, Google Hangouts, or Zoom - practice in advance!
 - Send them a phone number to call you if they find they are having internet challenges on the day of the interview. This way you can proceed via phone if need be
- Plan on 45 minutes to an hour in length to do a basic evaluation regarding whether you are a good fit for them and they are good for your position. Here’s a sample interview script for a first interview: [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)
- Things to cover:
 - Mentor: articulate what they’re looking for in an apprentice
 - Apprentice: articulate what they’re looking for in a mentor and apprenticeship
 - Basic minimum requirements: starting date/availability, any skills you need them to already have such as horsemanship skills, driving a manual transmission, etc.

- Review compensation (stipend, room and board), and other important points - a few details about your location, days off schedule, work schedule
 - Cover any deal-breaker issues or policies: no smoking, Covid restrictions on visitors, pets or working animals they want to bring, etc.
 - Ask if they have any questions about things they read in the site description. This is a better use of time than having you describe your operation for 5-10 minutes.
 - Be sure to give an accurate picture of housing, how far it is to town, etc. -- this is even more critical due to Covid impacts
 - Ask a few of the questions that are specific to that applicant, per your review of their application and resume. These will help you determine if you want to invite them for a second round: ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#)
 - If there's something in their application/resume that you want to know more about, to understand their level of experience or judgement.
 - Offer an opportunity for them to ask questions
 - Reiterate that there are no silly questions
 - Offer some leading questions, to gauge their curiosity
 - "You mentioned___about our operation as one reason you applied to us. Can you tell me more about your interest in this?"
 - "Do you have any questions about how we structure our business?"
 - "Do you have any questions about our land management practices?"
 - "Is there something specific in our site description that was of interest to you that you want to pursue if you come work here?"
- Be sure to let them know when they will hear from you, letting them know if they will be moving forward to the 2nd interview or not

Choose Your Finalists

- Narrow it down to ideally 2-3 candidates for 2nd round interviews
- Call references if you haven't already. Prepare some good questions. Try these [Questions for References](#) to elicit full, honest information from them.:
- Send out your invitation for the 2nd interview. You can modify the [Invitation to Interview template](#) to note specifics you want to discuss in the 2nd interview.
- If you have some things you want to ask in an email prior to that 2nd interview, that's ok

- Offer your finalists an opportunity to talk with a reference of yours: a past employee or apprentice of yours. If with past NAP apprentice, the NAP coordinator can be on the call
- Consider sending them a digital photo album of your operation: their housing is a key consideration for them, so indoor and outdoor photos of this are really important. Photos of fields, animals, weather good and nasty, etc.

Second Interview for your finalists

Site Visit Option

Historically, NAP asked mentors to host their finalists for an on-site, work day visit as the 2nd interview. Nothing can compare to meeting each other in person, sharing a meal, working together for a few hours; what you learn about the applicant and, *just as important*, what they learn about you, is the best way to learn whether you will be happy to see each other, day after day, for eight months.

Depending on how far you are from an airport or how long a drive it is for your finalist, you may need to host them overnight (which is one reason why NAP did not require this during Covid-19). NAP has a small fund to use to help offset the cost of applicant travel to mentor sites, but this usually does not cover the full cost of plane fare. Mentors have offered additional financial assistance to applicants to help with costs. With the expansion of NAP to multiple states and over 25 mentor sites, it may become impossible to financially assist with interview travel. However, if it is possible for your finalist to meet you in person, visit your ranch or farm, and get a sense of your region and isolation factor, it is worth attempting.

Here's a sample site visit schedule:

8 am	Applicant arrives for brief intro
8:30 am	Chores done with mentor, encourage them to ask questions about what you are doing and why. Explain this to them
11 am	Inside time to answer their questions about the area, weather, housing (give them a tour our apprentice housing), any other details they need to know
noon	Eat lunch together -- consider making it

	and seeing if they volunteer to help with something!
1:30 pm	Ask your final questions and answer theirs

Topics to consider covering:

- Review any ranch policies that seem to need underscoring
- Show them the housing and discuss whether utilities, internet, etc are included
- Work schedule, days off, if vacation or additional time is needed
 - Ask if they anticipate needing to be away for family matters, etc
- Share some thoughts about why you ranch/farm the way you do
- Give them a sense of how far away town is, how isolated you are or aren't
- Play a game, have a more personal or informal talk while taking a walk -- do something to help them relax so you get a sense of what they are like outside of an interview setting
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)

Virtual Option

Covid-19 made it necessary for NAP to create an alternative to the in-person, site visit 2nd interview. Post-Covid, it may still make sense to use this alternative when funds or travel distance make a site visit impossible.

If your first interview was brief, we recommend allotting at least 60 minutes for the second interview. This provides time to ask and answer questions thoroughly, go into detail with elements of your apprenticeship offering, and gather details about their experience. Your goal here is to learn more about the person as well as about their experience, so finding some less formal questions and topics will help you crack through the "interview persona" and get a real sense of each other.

Things to consider including:

- Ask what elements of your operation they are most curious about
- Share some stories about long days, good days, something you really love about your life and work
- Consider a virtual tour of work spaces, outbuildings, fields where they will work
- **Clearly cover housing and board (internet access is critical for this generation, and for their NAP requirements), days off, if they can go away for a longer stretch at some point in the season, stipend, rules**

- Ask a few more of those “Tell Me More” questions -- this is your chance to find out if they are right for you or not.
- [Here are some more light-hearted questions](#). One mentor site had the applicant pick 2, the mentors picked 2, and then everyone on the interview answered each question. This was a way to have an ‘informal’ chat about a non-work related topic, to mimic the kind of conversation that happens during site visit interviews:
- Ask about conflicts they have encountered, communication style -- things to help you know where they need may be challenged and your mentoring will need to kick up
- Go through scenarios that have come up in the past, positive and challenging, with your operation or with apprentices
- Ask any deal-breaker questions
- Consider asking them if they have ever lived in a place that was remote, stretched them out of their comfort zone, or was in a new culture to them. Ask what they did to cope, and thrive, in such a situation. If they have not yet had an experience like this, ask them how they think they will be challenged and any thoughts they have on strategies to help them thrive. This gets to the issue of isolation and support systems, without asking directly if they have family or friends who function as a support system.
- Help them learn more about your mentoring style, how you organize your days, help them get a sense of the flavor of your operation. This ensures a good fit for both of you.
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)

Final Thoughts

It isn’t just about experience; you’re looking for the person who will be the best fit for all you offer: what you will teach, how you mentor, where your operation is located and what you raise, and what their vision of their future is and how your operation will further that dream.

Chapter 5: Setting Expectations

You've completed your interviews and have either selected your apprentice or are sending out your offers. Now is the time to clarify details of employment, be sure your apprentice understands and agrees to those details and your ranch or farm policies, and prepare for their arrival. Taking the time to write a strong apprenticeship agreement, create your skills list, and determine how you will orient your apprentice to your operation, yourself, and their new community will get you off to a good start and avoid problems down the road.

