I’m not your typical candidate, and that’s ok

Telling a better story about yourself

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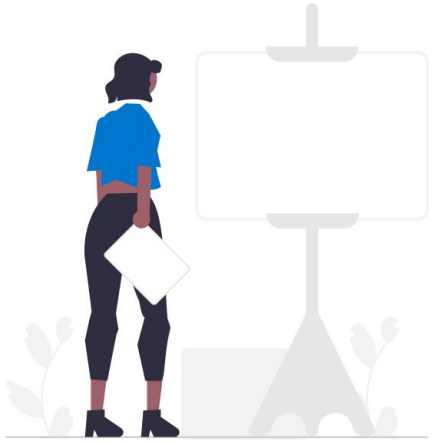
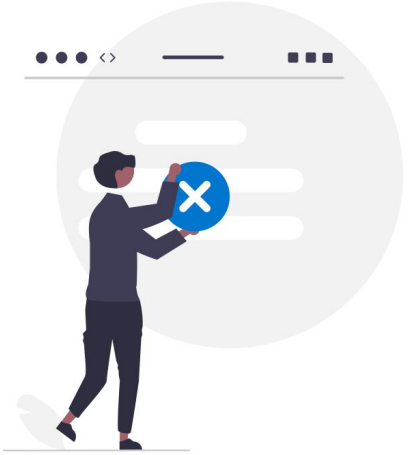
(jyow-ray)

Who is this talk for?



Those who feel inadequate

You may be constantly under pressure to learn more and build more skills to be hirable. You are doing your best but it still doesn't feel enough.

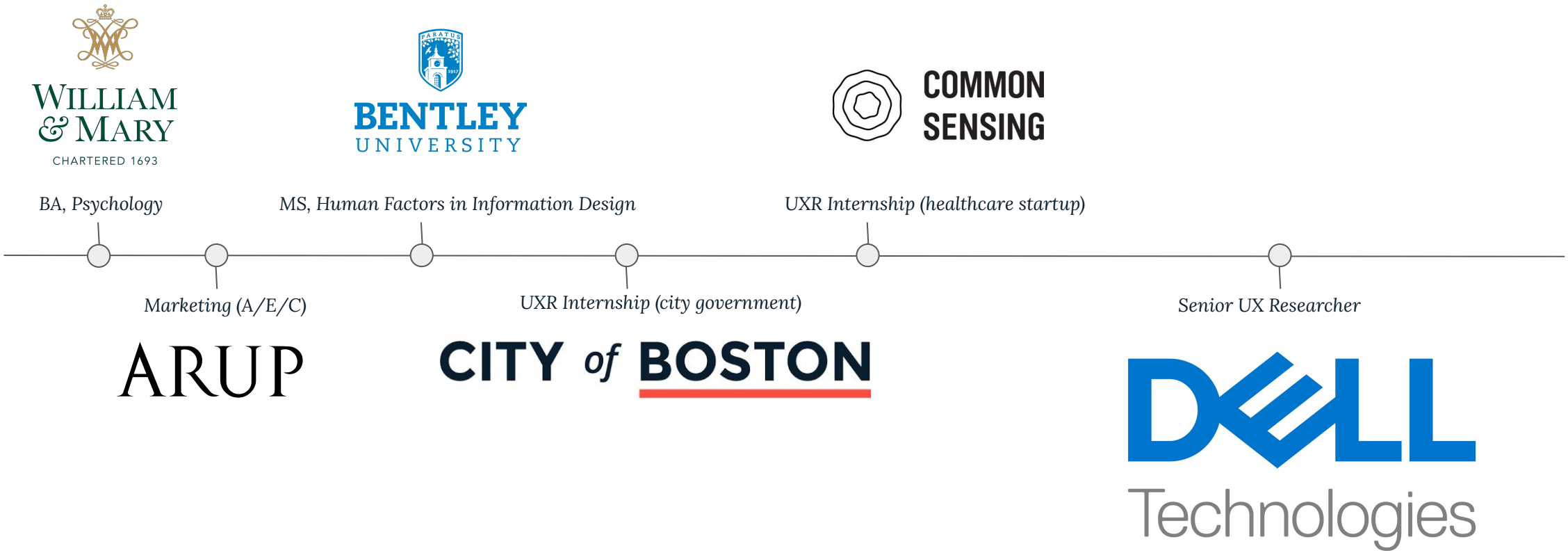


Those who question themselves

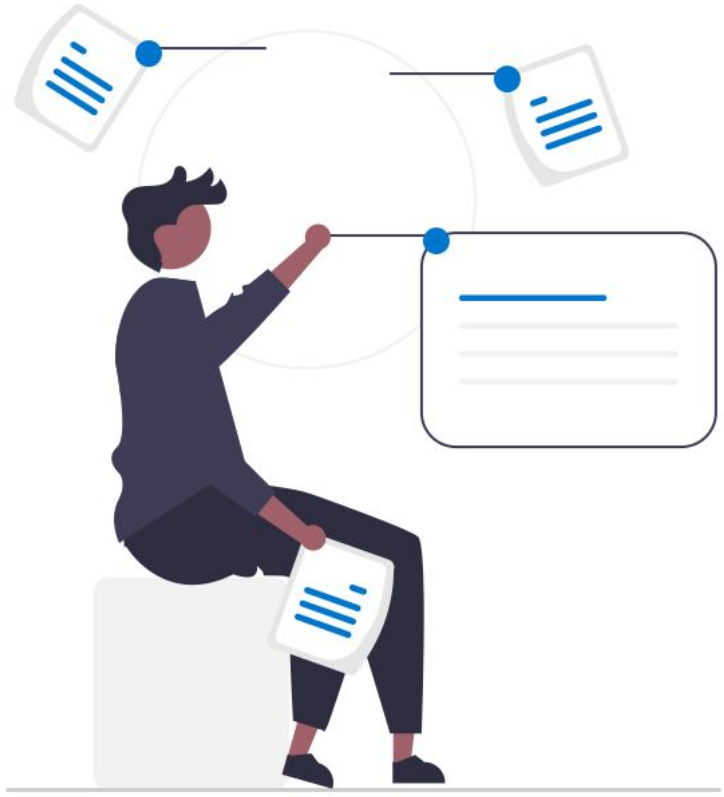
You started this journey thinking your skills are transferable, but nobody else seems to think so. You question whether trying to get into UX is a good idea.

