I’m Maggie Portis, and I participated in the ARLIS year-long mentoring program in 2008, which was also my first conference. Although I had graduated from library school a year earlier and had been working in art libraries for a few years, I wanted a mentor to bounce ideas off. In contrast to many of my friends in the profession, I felt like I wasn’t sure where exactly I wanted to go with my career or what steps I might need to take to get there. I hoped a mentor might be able to help me with this, or at least be an objective sounding board!

1. An unbiased listener
   perspective on work situations
   can help sort out career goals since they’re an uninvolved party
   Your mentor has no real stake in a situation

2. The more perspectives the better
   Many times peers will say something authoritatively, like your resume should be only one page. A mentor can help your evaluate whether this is really true or a matter of opinion or perhaps regional.
   Can discuss how your career trajectory might appeal (or not) to future employers

3. Since I had recently switched from working in Museum libraries to an art and design school, certain things: collection development, outreach, education, are very different. As are expectations for you as you progress and work towards promotions.

4. Similarly the school I’m at now is very small whereas Kim works at a very large institution. Her perspective on things from that level is very useful as I might want to work in a large university at some point, so I get real world advice on what I should be working towards

5. We would often discuss technological trends and ways they’re being used in libraries. The way a small art and design school does it is different. Her large university is often more of an early adopter and the way they adopt is different, so getting her take on things as well as real world ways that they use things is both interesting to hear, but can also give me ideas of ways I can use it for my school or how I can adapt her policies to be relevant for my situation.

6. I liked that we weren’t geographically close. I often feel like the local chapters can be kind of insular – everyone knows everyone and many people have worked at multiple institutions in the area. You feel more comfortable talking to someone who doesn’t know well the people you might be talking about. This again speaks to the whole unbiased opinion thing again, but also just knowing whether things are done differently in a certain part of the country or not, even. Also broaden my horizons. Kim knows many more ARLIS members than I do since she’s been involved longer, so introductions are always nice.

7. She helped me figure out how to get more involved in ARLIS. When I renewed my membership every year, I would check the boxes that yes, I’d like to volunteer for this or
that, but no one ever contacted me, and I didn’t know who to ask further or really what to say to them.
Kim helped educate me about what the various committees do, and suggested ways I might get involved and how to sign up.

8. My only word of warning is that like with many relationships, you get back what you put in. Our best discussions were certainly when I was engaged with the topic or had spent some time preparing for our talks. Obviously we’re both busy people, so that didn’t always happen but it’s worth the effort.