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Shazia — Follow

storytelling through design, photography, writing shaziamansuri.com
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50 faces in 10 weeks

what i learned about 1:1's during my summer internship



strong, functional workspace design always makes me swoon! // photo by me

I was asked in an interview once what the most underrated thing on my resume was—the one experience people often failed to ask me about, the experience that was secretly the most valuable, the experience I wanted my interviewer to remember from the 8x11" laundry list of things I had been up to for the past few years.

But instead of detailing a past industry experience, I gushed about the last bulleted item, my freshmen year gig as a staff writer for my university paper.

As a writer, I spent five months interviewing professors, students, activists, CEO's, researchers and leaders in pursuit of meaningful stories—in pursuit of uncovering what they were about, who they were in the process of becoming, their opinions and research on topics that 12,000+ students would care to read about the following morning. Asking questions in the right order, to the right individuals, with the right amount of research beforehand is a skill that we don't stress enough in college (or life), but something that goes far beyond campus grounds. At the start, it was intimidating—*what questions should I ask?* (All of them, you'll learn to narrow down later.) *What if they don't want to talk?* (Move on, don't let it stop your story.) *How do I reign in a conversation that veers off the predetermined course—or go with the flow if it's gone past my notes and research?* (Follow where they lead, follow what's interesting to you.) It took a few conversations, a few late nights transcribing audio recordings and quilting together parts of an article to realize there was a hidden magic to this process.

By my fifth or sixth story, I discovered that the process of interviewing and writing actually occurred simultaneously, not as a linear process—the stories of strangers could be visualized, organized and polished in the moment they were telling it. In the midst of talking to someone on a bus stop, I would realize that their last phrase would be the headline, their next sentence a great pull quote, the following rant a sign to pivot to an entirely different article than I had originally imagined. I didn't need to be overly prepared or stick to questions that led to a narrative; the narrative would unfold how it needed to be told every time.

I realized there was an art to asking questions, to closely following where people were unconsciously leading you to; my idea of what would be captivating about someone's life or work was rarely what they saw for themselves.

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a quiet revolution against the cube life // photo by me

Flash forward to a year later, at my summer internship at a CPG-giant. I wasn't in my dream role but at an organization that I deeply admired—everyone I came across was incredibly generous with their time and mentorship, and I was fascinated to know what all the dusty corners of

a CPG-giant looked like. My first week, I set my summer goals with my manager and listed *Do 1–2 1:1's a week* as a priority.

And each week, I exceeded my goal. I met with 5–6 individuals a week, from across departments, offices and career paths and came out of what could have been a typical summer internship experience with a life-changing experience (and borderline corporate sociology project) that was useful in every adventure that came after.

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Which brings us to: how to do 1:1's, where to find them, what to ask, how to turn a conversation into a potential relationship

1. Make a list of things that are strange and fascinating to you

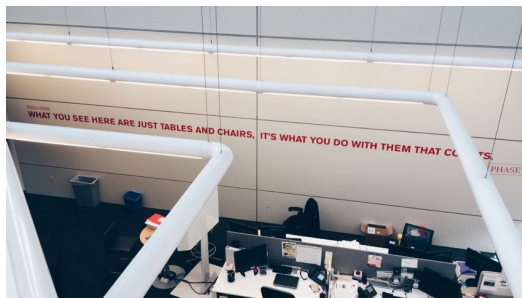
Do you wish you could articulate what a data scientist does in non-vague terms? Are you interested in design but not sure what types of design roles are out there? Do an audit of your own interests (what you're interested in and know well, what you're interested in and know vaguely and what you're interested in but know absolutely nothing about) and use these as a direction as to the types of people you should meet with. This **does not** have to translate to what you want to work in forever! Maybe you came across the term social listening and didn't realize that could be an actual job or are interested to hear about the software development lifecycle in this particular industry. For all the things you're interested in learning about, there are at least 1–2 people working in or near that role every single day!