I’m not here to give you all the answers.
I’m here to help you see from a different perspective.

My path


WILLIAM & MARY
CHARTERED 1693
BA, Psychology
Marketing (A/E/C)
ARUP
BENTLEY UNIVERSITY
MS, Human Factors in Information Design
UXR Internship (city government)
CITY of BOSTON
COMMON SENSING
UXR Internship (healthcare startup)
Senior UX Researcher
DELL Technologies

What mentees ask me



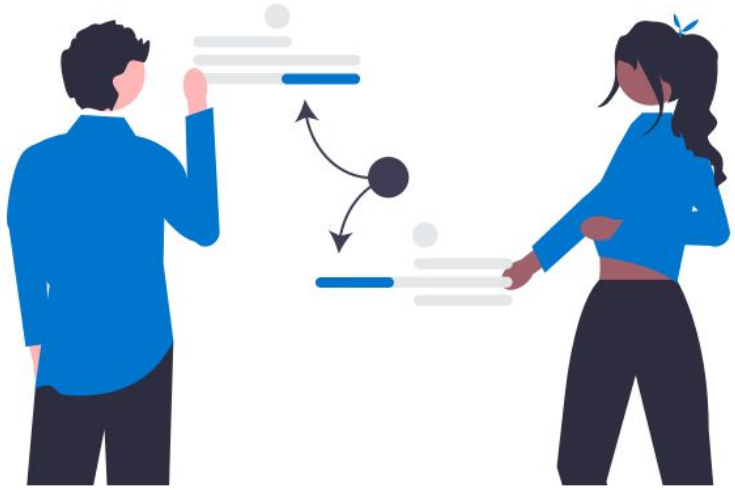
- *Can you look at my resume?*
- *Can you look at my portfolio?*
- *Should I go get a graduate degree?*
- *Should I go find volunteer work?*
- *Should I go learn [skill]?*
- *How should I answer this interview question?*
- ...

You are trying to meet *some* external standards.

Let’s recap how you might have ended up here…

Having challenges in your job search...

What you may be told as “the problem”



- *You don’t have a Master’s/PhD degree*
- *You don’t have any “industry” experience*
- *You haven’t done research in the “tech” space*
- *You don’t understand Agile / fast-paced work*
- *You don’t have 3 years of experience*
- *You don’t have “real world” projects*
- *You are transitioning from some obscure field so your past experiences are not relevant*
- *…*

What you may be told as “the solution”