Resources:

- [Zoom recording from the winter 2021 call](#)
- [Google slides shown in Zoom call](#)
- [NAP Apprenticeship Employment Agreement Template](#)
- [Sample Apprentice Agreement-diversified farm](#)
- [Housing MOU for mentor/apprentice](#)
- [Items to include in your apprentice employment agreement/contract](#)
- [NAP Apprentice Suggested Gear List](#)
- [2020 NAP Grievance Policy](#)
- [Medical Intake form: San Juan Land & Livestock](#)
- [Orientation schedule: San Juan Land & Livestock Apprentice Orientation](#)
- [Round River Resource Mgmt On-Boarding](#)
- [Sample SJR Skills Checklist](#)
- [Mentoring Partnership Check in Accountability Tool](#)
- [Supporting Mentors to Teach Next Generation Agrarians](#): The Mentor Toolkit from National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network

Getting off to a good start: What you need to do before apprentice arrive

The last thing you want is for your new hire to show up, having quit their job and relocated, and then one of these kinds of details means they have to leave. This is heartache for all concerned.

When you make your offer:

Be sure you clearly communicate the details of compensation (stipend, room and board), start and end dates for the apprenticeship, your days off policy, and any ranch policies which could be a deal breaker, such as your smoking, visitor, or pet policies. Even if you discussed these during your interview, as well as stated them in

your NAP Mentor Site Description, it's best to review them upon hiring. These details will be written in your employment contract and housing lease with your apprentice, but it's good to be sure the apprentice has truly considered them and agrees to them in advance of arrival.

The policy items most commonly clarified are:

- Cell phone use during work hours: Be very clear on use during work day as this generation is use to unlimited access -- for example, they can listen to podcast while fixing fence but not when handling or herding livestock
- Work Schedule: Be explicit with the length of your work day, and how this changes based on the season/month
- Compensation: Monthly stipend amount, room and board you offer -- is it a shared midday meal and if so how often, a freezer full of meat, a food stipend, etc.
- Smoking/drugs/alcohol use on or off the property: Are you a non-smoking operation? Does this mean no smoking anywhere or is it ok in some places? If you are in a state where marijuana is legal, is this ok during off hours in housing you supply?
- Cleanliness expectation with housing and work areas: Do you want to ask for a cleaning deposit? Apprentice definition of clean may not meet the standard you need
- Live-in partners: While their partnership or family situation can't be a reason you do or don't hire a person, it is vital that you clarify whether the housing you provide is for the apprentice only, or if a live-in partner is ok and if so how you will handle house expenses like utilities, etc
- Visitors: How often and how long are visitors welcome to visit your apprentice and stay? How much notice do you want before they arrive?
- Pet policy and working animals
- Time off in addition to the weekly day off: If you do allow this, clarify how much advance notice you want and that this time is at the convenience of the ranch schedule, etc. Some ranches regularly give additional time as needed for medical appointments, etc.. Other ranches have a set amount of extra time off that the apprentice must track and use sparingly
- If your own home functions as headquarters for the ranch/farm, clarify how the shared space is kept in order.

Before they arrive:

NAP requires that apprentices be hired as employees, with a written contract or work agreement, and that you carry Workers Compensation insurance. You'll want to have those things in place before the apprentice arrives.

Employment documents

- Your written employment agreement or contract needn't be lengthy, but it is good to include the basic elements of the position such as compensation and schedule, a general list of duties, and a reference to the NAP grievance policy. Consider including an addendum that lists your ranch/farm policies.
 - Sample contracts/agreements:
 - [NAP Apprenticeship Employment Agreement Template](#)
 - [Sample Apprentice Agreement-diversified farm](#)
 - [Housing MOU for mentor/apprentice](#)
 - [Items to include in your apprentice employment agreement/contract](#)
 - [2020 NAP Grievance Policy](#)
- Print out a W-4 so your apprentice can indicate their tax withholding preference, social security number and best address for tax purposes.
- If you work with an accounting firm they may be able to set up a payroll system and run payroll for you. Many online payroll systems exist but may not be cost-effective if you only have one or two employees. You can also set this up in-house, but confer with your local Small Business Association office, your accountant or bookkeeper or someone else able to assist you so you accurately determine what you will withhold from the paycheck as well as calculate your payroll tax liability with paying the employer's portion of Social Security and Medicare, and how you will submit your payroll taxes
- Medical Intake Form: While you can't ask health related questions during the interview, you can ask employees, once hired, to let you know of any health issues, allergies, medications, etc., so you can communicate this to health professionals in an emergency. At least get an emergency contact person for your apprentice, if nothing else. Here's a [template for a medical intake form](#) used at San Juan Land & Livestock.

Creating your Skills Sheet:

Your Skills Sheet is the core of the education program you offer as a mentor. It is both useful and required. It serves as a syllabus, outlining all the educational opportunities available to your apprentice. It helps you plan how best to teach the skills you need your apprentice to learn, assess their progress, and strategize ways to

incorporate learning into your work days. It is required, as it is legal proof that NAP apprentices receive focused, intentional training and education as part of their apprenticeship.

In the next chapter, on Balancing Education and Work, we'll discuss how to use the skill sheet during your season. Here, we'll focus on creating that Skill Sheet.

Your NAP Coordinator can help you create your Skill Sheet, but one of the best ways to begin is to make a list of every skill a ranch hand needs to do on your operation. Once you make that list, it will become clear which of these you want to teach an apprentice. For example, while some operations use tractors frequently, you may decide you don't want to teach novices how to run equipment. In that case, you wouldn't include tractor operation and maintenance on your Skill Sheet.

Once you have determined which skills you want to introduce your apprentice to, and help them acquire, you think through the progression of learning steps that skill requires. This is placed in a spreadsheet and becomes your Skills Sheet. Skills Sheet categories mentors often include are Tools and Equipment, Animal Handling and Husbandry, Land Management, Workplace Ethics, Horsemanship, and Business and Administration. Within Land Management, Pasture Planning could be listed, as well as Pre and Post Grazing Assessment, and Monitoring Land Health.

Here is a [Skills Sheet template](#) for a cattle ranch apprenticeship. Use this to determine what skills you want in your Skills Checklist, and how you wish to organize it. More information on using the Skills Checklist throughout the apprenticeship is covered in Chapter 6 of this toolkit.

Topic 2: What does the *apprentice* need to know before they arrive

Your incoming apprentice is excited to arrive, and is often eager to prepare even as they tie up loose ends with their current job and begin packing to move. More than likely, they are moving to an entirely new region and community. There are a few simple things you can do to help them make a smooth transition.