Sometimes interns feel pressured to do 1:1's and hurriedly email anyone they feel they should meet with for coffee. This can be a time-suck for you and the employee you're meeting with, especially if it's directionless. Meet with people you're interested in, doing things that you care to chat about—which leads us to the second tip:

2. Make a quick note of what you want to get out of the chat

What are you hoping to learn? Are you hoping to get an overview of what their role consists of? Are you interested in seeing samples of the projects they've worked on in the past? Are you hoping to shadow them/their team or inquire about future opportunities in their department? Or do you want to learn more about their thoughts on the organization's direction given their tenure, general advice about the industry or tips on navigating the workplace? There are different types of 1:1's depending on what you want to get out of the conversation and whether you would like it to lead to more meetings.

Before you start doing 1:1's, make a list of questions whose answers you would be truly interested to hear—not what you think you should ask.



when did inspirational wall quotes at companies become a trend? // photo by me

3. Make a list of over-arching 1:1 questions in a notebook and bring it to each one you have.

Questions that I've always found fruitful to ask: how did you find your way to this organization/role/department, what do you wish you knew when you were in college, what experiences did you have during college that proved to be the most valuable now, is the organization/role/department what you thought it would be (or what you surprised you the most about working here) and who is the most interesting person you've met in your career (or who have you come across with the coolest job).

If they manage a team or department, I've found it also interesting to ask what they worry about/what keeps them up at night and where they hope to see the future of their area in relation to the company's growth.

Each conversation is different, but I typically start 1:1's by introducing myself and setting the overview of the chat (*I'd love to learn more about the role of a Communications Director and your experience working for a fashion brand*) and then ask questions about their work, their experience at the organization, exciting things they're currently working on and what they hope to do next. It's always neat learning about what people who are already well-established want to venture into next and what they see for themselves down the line. It also helps reinforce goals you might have and get their perspective on it (like attending graduate school).

4. Wait I'm still stuck on step 0! How do I find people to have 1:1's with?

Start with people you've sat in meeting alongside, individuals on your team or nearby teams that you interact with. Learn about their roles in relation to your own and advice they have for you while within the department. Talk to your manager about people they think you should learn from and set up time with them early. Use LinkedIn! (*But perhaps not to the extent they limit your account and send you numerous emails about purchasing a recruiter plan based on your excessive searching behavior... this may or may not happen to me every month.*) Search by titles/roles within your organization, look them up on internal company systems/Outlook address books and shoot them an email letting them know you came across them via LinkedIn—everyone is always thrilled when interns reach out to them! Occasionally, someone will be too busy to chat with you, reschedule endlessly or simply not respond—find others in similar areas of interest and reach out without feeling discouraged. At the end of each 1:1, ask them for a recommendation for someone to meet with or an introduction to someone they know—this grows your list and network but also tells you who they find interesting to learn from.

5. How do I maintain my connections post internship?

Send them a thank you note within 1–2 days after! I typically send a thank you note within the body of a LinkedIn invite. Ways to stay in touch after your meeting: if you come across an article they might find interesting or relevant to your chat, share it with them! If you're applying for roles afterwards, ask if they can look over your resume or portfolio. If you come across an opportunity for speakers or panelists within campus organization, invite them back to present. If you want to intern with their team or department in the future, let them know you're interested and want to learn more about the application process. Maintaining relationships doesn't have to be weekly check ins for the next year—it can be simple touch points every now and then that reminds them you met and if either of you can be helpful to one another, they feel comfortable reaching out.

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In my pursuit of 1:1's during my internship, I met with designers, engineers, marketers, researchers and analysts, traveled to three other offices nearby, skyped leaders from opposite coasts, shadowed teams and helped with their projects in my downtime. Learning from the people in every corner of the organization excited me to return the following semester with a different department and discover roles I didn't even know existed. What I found was that even though I wasn't interviewing the individual I met with, I was still hoping to get to the root of their story—what they do day-to-day, what drives them, what they found exciting about their work and why they were imperative to the DNA of their organization. The company culture of any organization lies in it's people; and each time, just as I had seen before, the things that they found routine and mundane was captivating to someone like me who was on the outside looking in.

My last 1:1 for the summer was a senior leader within the tech group. We had originally allocated 15 minutes but ended up chatting past an hour in his office. Halfway through our conversation he laughed, paused and told me I really knew what I was doing—and maybe I should become a journalist. Maybe in my own way, I already am.

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Woo, you made it to the end! Would love to hear your own 1:1 advice or experiences :)