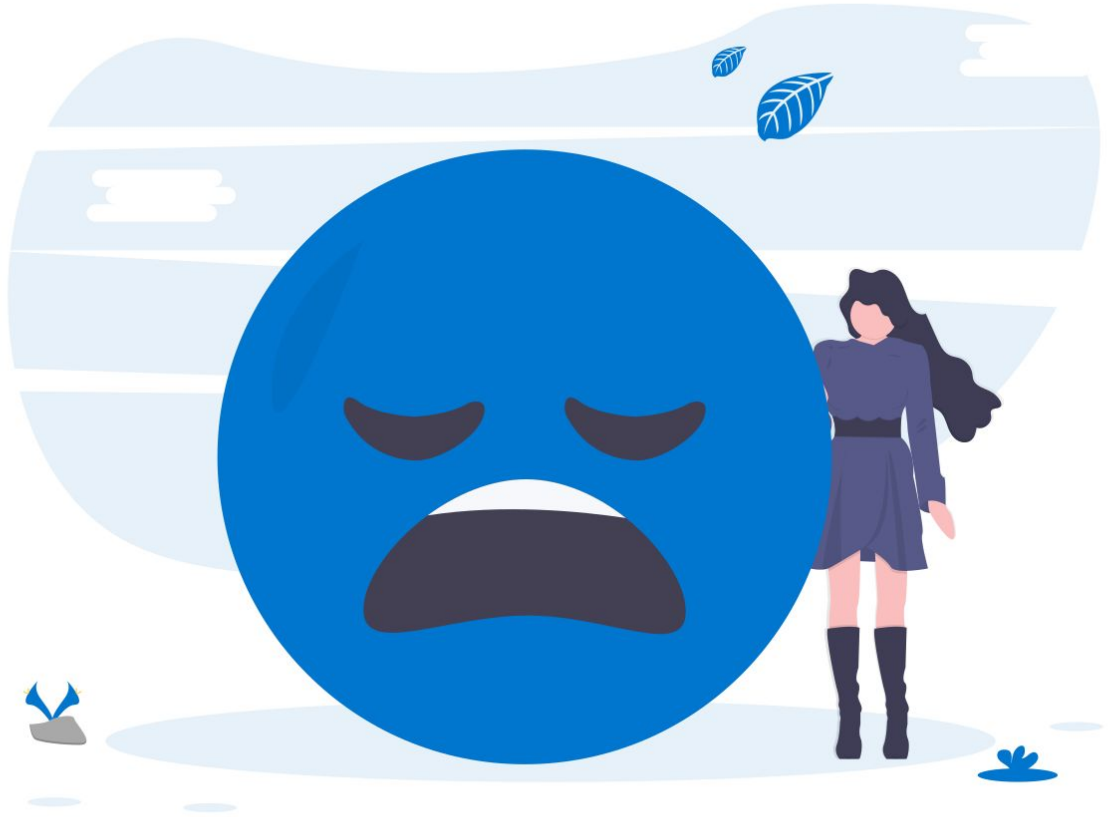
Lower your expectations

- *Start with entry-level / contractor / intern roles*
- *Apply to generalist roles*

Get better

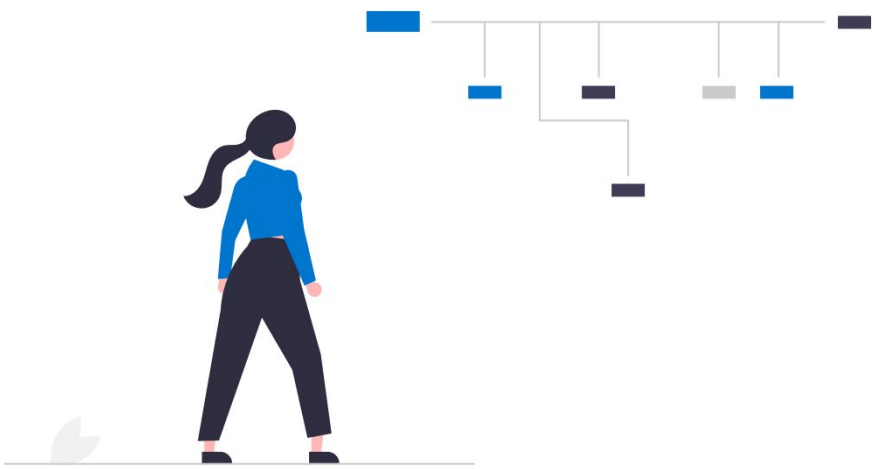
- *Build more project experience through volunteering / doing pro-bono work*
- *Pick up more skills (Figma, Statistics, SQL…)*
- *Learn from books / conferences / talks*
- *…*

You are stressed, anxious, and insecure



REALITY CHECK

Not all improvements are realistic



Realistic

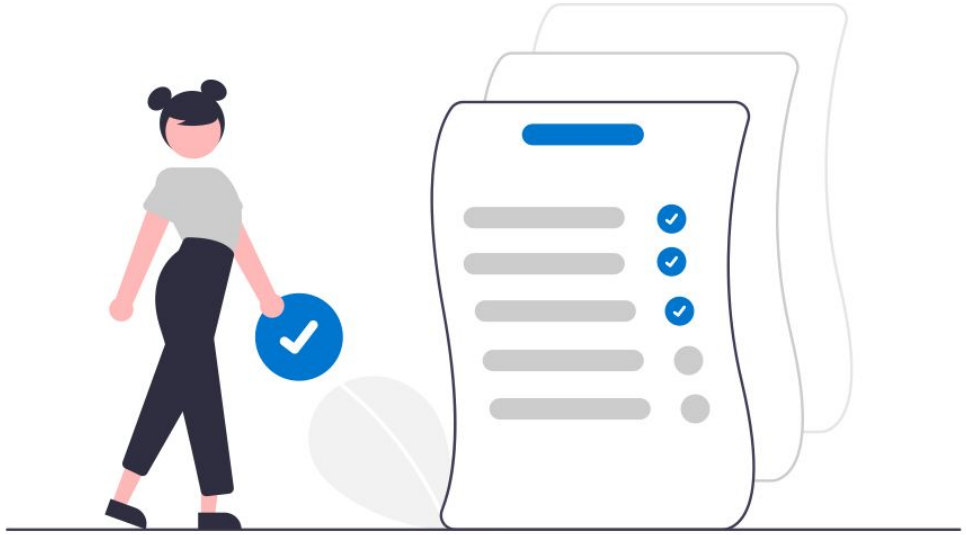
- *Get more practice with certain research methods*
- *Learn about product development and what it's like to work with Product Managers/Engineers*
- *Learn how to plan and execute better research through books/talks*

Not Realistic

- *Suddenly get 3 years of work experience*
- *Master several new skills in a short amount of time*

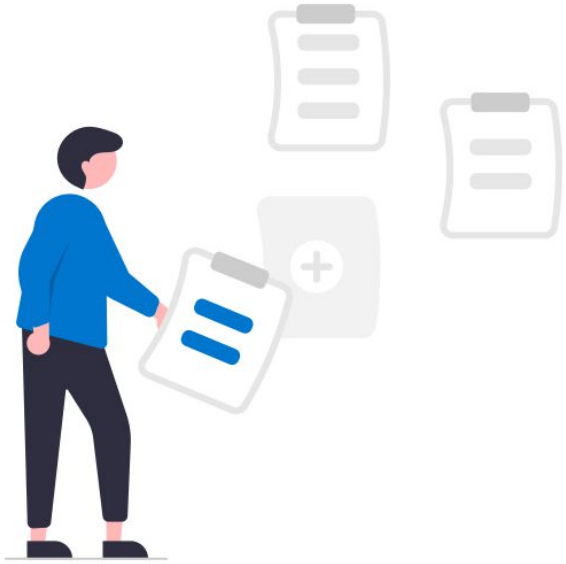
You don’t automatically get a job when you score 100% on the job requirements.