- Gear List: Most mentor sites are a long way from stores where apprentices can buy clothing or tools they'll need upon arrival, so NAP has compiled a [Suggested Gear List](#). Review this and add or edit as you see fit for your operation, then send it out to your apprentice a few weeks before they will arrive, so they have time to purchase any items they need. Some mentors

choose to supply work gloves, pliers, irrigation boots, or other gear they wish apprentices to have. This is not required of you.

- Postal Mail: While apprentices are skilled with email and other virtual communication, they may still need a postal address. Send them the mailing address for either their housing (if it has a separate address) or your ranch so they are able to receive mail.
- Resource List: Compile a list of readings, videos, podcasts, etc that you find interesting or useful in your own operation and send this to them. This helps them become familiar with the lexicon of your type of agriculture, management practices and ideas you find valuable, and will help them better understand you as a mentor and the operation. NAP has a resource list we send to incoming apprentices, but you may have specific sources you want them to look into. For example, some ranches send a few articles on low-stress stockmanship, pasture management for recovery, winter grazing techniques, shepherding, or animal health. They may not read them all (after all, they aren't on payroll yet!), but most people will dig into these due to their excitement and anticipation. Consider a reading or podcast that covers life and death on ranches, as this is harder on apprentices than they imagine it might be.
- Consider giving them some sense of the history and current condition of your area, by sending them the name of your local newspaper, or any recommended reading about your area. Apprentices are often very curious about their soon-to-be home.

Topic 3: Arrival/First week: Orientation or On-Boarding

No matter who they are, your apprentice is bound to be a little overwhelmed in the first week or two of their apprenticeship. Help them understand the flow of your workday, work week, and how you set priorities, as they are ready to work and want to dive in -- but may have no idea how best to do that. A structured orientation week will help them settle in and focus on what you most want them to do and learn first. Here are two different sample orientation schedules for you to alter for your own operation:

- [Orientation schedule: San Juan Land & Livestock Apprentice Orientation](#)
- [Round River Resource Mgmt On-Boarding](#)

You'll see from these samples, there are a number of things NAP asks you to do within the first ten days, as well as things that are specific to your operation. This list includes:

- Sign employment paperwork and housing agreement
- Get her/his emergency contact info → put this somewhere easily accessible get a copy of a medical insurance card if they have it.
- Complete medical intake form and get a copy of their insurance card, in case we have to take them to the ER and they aren't conscious, etc. And give them your emergency info too!
- Give them a set of maps of the ranch/farm and pastures/fields, show them where they all are -- if there is time, we'll take them to all those fields so they get useful and autonomous early. They can take the map with them when they go to a field and they can find fences, gates, water points, etc.
- Discuss day off -- what day they will be taking
- Review ranch/farm safety policies, workers' comp, vehicle policies, etc.
- Do a vehicle assessment with them -- walk around the trucks or equipment you want them to use, get a sense of how adept they really are -- go on a drive with them and see if they are going to burn out your clutch, etc.
- Complete a baseline Skill Sheet assessment and talk over which skills are most present at which time of the season, so they see how the education fits into daily work.
 - Consider having them star the skills they are most interested in learning. While these may not be the most critical skills you need them to learn right away, it demonstrates that you want to support their goals, and you can look for times in the season when you *can* focus on these things.
 - The baseline will help you figure out where you need to focus your mentor energy first, so the apprentice becomes capable with whatever chores are the ones you need them to learn first. It also helps you determine where they can be useful right away
 - Prioritizing this meeting makes clear to them that their education is important to you. This really builds trust.
- Review ranch/farm schedule, work schedule/rhythm, days off...
- Consider having a white board ranch/farm calendar that you use interactively with them during team meetings, etc, as this will help them learn all that you are navigating, what is a priority, and where they can fit in to help (a sample is in the Zoom slides)
- Have a social meal with them, or play cards, watch a movie, have more opportunity to get to know each other right away. This establishes a healthy and fun relationship that helps us get through the hard days

- Have a conversation where they tell you their goals -- practical and personal-- for the apprenticeship, in relation to their job duties and skill sheets. And tell them some of your goals!

A few final organizational supports to consider:

- Anything you can do to help them quickly orient to your work schedule, property and pastures, your area and yourself will be a big support. Here are some ideas that mentors find useful:
 - Consider creating an apprentice or employee handbook -- policies, maps, important phone numbers, where the grocery store and tire store are, etc.
 - Have a ranch/farm calendar - some mentors use Google calendar and include ranch work but also whose day off it is, when the mentor has a meeting or event and won't be available, etc.
 - A white board that is the Task List can be a real asset. It's a place to note smaller projects that your apprentice can do on their own, at least once you have lined them out on that task. For example: oiling tack, inventorying polywire reels and pigtail posts to see if more are needed, repair fence, caulk water tanks, etc. This helps the apprentice grasp all the pieces of the puzzle -- they want to learn how to think about all the things you think about as a manager.
 - Create a simple calendar that notes the Big Events of each season: that calving is March - June, branding is in early May, head to ranch June - Sept. The seasonal shifts can be disorienting for apprentices when they start but giving them a printed 'big strokes' calendar can help them
 - Some ranches use online programs like Asana to organize tasks

Ultimately, the best way to communicate expectations about anything -- policies, schedules, or the right way to set up portable electric fences -- is to explain WHY. If your apprentice understands why early mornings are necessary in August, why their friend can't bring a pet poodle to visit, or why they need to have a safety check prior to driving a tractor, they will realize why it is important to do things the way you have outlined them, at least at the start of their apprenticeship. And they'll know when and how to suggest a new idea, ask for feedback, and become useful and effective members of your team.

Education on a working farm or ranch is co-created by the mentor and apprentice, so a shared understanding and agreement of how work and education occur is the

foundation for shared expectations. Some learning is built in to each day's chores, some learning is season-specific, and some learning will require intentional teaching time scheduled proactively. The sooner you discuss your calendar and work flow, and get a read on your apprentice's incoming skill level and learning aptitude, the sooner you'll be able to co-create a system for learning to happen.

The table below, adapted from *The Mentor's Guide*, by Lois J. Zachery, is a sample of the questions to discuss in order to clarify expectations.

Outcomes	Questions to Ask
Well-defined goals	What are the specific learning outcomes desired by mentee and mentor during this time?
Measuring Success	What criteria will we use and how often will we evaluate progress?
Mutual Responsibility	Who is responsible for which elements of our meetings, accomplishing goals, etc?
Accountability	How do we make sure we follow through with our responsibilities? How will we remind each other when we are not following through with scheduled meetings, trainings, etc?
Stumbling Blocks	What kinds of challenges might we encounter due to time, learning curve, etc? How do we want to address these when they arise?
Mentoring Agreement	What do we want to write down as our agreement on the above points?
Work plan for learning goals	How will we identify the next most relevant learning goal, and what is our plan to make sure we take advantage of it?

Refer to the section on Work and Education Balance for tips on creating S.M.A.R.T.E.R. goals, learning plans, skill sheet use, and other ways to create clear goals, measure success, and determine how and when focused learning can occur.

