

Case Study

Understanding: It Seemed So Clear when you Explained It...

You have recently explained a complicated computational technique to Josh, your mentee. As you were explaining, Josh nodded the entire time as if he understood every word you were saying. When you were finished with your explanation, you asked Josh if he had any questions. He said no. Just to make sure, you asked Josh if everything was clear. He said yes. Three days later you asked Josh how his work using this technique was going and he told you he hasn't started because he does not understand the technique.

What can you do in the future to make sure your mentee understands what you are saying?

Case Study

Understanding: A “Resourceful” Mentee

Your mentee, Sascha, is enthusiastic about your research project and seems confident in his ability to be resourceful. Every day when he gets back from the instrument room, you ask him how it went, and he says “Good,” without giving much detail. You occasionally check his log book and everything seems to be going well, and so it doesn’t occur to you to question Sascha about the nitty-gritty details of his day.

After several weeks pass, you realize that your data were collected not exactly the way you wanted. After some probing, you realize that the instrument was not taking data over the full range of operation. You asked Sascha why he didn’t record data over the full range and he said the power supply fuse blew every time he tried to take data at the higher ranges. “I looked for a different power supply, but I couldn’t find one,” he told you, “And so I just stopped taking data a point just below the one that caused the fuse to blow.” You’re frustrated because you could have had the instrument repaired if you had only known.