This is not an exam.



Companies don’t always know what to look for

Copy-pasted job descriptions



Value of researchers not commonly understood

Reading on how good job descriptions can be written:
https://playbook.uie.com/blog/the-thank-you-note-a-sketching-tool-for-ux-hiring

You may already have some of these qualities

Some job requirements are only proxy measures

3 years of research experience

- *Understand when appropriate research methods should be used*
- *Can independently plan and execute on a project*
- *Can effectively communicate*
- …

“Tech” / “Industry” experience

- *Understand how product development process works*
- *Understand constraints on timeline and budget*
- *Can manage stakeholder expectations*
- …

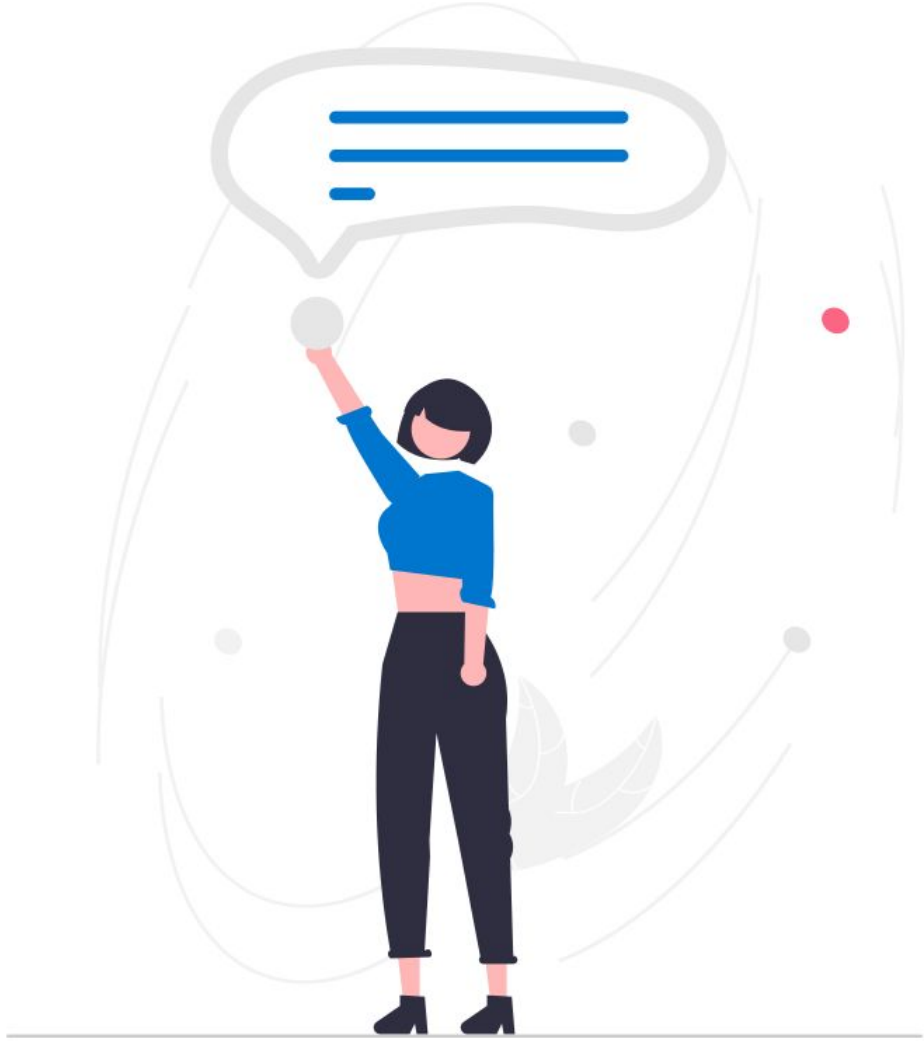
Reading on hiring for comparable experiences::
https://articles.uie.com/ux-hiring-lets-talk-about-comparable-experience/

When you are too focused on checking off boxes from a job description, you end up putting yourself in a box defined by other people.

You can’t stand out if you are in a box.

Perspective shift:

How do I tell a better story about myself?



What’s YOUR story?