A few additional tools to help you create sound accountability for yourself and your apprentice are listed here.

Levels of Ongoing Accountability (adapted from *The Mentor's Guide*, by Lois J. Zaczary)

The mentoring relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How are we doing? ● Are we satisfied with how our interactions are going? ● What might we try to strengthen our relationship and communication?
The learning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are the lessons, on-the-spot teaching and other educational processes working for you? ● How are your learning goals moving forward? ● What can we try that could make your learning stronger/better for you? ● What are you learning about yourself as a learner in this environment?
Progress towards learning goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which of your goals are moving ahead well? ● What's been a success for you thus far? ● What's your biggest frustration? ● What's giving you the most satisfaction about what you are learning?

From *Common Sense Mentoring*, by Larry Ambrose

- "If you are not hearing from your mentee, don't wait". Be proactive and set up a time to talk, and talk *only about what is going on in your partnership*, not about the current topic being learned. Your objective is to find out if your mentoring is effective or not, and if not, what you can do to make it better
- Mentees have lots of feedback for you, but they will seldom tell you about it. Mentees will 'assign authority' to you, and have been taught to avoid giving feedback to an authority figure. Solicit feedback from them! Ask:
 - "Tell me one thing I can do more of or begin doing that would help you?"

- “Tell me something that I do that isn’t helpful?”
- “The other day I gave you lots of details when describing how the engine works -- was that useful or was it confusing? What would have been more helpful for you?”

[Mentoring Partner Check in Accountability Tool](#)

Mentoring Agreements

Some programs choose to clarify expectations regarding the educational process and responsibilities in a written mentoring agreement. While it may feel overly formal for a ranch or farm setting, it can be useful to write down your basic agreements regarding how often you will check in with one another regarding the progress of learning goals, whether or not your teaching is clear, and strategize how to keep the learning going during busy times of the season. An example can be found in the [Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit](#), page 57.

Additional Resources:

- US Dept. of Labor ["*Credit towards Wages under Section 3\(m\) Questions and Answers*"](#) (this discusses how room and board can legally be counted towards the minimum wage for ag workers--your state law may not adhere to this)
- US Dept of Labor ["*Fact Sheet #12 "Agricultural Employers Under the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)"*"](#)

Chapter 6: Balancing Work and Education: Communication, Workflow, Schedules

How do you fit in education when (to quote a past colleague) “There are only 36 hours in a day and we already filled them all?”

Every ranch and farm is already a more-than-full time pursuit. Yet an apprentice who understands your operation’s priorities will help you accomplish them, which creates time for more intentional teaching moments.

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording from the winter 2021 call](#)
- [Google slides shown in Zoom call](#)
- [Tips to get them going](#)
- [Overall Season Calendar for Apprenticeship Period](#)
- [Check-in Prompts for Short or Longer sessions:](#)
- [Sample Team Meeting Agenda](#)
- [Time Management Matrix by Stephen Covey - Urgent/Important](#)
- [San Juan Ranch Covey Quadrant for team mtg 2/1/2021](#)
- [Sample SJR Skills Checklist](#)
- [Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship mentor training Communication video](#)
- [Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship mentor training Communication tip sheet](#)
- [Communication: The Core of Everything](#)

The best way to make sure that learning happens and that necessary work is done well and on time is to front-load communication so your apprentice knows the priority tasks for a week or month, is able to accomplish tasks autonomously and to your standards, and continues to learn something new on a regular basis.

You already have systems in place that help you. You may not even know all the strategies you use, or how you know what to work on when -- especially if you grew up in agriculture and basically learned your job before you were born.

3 systems: Production, Financial, Relational

Every operation large or small has three systems it relies upon to conduct its business.

- Production: What you raise, how you raise it, what breed/varieties you choose and why, technical assistance, etc?
- Financial: accountants, bookkeeping systems and personnel, budgets, planning large projects as related to financial needs, Ranching for Profit Management groups, etc.?

- Relational: Who do you rely upon? Customers, feed or seed sales people, the tire store, the parts store, employees, neighbors, family? How do you take as good care of those you rely upon as you take of your bank balance and land?

Most of us have many resources to go to for guidance and support for our production needs. We have key resources for financial support as well. But most of us have few if any resources when issues with people go awry. Yet if the people we rely on aren't feeling appreciated or fairly treated they are unproductive or worse.

As a result, successfully accomplishing the work while creating educational opportunities relies on timely, clear *communication*.

Empower your apprentice with a basic understanding of the way you organize your work days and plan in advance of big projects. Together you can:

- Identify learning that is automatically built in to work days and events
- Look for the spontaneous "teachable moments" - when something happens, a neighbor drives in, an event arrives and you can grab onto the learning it offers
- Strategize when to fit in more focused teaching events

As the apprentice becomes more capable and aware of all that has to be done, the more they can:

- Do things on their own, freeing you up to focus on other elements of your work and life
- Think ahead, gather tools, prepare vehicles, etc. in advance of work projects so you don't have to do it
- Help you both make time to teach the next level of skills

While basic orientation to your operation was covered in an earlier chapter, here again are the [tips that will help you and your apprentice](#) organize your time, incorporate intentional teaching and training, and keep motivation high throughout the season:

Tools that can help:

Regular, Brief check ins:

The biggest mistake mentors make is forgetting to check in with their apprentice regularly, giving them feedback on their work and asking if they are learning what they hoped they would when they were offered your apprentice position.

Start doing this at the end of the first week; it helps establish this as a normal part of your work week. Some mentors do it first thing one day a week, others as an end-of-

day unwind chat over a beer or cup of tea. Taking a walk or driving back to headquarters are also great times for this.

- Ask a few short questions. They may not have a lot to say the first few weeks, but they will eventually, and you make it clear that feedback and check ins are just a normal part of the work schedule and environment
- Sample questions:
 - What's something that was fun, exciting or really stimulating for you this week?
 - Was there anything we did or talked about this week that was confusing, hard to learn, that we should schedule more time to discuss and do?
 - Was there anything in particular I did this week as a mentor that was especially helpful or useful for you?
 - Was there anything I did that was confusing, difficult or unclear?
 - What's something you really want to do or learn that we haven't gotten to yet? Let's brainstorm ideas on fitting that in soon
 - [Check-in Prompts for Short or Longer sessions](#)

The most important thing you can do, hands down, is to let your apprentice know when they did something well. If you do nothing else, this alone will make your relationship and the work/education balance effective and positive for you both. Even a small "you did really well sorting cattle in the corral today" can mean the world to your apprentice. THIS is what keeps them motivated through the hard days and long weeks of mundane chores.

