SETTING UP YOUR RESEARCH BLOCK
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STEPS TO AN OPTIMAL PROJECT:

1. When to start? As soon as you know your interest. If you can decide which type of research and in which field you are interested, you can be looking for a mentor throughout your first and early second year. It is wise to develop a relationship early so you can put preliminary thought and plans into the project before your research block begins.

2. Determine the type of research that you are interested in:
   a. Basic science
   b. Translational
   c. Outcomes

3. Determine the field of medicine in which your research interest fits or determine what type of research exists within your field of interest.

4. Look for a mentor:
   a. Somebody who you “connect with”. Ideally, you will be spending a lot of time communicating with your mentor.
   b. Ideally, somebody who is accomplished, not just starting out him/herself.
   c. Somebody who has mentored others who have then been successful.
   d. If you are looking at basic science, decide whether it’s important to have “face time” with your mentor. If so, look carefully at the size of the lab. Your mentor may be very busy and have little time for you.

5. Develop a project: For a short-term (1-2 month) project, it is challenging to start a project from scratch and see it through to completion. Options:
   a. In some cases, your mentor may have access to data sets that are available for data extraction. You can spend your time asking the question of the data set, evaluating the data, reading about relevant information in the field, then writing up the results.
   b. Your mentor may have started a project that you can join in on.
   c. If you have a good feasible question and want to start from scratch, consider using 1-2 months in your second year to get the project going, then use the remaining months in your third year to crunch the data and write it up.

6. Funding: This is something to discuss with your mentor. Your mentor may have funds available, or you might have to apply for a grant.
7. The actual research block. How you spend your time will be determined by what you are doing. For me, I met weekly with my mentor to do statistical analysis on data and ask him questions. The rest of the time, I spent at home on my computer, reading the relevant literature, then writing an abstract and manuscript.

8. Results: Your research will very likely extend beyond the specified “research months”. Even if you have completed a manuscript, there will be revisions, submissions, rejections, re-revisions, etc. Your research can be presented in several ways:
   a. Poster presentations at national meetings. Find out about the meetings that are relevant to your research. Submitting an abstract for presentation can be simple – just uploading it to a website.
   b. Manuscript submission for publication.

9. Final points:
   a. Research months are a great opportunity to develop a relationship with a mentor and begin asking and answering scientific questions.
   b. Research during residency will likely blend into research in fellowship/career.
   c. For career purposes, it is helpful to develop your interests early. Many competitive fellowships are interested in applicants who have a clear idea of exactly what they want to do within the specialty.
   d. People evaluating you in the future (fellowship programs, jobs) will look to see not only if you have started projects, but if you have seen them through to completion.