Focus on yourself, not external checklists

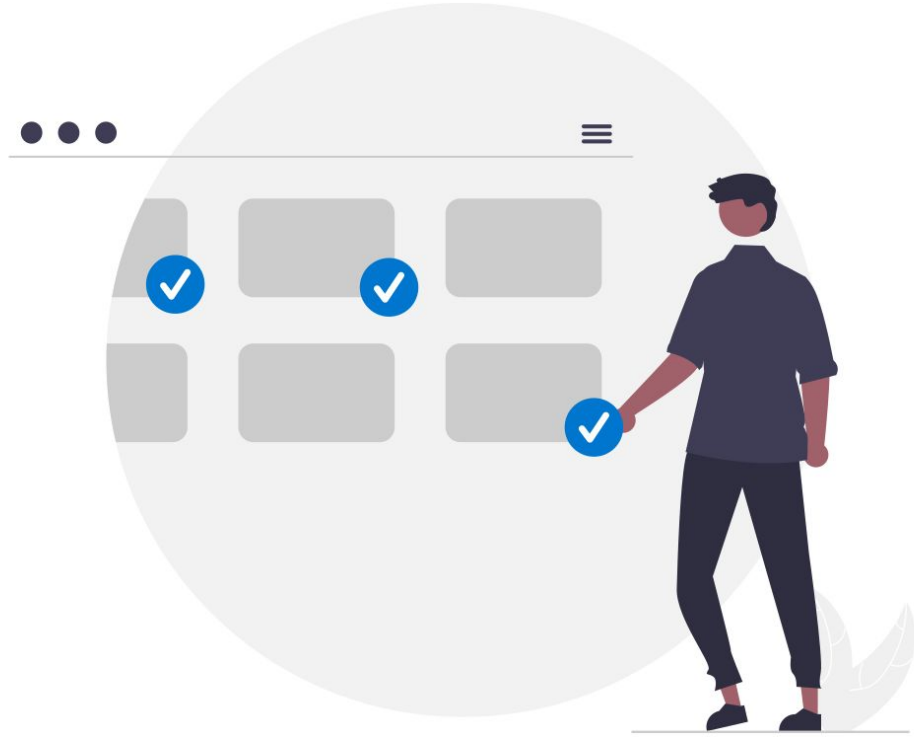
What makes you stand out?

Why are you so great that it should be a no-brainer to hire you?

What value do you bring?

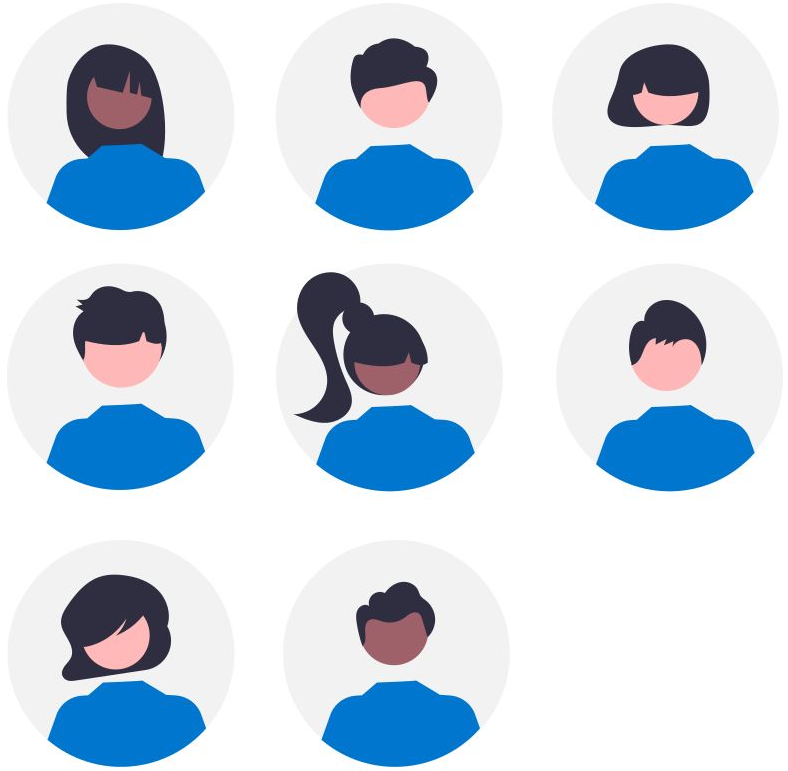
You might be tempted to say...

- *I have experience with conducting research using different types of methods...usability tests, interviews, and surveys...I can design and execute my own research studies...*

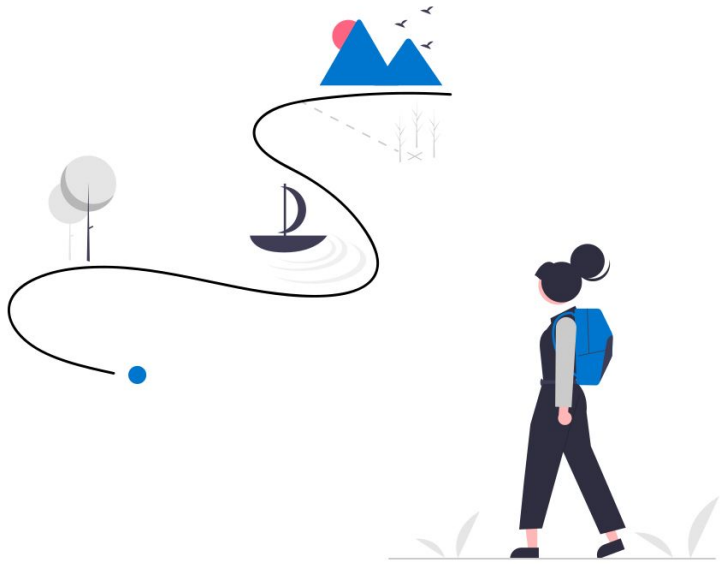


#1 - That is not a story.

#2 - How does this make you stand out?



HOW DO I FIND MY STORY?