- "Today when you were loading hay I could see how much more comfortable you are with the loader"
- "This week I noticed some improvement with your cattle handling--you really worked off the shoulder well when we were turning them into the new pasture"

Deeper check ins:

Because mentors are more than employers, your apprentice will thrive if you periodically check in with them on a personal level. This may seem unprofessional or intrusive, or just awkward, but it is a key part of mentoring. Don't wait for a problem to arise to have a friendly "How are you doing?" check in. Ask them:

- Have you heard from family or friends? How are things back home?
- How is the workload feeling? Do you feel stuck as far as learning goes?
- Look at that prompt sheet for ideas: [Check-in Prompts for Short or Longer sessions](#):

There may be times when it is vital that you find time to check in on your apprentice's well being. If they are:

- Increasingly forgetful, making more mistakes than usual, withdrawn or snarky. They could have had bad news about family, be struggling with insomnia or could benefit from some positive feedback
- If you know you have been stressed, unavailable, or short tempered often
- If you two had a rough day working together. Clearing the air will help both of you move past a hard day and come back together to get things done in a positive and productive way

A full ranch or farm schedule makes it hard to take time for these more personal conversations or informal conversations about life, dreams and, yes, needs. The chapter on Feedback will go into this in more depth, but here are some tips to consider

- **Try a Team Pulse Meeting:** If you have more than one apprentice, this can be a great way to get a read on team morale, and uncover simmering tensions before they increase.
 - Sit down in a pleasant, non-work associated place. Go around the circle, with each person saying how the past week/month has been for them: what went well, what was frustrating, what was fun.
 - If a problem is brought up, you don't have to try to address it in the moment if you haven't time or it seems unproductive. But you'll know to follow up either individually or with whoever is involved in a disagreement or issue.
- **Debrief an Event that was Difficult:** If you had a rough day with your apprentice, you may both need a break before you debrief, but don't forget to check in on it.
 - Ask them those simple check in questions as they relate to the event: "What was hard for yesterday when we worked cattle?" "Was there something that felt like it went well for you?" What do you think you could do better and what can I show you or do that will help you move forward with that learning?" And don't forget: "I know I lost my temper and got really sharp and short. I get impatient on days like that."

Team Meetings, Calendars and To Do Lists, Covey quadrant knock-off

Mentors complain that apprentices don't know how to be useful, don't know what to do when one task is complete so they are on their phones with social media, or just stand around looking perplexed. This isn't because they are lazy; they just don't have the life-long experience to know what task is next or the magical ability to read their mentor's mind.

Weekly Team Meetings:

Bringing a new person -- especially an apprentice-- into a team makes it necessary to verbalize the week's priorities. Many mentors are used to working with small, tight-knit teams of family or 1 or 2 employees, who intuitively know what is most important to do

each week, and how to organize days and delegate tasks to get things done effectively and efficiently. A weekly team meeting is a great way to help your apprentice become more adept at juggling tasks and taking over responsibilities.

Create a list of topic areas to cover each week, such as pasture planning; cattle movies; infrastructure needs; vehicle checks; days off/personnel needs; etc.

- Here's a sample agenda of items to consider covering each week in a team meeting: [Sample Team Meeting Agenda](#)
- Below is an adapted Covey Quadrant, another way to organize and document action items for a team meeting
- Many mentors schedule this as a 1-hour meeting, once a week. If you do them often, they needn't be long
- Consider having your apprentice facilitate the meeting and create the agenda, with your input, after they have been on site a few months. This catapults them into managerial mindset and they begin to comprehend all that it takes to run an operation like yours.

Ranch Calendar:

Two different calendars prove useful when an apprentice is striving to understand what happens when, and where they can be useful. The first is an overall calendar of your season. This can be very streamlined, just noting the major events that occur each month. Here is a sample: [Overall Season Calendar for Apprenticeship Period](#)

A month-at-a -glance visual calendar prominently placed in a meeting space your apprentice uses daily will reinforce priorities discussed during meetings, help the apprentice think ahead and find ways to help you prepare for upcoming events. Whether you use an online calendar like Google Calendar, or a white board or wall calendar, find something that **you** the mentor will use, and make it a habit to use it weekly.

- Use a large white board or fillable calendar to help schedule a month at a time: there's an example of this in the slide deck
- This helps your apprentice grasp how what you do *today* is determined by what has to occur two weeks or 2 months from now
- A visual reminder helps them figure out where they can take something off your shoulders, what training they need in order to be ready for a task that is coming up
- If you like digital tools, try a shared Google Calendar that everyone has access to and can add tasks and events to
- Some mentors use workplace apps like Asana that list tasks, deadlines, and who is assigned to the task

To Do Lists, or “What to do when mentor is busy”:

Create a Task List of tasks an apprentice can already do, or can learn and can be done independent of you. These may be things inventorying fence supplies in preparation for purchasing more, vehicle maintenance checks, changing the oil in vehicles (of course, you’ll want to be sure they know what they’re doing, so run through it with them once or twice until you know they are good on their own)

- This could be another white board next to the calendar
- Some mentors prefer an online app like Asana or other organizational app

Covey Quadrant Knock-Off:

Stephen Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Successful People* created a matrix to help prioritize tasks. There are two continuums: one for Urgent/Not Urgent, another for Important/Not Important. Here’s a simple version of Stephen Covey’s quadrant, from this article: [Time Management Matrix by Stephen Covey - Urgent vs Important](#)

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Crying baby Kitchen fire Some calls 1	Exercise Vocation Planning 2
Not Important	3 Interruptions Distractions Other calls	4 Trivia Busy work Time wasters

- Here’s a more detailed version of the same:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Quad I</p> <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Pressing Problems • Deadline Driven <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Burn-out • Crisis management • Always putting out fires 	<p>Quad II</p> <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention, capability improvement • Relationship building • Recognizing new opportunities • Planning, recreation <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision, perspective • Balance • Discipline • Control • Few crisis
Not Important	<p>Quad III</p> <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some callers • Some email, some reports • Some meetings • Proximate, pressing matters • Popular activities <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term focus • Crisis management • Reputation – chameleon character • See goals/ plans as worthless • Feel victimized, out of control • Shallow or broken relationships 	<p>Quad IV</p> <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busy work • Some email • Personal social media • Some phone calls • Time wasters • Pleasant activities <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total irresponsibility • Fired from jobs • Dependent on others or institutions for basics

Mentor site San Juan Ranch adapted this for their team meeting agenda template, using the #1 "Urgent/Important" and #2 "Important/Not Urgent" quadrants, replacing #3 and #4 with #3: "Action Items" -- what was assigned to whom and what deadline for that action, and #4: "Important Dates", so everyone has a list of upcoming events such as vet visits, cattle work, pasture moves, other meetings, etc. [San Juan Ranch Covey Quadrant for team mtg 2/1/21](#)

Lastly

Whatever tools or systems you use, it will make a huge difference for your apprentice if you have a normalized way in which you communicate details about the workday, priorities, and what you most need them to do and when it needs to be done. It may feel like work you haven't time for, if you don't already have ranch calendars or conduct weekly team meetings. And it may be that you and your apprentice can create informal and continual communication lines that render more formal or systematic methods unnecessary.

