

STEP 1



PLANNING YOUR FIRST SESSION

OBJECTIVES

- Planning your first session
- Establishing your relationship
- Guiding principles for group mentoring

Planning Your First Session

As a Grad Girls Tech mentor, you set the tone for a successful mentoring experience. The first session is your chance to establish trust, clarify expectations, and create a welcoming space where your mentees feel comfortable engaging.



Check out the Mentee First Meeting Checklist for things to include when you first reach out

The Commitment

- There are six group mentoring sessions in total.
- **You are expected to attend and host all sessions.**
- Students are required to attend at least three sessions to meet graduation criteria – your consistency helps them stay engaged and on track.

Communication

- Day-to-day communications with students are supported by the Discord Coordinators, who share reminders, answer FAQs, and keep everyone connected.
- Your role is to guide the mentoring sessions themselves, leading discussions and providing clarity when needed.

Location & Format

- All sessions are delivered virtually - via Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.
- Be prepared to host the call, moderate discussion, and ensure everyone feels included.
- Test your tech beforehand to ensure a smooth experience.

Support & Guidance

- You are not alone in this. The Mentor Coordinators are your key contacts throughout the group mentoring. They will guide you, answer questions, and step in if any issues or concerns arise.

Planning Your First Session

Set Expectations Together

Your mentees will engage more when they feel ownership. Invite them to share what they want to gain from mentoring and what support they expect from the group. You might ask:

- “What do you hope to get out of Grad Girls mentoring?”
- “What would make these sessions valuable for you?”
- “What would help you feel most supported?”

This is also your chance to share your expectations - such as being prepared, engaging respectfully, and contributing to discussions.

Inclusivity Reminder

- Group mentoring only works when every voice is heard. You set the tone.
- Encourage quieter mentees by asking gentle, open-ended questions.
- Balance airtime if one or two students dominate the conversation.
- Be mindful of cultural and personality differences in communication styles.
- Model inclusive, gender-neutral language.
- Be intentional about creating space for students with different lived experiences, comfort levels and ways of thinking to participate safely.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will feel ready to share deeply at the start - reassure them that it's okay to ease in.

Next Steps

- End the first session with a clear next step to keep momentum and show mentees that this is an ongoing journey. For example:
- Ask each mentee to identify one short-term goal to work on before Session 2.
- Suggest they bring a career-related question or tech topic for next session.
- Encourage reflection: “Think about a time you overcame a challenge – we’ll share and discuss in our next session.”

Suggested Flow / Agenda (*Optional but Helpful*)

Having a loose structure helps you feel confident and gives your mentees clarity. Here's a simple flow you can adapt:

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Icebreaker Activity
3. Set Expectations
4. Exploring Aspirations
5. Wrap-Up & Next Steps

Establishing Your Relationship

Your first session is about building trust and setting the foundation for a supportive group environment. Many mentors find it easier to begin with an informal discussion before moving into goal-setting or career planning.

Here are some conversation starters to help you build rapport and set the tone:

Building Rapport



- What are your mentees currently studying or exploring in tech?
- What inspired them to join the Grad Girls Tech Program?
- What are they passionate about outside of study or work?
- Fun icebreaker: If they could re-live their life as an animal, what would they be and why?

Exploring Goals & Motivations



- Where do your mentees see themselves in 12 months? In five years?
- What skills or experiences do they want to gain from Grad Girls Tech?
- Who inspires them in tech, and why?
- What challenges do they anticipate, and what support would help them?



Tip: You don't need to cover everything in the first session - let the conversation flow naturally and leave space for curiosity and follow-up questions.

Guiding Principles for Group Mentoring

As a mentor, you set the tone for your group. These quick guidelines are here to help you create a safe, supportive, and engaging mentoring experience for your mentees

Best Practices

- Listen actively and encourage every voice in the group.
- Share your experiences openly – including challenges as well as successes.
- Keep discussions professional, respectful, and supportive.
- Protect confidentiality and create a safe, inclusive space for mentees.
- Guide mentees to discover their own answers, rather than providing them all yourself.
- Set expectations and ground rules early to build trust.
- Balance voices so quieter mentees feel included.
- Share practical, actionable advice mentees can use straight away.
- Celebrate small wins as well as big achievements.

Avoid

- Dominate the conversation – mentoring is a dialogue, not a lecture.
- Give opinions in a way that may make mentees feel judged.
- Share confidential information outside the group.
- Assume all mentees have the same background, confidence, or access to opportunities.
- Treat mentoring as evaluation – it's about encouragement and growth.
- Cancel last minute without notice – consistency builds trust.
- Overpromise on the time or support you can realistically give.
- Drift too far off topic – keep stories relevant to tech and career development.
- Compare mentees to each other – focus on individual growth.



Remember: your role isn't to have all the answers - it's to guide, encourage, and create a space where mentees feel safe to explore their own pathways in tech.