You bring more than “research skills”

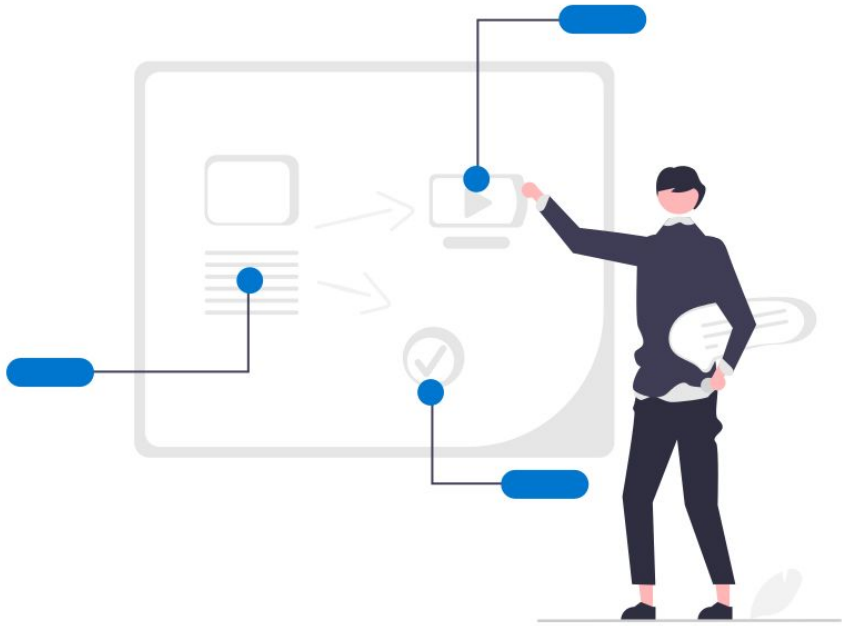
These qualities may not be apparent unless you call them out

If you used to be in academia...

- *You may be really good at identifying the right questions to ask*
- *You may be really good at convincing people to give you money to do research*
- *You may be really good at breaking down complicated topics and making it easily understandable*

You bring more than “research skills”

These qualities may not be apparent unless you call them out

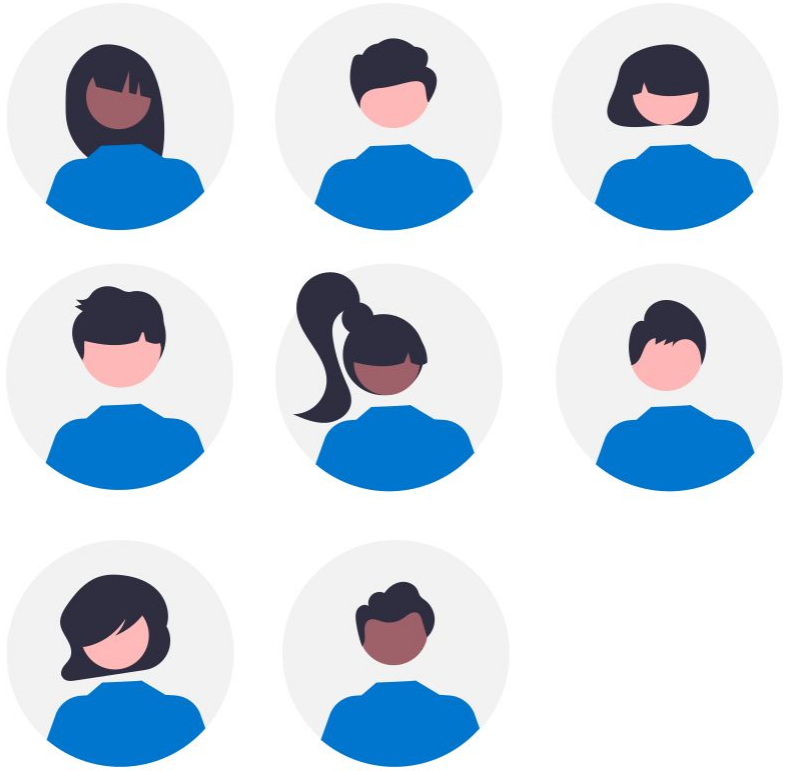


If you used to be in business...

- *You may be really good at succinctly delivering information to business leaders*
- *You may be really good at convincing stakeholders to follow your recommended approach*
- *You may be good at managing stakeholder expectations and speaking in their language*

You bring more than “research skills”

These qualities may not be apparent unless you call them out

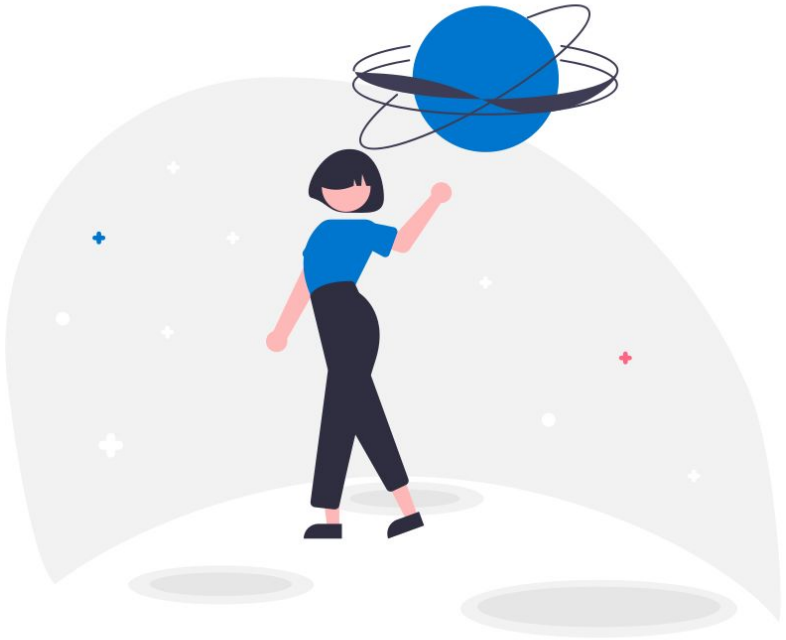


If you used to be in non-profit...