Whatever you choose, informal or planned, systems or ad-hoc chats, be sure it is working for your apprentice. Even mentors who have been with NAP since its inception realize they aren't always communicating in a way that is clear to their apprentice. The more upfront and intentional you are, the fewer glitches, frustrations and time-sinks you'll have in your season.

For more tips on creating solid communication with your apprentice:

- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship [mentor training Communication video](#)
- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship [mentor training Communication tip sheet](#)

- **Communication: The Core of Everything**

Chapter 7: Mentoring to Create a Self-Initiating Apprentice

Resources:

- [Zoom recording](#) from the spring 2021 call
- [Google slides](#) from the call
- [Basics Characteristics of Adult Learners:](#)
- [Video from Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship on Adult Learners](#)
- [NAP Learning Plan Worksheet](#)
- [Mentoring Checklist](#)
- [Learning Plan Samples](#)
- [Sample SJR Skills Checklist](#): sample Skill Sheet with scores and comments from baseline to midseason in the Animal Husbandry sheet
- [Prompts for Skill Sheet Meetings](#)
- [Learning Plans and SMARTER Goals](#)
- [The Intergenerational Workplace](#)

A self-initiating apprentice with great motivation and follow-through comes about for two reasons: First is whole-hearted engagement. They are an active participant ready to engage in all the learning opportunities built into each day at your farm or ranch. They seek out other resources to augment that learning: books, videos, podcasts, workshops, local experts or neighbors they can learn from. Second is the quality of their experience with their mentor. This is where the difference between an employer and a mentor becomes clear. A mentor does more than teach skills; you are investing in them as a person and learner, creating educational environments, incorporating **who they are** into what you need them to learn.

Education is co-created by you and your apprentice. If they are recently out of school they may wait for you to offer the next lesson or task rather than ask for their next learning stretch, especially if they know you are busy. You may get so wrapped up in getting things done you inadvertently keep them doing tasks they already do well rather than teaching them a new skill that catapults them forward.

The NAP Skill Sheet is an active tool to help you both, and this chapter will dive into using them well. There are other tools to consider such as S.M.A.R.T.E.R. goals, and we'll include links to information on those as well. Before that, this brief Adult Learners 101 builds a foundation to help you activate your apprentice's learning and keep it going throughout the season.

Adult Learners 101

Apprentices are adults, even if many are in their early 20s. And while they may be utter novices as agrarians, it's essential that we mentors treat them as adults. Here are the basic elements to keep in mind:

- They need to be *involved* in planning their learning
- The learning needs to be *relevant* to their personal goals
- The learning needs to have *immediate application*
- The learning needs to be *internally motivated*
- They want and need to be able to measure their progress (or lack) independently. You will both be happier if you help the apprentice develop skills to self-critique their work and learning: knowing when they do a job well and when they need to do it better
- For more on adult learners:
 - [Basics Characteristics of Adult Learners:](#)
 - [Video from Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship on Adult Learners](#)

Co-Creating the Education: It's on BOTH your shoulders and theirs!

Skills Sheets

On a working farm or ranch, there's no way that a mentor can do it alone -- the apprentice has to help make the education happen. They need to learn how to help make that education front and center. The NAP Coordinators help the apprentice with this, and the Skills Sheet, if used actively, is your best friend in this endeavor.

- The Baseline assessment lets you gauge what your apprentice already knows (or thinks they do!)
- Certain skills are needed at various points in your season; align what skill sheet elements your apprentice focuses on with what they need to do at that time of year
- With any skill, once you assess the incoming level of your apprentice, together you can brainstorm projects, reading, and specific teaching time to move them forward with that skill
 - ◆ Try creating a simple learning plan or action steps (this is discussed further below). Here's a template for a learning plan as well as examples:
 - [NAP Learning Plan Worksheet](#)
 - [Learning Plan Samples](#)

Key Tip: Don't think of the Skill Sheet as just a place to *record* what has happened; use it to *plan* opportunities for learning, either done with you, with someone else on your operation, with a neighbor or at a workshop, and self-study the apprentice can do

on their own. Skills Sheets are most effective -- and fun -- when you use it to spark conversation. What is your apprentice passionate to learn? Are you both interested in learning more about soil fungi or low stress handling? You can support one another and keep both of you on your growing edge, learning together.

Baseline, Mid-Season, and Prior to Departure Skill Sheet Meetings

NAP requires three focused Skill Sheet assessments during the eight month apprenticeship: a beginning baseline, at mid-season, and a month or so prior to the end of the apprenticeship to review their time with you and identify next professional steps. Here's the basic process for each of these assessments:

- The apprentice assesses where they have learned, and where they haven't, and then scores self.
- Mentor also assesses and scores where you think your apprentice skill level is, has grown or is stuck.
- You meet to discuss how the learning is coming along, looking over where the sheets indicate growth and where things have stalled and need more attention.
 - Pay special attention to any significant difference between your assessment and your apprentice's. This is likely an area where you may need to give them more feedback more often
 - Strategize how to address skills that are getting forgotten or aren't seeing growth.
- **Why is it useful to have apprentices score themselves?**
 - The more self-aware an apprentice is of their own improvement as well as how they get in their own way, the less defensive they are to constructive feedback.
 - It stimulates their ownership of their learning process -- they will come up with ideas on how to move themselves forward in their skill development.
 - You'll be able to gauge their confidence. It could be that they're doing something well but they still feel unsure about it and underestimate their improvement
 - And if they are overconfident, you'll catch that too!

Baseline Assessment

- If you didn't send them their Skill Sheet prior to arrival, give it to them right away upon arrival.
- Give your apprentice time to complete their Baseline Assessment during the first week to 10 days. Knowing this baseline helps you plan work, education and get them started on the right foot:

- Ask them to identify which skill areas are their points of passion. These may not be your priorities for their learning, but knowing these will mean you can try to roll those in as you can. This is especially useful when you begin to sense burn-out or monotony adversely impacting your apprentice.
- After they complete their Baseline assessments, meet with them and talk through their assessment.
 - Identify and discuss which skills you need them to learn or be better at right away and talk about the specific ways you will teach/train/review to make this happen.
 - For example, San Juan Ranch apprentices arrive right before calving season. On the Animal Handling Skill Sheet one section has them rate their experience with calving issues and skills (no experience, only watched someone else assist with a birth or have they actually had hands-on experience with a mom who can't get up after calving or a troubled birth, etc). Then the mentors know how much training will be needed and can plan that right away.
 - If they say they have some skill, make a point to work with them and double-check their skill level. You can check that what they say they can do, they actually CAN do.
 - The sooner you are confident -- and they are confident -- in their ability to do something well enough, the sooner they get the hang of how to learn as they go, and you can move them to the next new thing to learn

Tips for Subsequent Skill Sheet Meetings, including Mid-Season

- Set the date for the skill sheet review a day or two in advance.
- Give them a few prompting questions to help your apprentice prepare so you aren't the only one offering observations. Prompts and preparation builds objectivity for the apprentice; they learn to *self-identify* where they are stuck, not learning, avoiding a skill, etc.
- Sample question: Ask them to choose which of the skills sheets has been most active within the last time period (e.g. if in calving season, the "animal handling" sheet is a place they can focus their review). and places where they made improvement and where they got stuck. Questions to ask them to consider:
 - "What skills in this section have you been working on? Where do you think you've grown the most and offer up an example of this?"
 - "What have you most enjoyed working on? Why is that?"
 - "What's been hard to learn? Do you need more hands-on support?"
 - "Is there something I am always too busy to get to, so you aren't learning it?"