- *You may have experience dealing with sensitive topics and making your participants comfortable share their story with you*
- *You may be really good at finding ways to accomplish things when there are little to no resources*
- *You may be really good at project management*

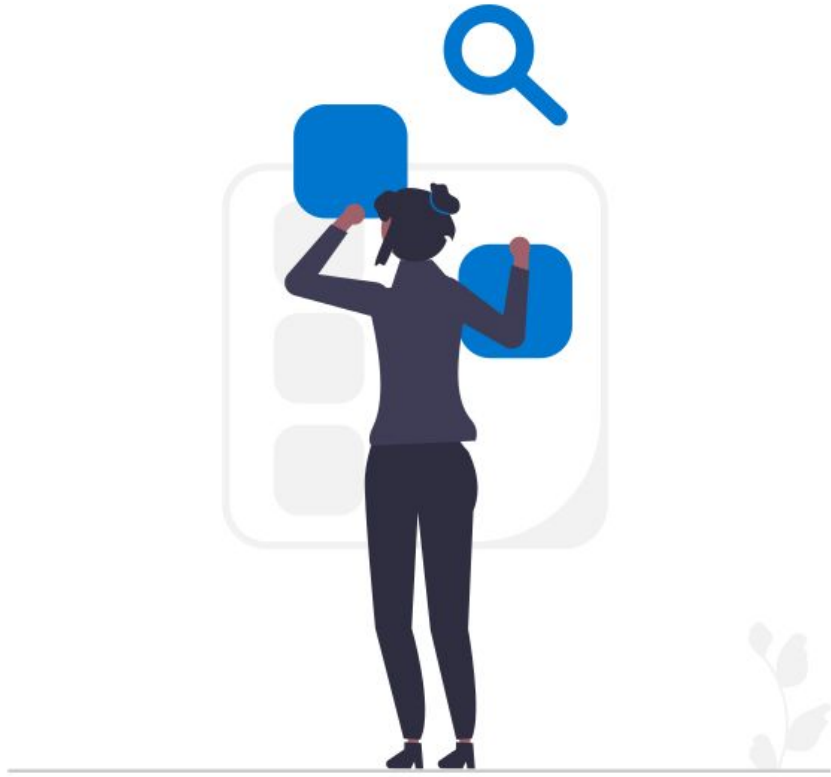
Focus on presenting your strengths and qualities

Benefits of a good story #1: Getting over your insecurities



- *No time wasted on chasing some arbitrary requirements that you will never meet in a reasonable timeframe*
- *Feel more comfortable with your own abilities and will come off as more confident when you speak*
- *Have a **narrative backbone** to go back to AND can stand your ground if you get questioned on your "lack of qualifications"*

Ok *maybe* that helps me get over my imposter syndrome, but how do I prepare my resume / portfolio?



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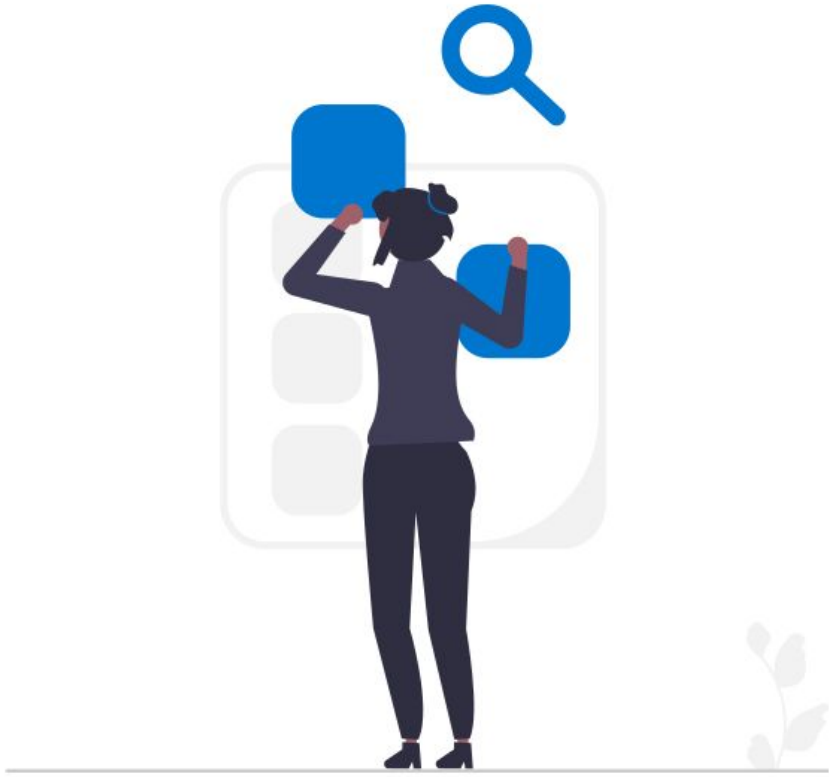


Your resume / portfolio should be telling the same story...

Summarize your story on your resume

Contextualize your previous experiences for the recruiter

Think about who else may be applying...

- *Help recruiters understand why they should keep reading your resume*
- *Help recruiters understand how your past experiences relate*
- *Give recruiters a reason to want to talk to you*

What your portfolio IS NOT about

- *Showing a list of research projects you've completed in the past*
- *Showing how many methods you've used in a single study*
- *Showing how many pieces of findings you were able to gather and synthesize*
- *Following a "template" of how research portfolios should look like*

What your portfolio IS about

- *Who you are*
- *What is YOUR process*
- *Why you made the decisions you made*
- *How you think*
- *How you approach problems*
- *How you deal with challenges*
- *...that happen to be shown through projects*

Portfolio projects should tell stories

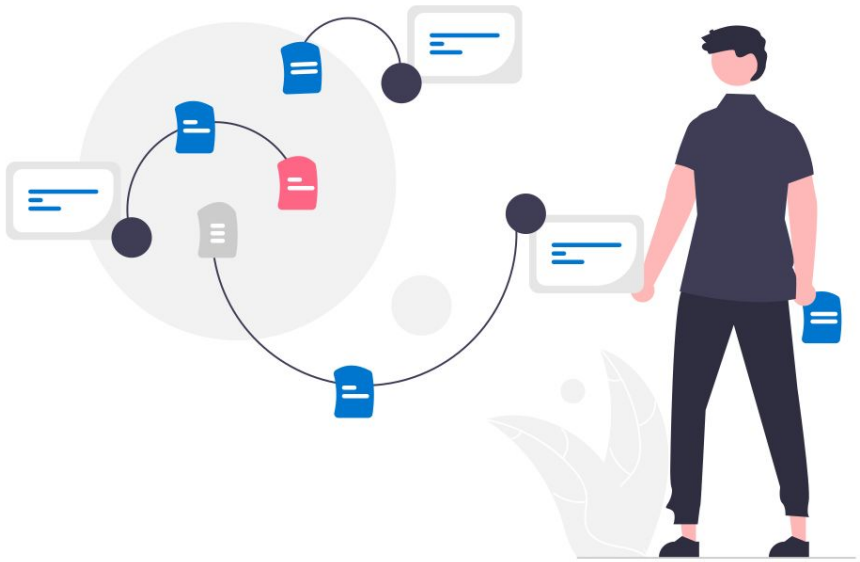
And they don't have to all be "UX projects"

- *What was the problem (and why did it matter)?*
- *What did you do to identify the root cause of the problem?*
    - ***Process***
    - ***Rationale for decision***
- *Challenges you faced and how did you overcome them*
- *Brief results (your portfolio audience is NOT your project stakeholder!)*
- ***Impact (tactical, strategic, interpersonal)***

Just because your bootcamp told you to do portfolio in a certain format, it doesn't mean you have to follow it.

Help people see how you can be a great researcher

Benefits of a good story #2: Contextualizing your past experiences and how they can be leveraged in the new role



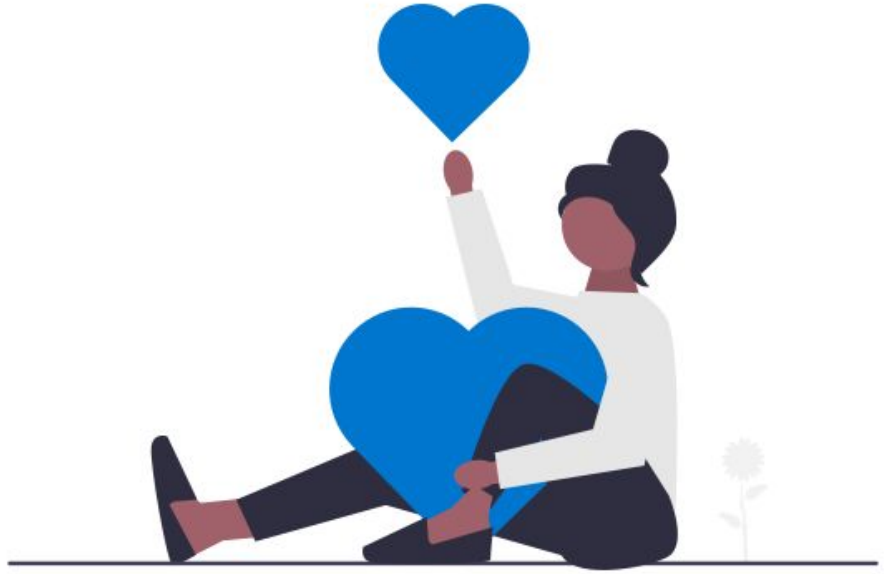
- *Contextualize your past experiences so people don't have to ask "Why the hell is this person even applying?"*
- *Actively communicate how you can transfer your existing skills, as opposed to expecting hiring managers to read your mind*
- *Show (and not tell) that you have storytelling skills*

Make yourself more memorable

Benefits of a good story #3: Standing out from the crowd

- *Help hiring managers picture you working in the environment and dealing with the challenges they face*
- *Be seen as a holistic person with a multitude of experiences that people may want to work with*
- *Emphasize and re-emphasize how you stand out throughout the job search process, which makes you more memorable*

Focus on yourself
Take the time you need
Tell a good story
Walk away if you have to



Thank You!

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