- Here's a list of suggested questions: [Prompts for Skill Sheet Meetings](#)

Here's a [sample Skill Sheet](#) with the one sheet filled in with scores and comments from baseline to midseason in the Animal Husbandry sheet.

Other tools to help plan and execute learning to support a self-starting apprentice:

[Learning Plans and SMARTER Goals](#)

It May take a LONG Time for them to "get it": How to Maintain Patience

- You the mentor can do a task in half the time it will take your apprentice to do it, and you have to let go of that -- let go of expecting them to do it as quickly as you do. One suggestion: let them set their own pace for a week or two, then you can give them a timeframe that is closer to what is ideal: "Ideally we should be able to unload this truckload of trees before lunch".
- Let them do a task on their own first (if there are no safety reasons why this is a bad idea), and then review it with them to give them feedback on what they did well, what needs improving. For example, if an apprentice says she has done "tons of electric fence", give her a few instructions and let her set up a fence and charger on her own, and then went to look at it. She may have set the charger so it isn't facing the sun. This can be a powerful and lasting learning experience.
- They may need more basic info than you think, like the difference between red and clear diesel, what fluids to check in a vehicle before leaving headquarters, how to use a shovel correctly.
- Plan hands-on teaching/oversight up front to be sure they do this the way you need it done. You are learning HOW THEY LEARN, where they are naturally adept and where they will need more patience and help from you/mentor team.

Once the Honeymoon is Over:

By and large, things go well for the first three weeks. Everyone's on their best behavior, but eventually the 'new' wears off, the mundane routine sinks in for them, and that charming quirk or yours or theirs isn't so charming anymore. Often generational differences show up here: you discover your apprentice is posting photos to Instagram during the work day and that annoys you, or they don't understand how overwhelmed we are with your new iPhone. Here are some thoughts on how generational differences may show up: [The Intergenerational Workplace](#)

Expect the Doldrums:

Agricultural work is often repetitive and mundane, and it has to be done well every time! This mix is often unfamiliar to apprentices. Here are some ways to help keep them enthusiastic:

- Have a check in and let them know that YOU are sometimes bored or tired of it too! That you may become 'spacey' or worn out and you too forget to make the fence hot. When you 'fess up' to how you get worn out or bored sometimes, they realize they can say it too, rather than suck it up for three months and then explode
- Try to diversify tasks, give them something new/different to do, especially if they've been doing the same thing for weeks - this is a time to pull out one of the areas of passion from their Skill Sheet and set aside some time for that, be it learning to weld with you or working on a neighbor's place for a day to learn how they work livestock
- Refer them to articles, podcasts, etc on a topic of interest to you both: on stockmanship, soil, etc -- give them intellectual food that prompts them to think more deeply about what they are doing at your operation. This might prompt them to ask more questions, get excited again.
 - listen to a podcast at lunch together, sometimes, just to get our educational juices flowing again
- Give them an extra morning off to sleep in -- that can change their reality from darkness to light!
- Let them attend workshops or visit other farms/operations in your area. They come back energized and with questions and ideas. And they also realize all they have been learning with you!
- Help them arrange a day with a local expert in a relevant field--soil scientist, NRCS range ecologist, other agrarians, land stewardship non-profit, local food coalitions, other farms or ranches you know
- Visit other NAP mentor sites--this can really feed the apprentice

A Few More Pointers

By midsummer, mentors often fall into the trap of having the apprentice continually do what they already know how to do well. The schedule is so packed we can't find time to teach them a new skill. The apprentice feels that they aren't really learning anymore, and they become irritable, or feel their education isn't a priority for you (and it may not be at that time of year).

This is time for triage. Look over the above list. Remember your apprentice came to learn, as well as to work. As long as mentors continually remember to prioritize

education along with the work, your apprentice will remain dedicated and determined, will rise to each challenge and find joy in the routine.

Chapter 8: The Gift of Feedback

Supporting Documents:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from the spring 2021 call
- [Google slides](#) from the call
- [Ways to get to feedback you want and need](#) handout for NAP apprentices
- [Simple check in and feedback prompts:](#)
- [Feedback Tools and Resistance to Feedback.docx](#)
- [EDGE Feedback \(from The Feedback Book, by Dawn Sillett\)](#)

Feedback is a gift when given with care and a desire to support one another. Well-timed, detailed praise can catapult your apprentice to a stronger commitment to learning and your operation. Hands down, it's the most essential tool for professional development and trust building. However, all too many of us arrive in adulthood with a string of mainly negative experiences with feedback that detailed only what was wrong about our effort or result, leaving us feeling inept.

If we were lucky to receive good guidance regarding what we did *well*, and what can be improved and how to improve it, we come to feedback eager to become better at whatever we attempt.

Given that both mentor and apprentice have past experiences with discouraging feedback (or the lack of any feedback), giving and receiving feedback can be one of the more fraught challenges of being a mentor. But if we take a moment and remember a time someone we trusted gave us much-needed advice, be it a way to improve our efforts, or praise for a job well done, it becomes clear that we already know a lot about how to give good feedback.

There are a few basics to remember, whether you want to give your apprentice a "thumbs-up" or tell them they need to improve some aspect of their work.

Useful Feedback is:

- Clear
- Specific
- Timely
- Affirming of Effort, even if outcome isn't what was wanted
- Future Oriented -- what can be done to improve - ultimately, talk about strategies to create improvement

Specificity Is Your Friend and Ally

Whether you offer praise or suggestions for improvement, including specific examples is essential if you want your apprentice to fully grasp your feedback and use it to improve. Here's an example that demonstrates nonspecific and specific feedback:

- Not Helpful: "You did great this week. I saw some real growth in lots of areas this month. Keep it up."
- Helpful: "I've seen you take on some new tasks this month as well as solidify your ability to troubleshoot electric fence. Last week you found that elusive short in the long fence, and fixed it by replacing the offset and tightening the wire. And you inventoried fencing supplies and gave me a list of what we needed to order. I've also seen real improvement with your pasture planning and analysis. You checked the grazing patterns last week, saw where we'd grazed pasture too short, and made adjustments in the size and timing of the next paddock. Then you came to me and we revised the pasture plan to account for the resized paddocks. This is excellent work. Keep it up."
- Not Helpful: "I'm really frustrated by the sloppy work you've done lately, not finishing chores, leaving tools laying around. You don't seem interested in what I'm trying to teach you and this needs to change."
- Helpful: "You seem a little off lately and I'm not sure why. You were late three mornings this week with no explanation. Yesterday, you didn't finish the fence job and I don't know why. Also, at Monday's team meeting you were looking at your phone quite a lot. I'm concerned about how this is affecting your work. Could you offer me some insight on what might be causing these things?"

Now that we've covered some basics about what creates useful feedback, how do we fit it into an already crowded work schedule?

Create a Culture of Feedback

Start with Curiosity

When your apprentice first arrives, you have no idea whether their predominant experience with feedback has been hurtful and rough, vague and hard to act upon, or positive. Take some time, over a cup of tea or coffee, or during a walk, to ask about their experience with feedback. This simple conversation will help both of you make a fresh start with feedback, recognising that it is essential to the education, and that you are both committed to finding ways to make it helpful.

- Consider asking your apprentice to tell you *their* worst and best experience with feedback.

- ◆ This will help you know if someone has had mainly bad experiences with feedback, if they are extra hard on themselves, what level of sensitivity they have, what sort of appreciation they need.
- ◆ Consider sharing how feedback is sometimes hard or helpful for *you* -- this helps them understand that this is a part of being human, that you can find it hard to hear it, etc

Start Early

Having a few good experiences with feedback early on, even if there is constructive criticism offered, can make a big difference in the long run. The fact that you care enough to ask can set up a positive environment for feedback

- Remember that there are simple questions you can ask regularly, that will build feedback into your day and week, normalizing the give and take of information about how the work is going, where mistakes or success resulted from the apprentice's efforts, and how to improve. Here are those questions again: [Simple check in and feedback prompts](#)
- Don't wait until there is a problem to have a feedback session. If feedback only happens after a rough day or big mistake, both apprentice and mentor will find it harder to have these talks and they will fall along the wayside. We all tend to avoid things that are both difficult and vulnerable, and associating feedback only with trouble aggravates our avoidance tendencies
- No matter how poorly an apprentice may execute a chore, there is always something to praise: effort made, persistence in spite of frustration and problems, or some small improvement. They may not have found the short in the electric fence, but they spent three hours walking the fence looking for it, and when they couldn't find it, they told you rather than pretended that the problem was fixed.

Short and Simple

Every mentor is working in a time crunch at least some of the year, if not most of the time. Finding time for feedback can be a struggle. This is one reason to start early and discover what method fits best into your schedule and suits your nature.

- Some mentors have a weekly check in on the same day every week. Doing this every week means the meetings aren't over an hour, and if there is a problem it is uncovered and discussed before it builds.
- Other mentors have weekly time when they work together with their apprentice, such as a full day working in the cheese room, just the two of them. This mentor

uses this time to ask the apprentice what's on their mind, and offers feedback as they work

- Make it quick. Ask: "What was your win for the day? What came up as a challenge and what might we do to improve that?"
- Driving time is a good time to ask a few questions:
 - "Was there a work day recently that didn't go as well as you hoped",
 - "During branding last week was there a skill you didn't get a chance to learn?"
 - "I know I was kind of barking orders" at you yesterday. How are you feeling about that?"
- Just the fact that you ASK and listen, can fix things. You demonstrate that they matter, and that builds trust.
- After completing a cattle move or other task, do a 10-minute debrief:
 - "what do you think went well, and what could we have done better?"
 - see if they can start to identify what they are doing that is or isn't effective. This helps them pay attention to the entire event and not just to what they are doing.
- During a weekly team meeting or check in, ask "*What went well, what went better, and what's your most pressing concern?*"
- If you have some specific comments on a job well done or on how they can improve the skills they used that day, share it at the end of the day or at the start of the next day.
- Likewise, invite them to offer observations in return. Were your instructions clear and easy to understand? Did you spend enough time working next to them to make sure they took them in?
- Here are some more feedback prompts and tools -- as well as advice for when your apprentice is resisting feedback: [Feedback Tools and Resistance to Feedback](#)

A Few Pointers:

- Focus on ACTIONS, NOT PERSONALITY. Ask "It seems you are dragging this week, what's up?" rather than "I'm really frustrated/confused by how lazy you seem this week"
- Ideally, give more positives than constructive comments (5 or 3 positives to each constructive criticism is the best ratio, but can be hard to do). If all your apprentice hears is what they do poorly, they become demoralized and it can break down trust

- Most of us do better if we can hear what we are doing *well*, then consider for ourselves why this is (do we have a better attitude, more interest in that skill, etc) and use that to help us work on the places where we *aren't* doing as well
- Some folks like using a system called Positives and Deltas
 - Positives -- comment on something they are doing well
 - Delta - mention a place that can benefit from change
 - Always be sure to not do too many Deltas in one session
- Try the EDGE process: [EDGE Feedback \(from The Feedback Book, by Dawn Sillett\)](#)

The value to *you* of getting feedback *from* them

It might seem counter-intuitive, but the best way for your apprentice to overcome defensiveness and really take in and act on your feedback, is to ask them to give feedback to you. Your ability to ask for and listen to feedback without becoming defensive models how you want them to listen to your feedback to them. You may hesitate to put yourself in this position; after all, asking for feedback makes you a little vulnerable to criticism. This is, however, what you ask of your apprentice. Apprentices look to mentors as role models, not only as agriculturalists, but also as people. Each of us, mentors and apprentices, have inherent gifts and strengths. And we can all improve!

Ask your apprentice to give you feedback on a few of these things, or on anything you know can be a troublesome aspect of working with you:

- "What have I done recently that was most helpful for you?"
- "Is there something I do that is not helpful for you?"
 - "Do I have a tendency to talk too quickly when explaining a new task, how a piece of machinery works, etc.?"
- "Are there times when you need or want to ask me a question but you don't know if I have time for it -- are you worried that you are interrupting me, but you still need to get some information and don't know what to do to get it?"
- "What's one thing I could do next week that would help you with your learning?"
- "Is there something you want to learn that we never seem to have time for?"

Resources:

Brene Brown *Dare to Lead* podcast, book, audiobook, and workbook (workbook is available for free online at her website. She also has several short webinars and blog posts highlighting sections of her book. Here are a few links:

- <https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/linkedin-read-along-series/>

- <https://brenebrown.com/blog/2019/05/01/lets-rumble/>
- Dawn Sillett, *The Feedback Book: 50 ways to motivate and improve the performance of your people*
- Harvard Business Review has a several good articles on giving, receiving and asking for feedback. Many require that you be a subscriber, but if you go to their site and search for feedback articles, many great resources will appear that are free