A few tips I wish I had before I met my advisors

Sue Moon
Expert-sourced Wisdom (I)

• “Run way!”
• “I wish I knew my advisor would drive me crazy”
• “Working with one person for five years is a long time”
Before I applied for grad school

• First programmed in Pascal, and then in C
• Used an illegal copy of William Stallings’ Data and Computer Communications (1st Ed.) as textbook
• Developed PC-based X-terminals for 2yrs
• Read and learned about grad programs in hard-copy annual reports
And ...

- Never heard about a thesaurus
- Never had a course on writing
- Never had a course on *technical* writing *in English*
- Can’t remember if I ever met 1:1 with MS advisor for technical discussion
- Never met anyone who knew my to-be advisors in person
When I started grad school

- I had scholarship from Korean government
- I meant to study hard
- I meant to do great research
But ...

- I hadn’t thought much on how
- I should have asked around on how
- This talk is about me telling myself of 20 years ago about how
Tip #1 Articulate Assumptions You Make About Your Advisor and Get Rid of Them
#A1 My advisor is omniscient (I)

- He probably knows
  - I could program decently
  - My spoken English is passable
  - I work most of the time (ahem!) _hard_

- But doesn’t know / can’t remember exactly
  - What languages I could program in
  - What papers I read last week and what I thought of them
  - Where I was stuck in my research the week before
Elevator pitch not only for a Job
Keep him up-to-date!
#A2 My advisor is omniscient (II)

• She knows what research problem is for me
  – She has read and remembers my statement of purpose
  – She knows about funding initiatives
  – She has ideas she would like to work on

• But she doesn’t know if I would actually want to work on it
Expose yourself as much as you can!

- Ask questions on all things technical but you don’t know about or haven’t heard about and answer them
- Try to answer questions your advisor asks. *They ask because they don’t have answers!!*
- Get all colleagues around you involved in this Q&A dialogue
From my personal experience

• Help students pick up methodological approaches to good research
• Leave them with freedom on research topics

Then I go find funding after preliminary results...
“Hey, that’s just one omniscient guy’s opinion.”
#A3 My advisor is a superman!

- He would have read my email sent out at midnight and replied by 8am next morning
- He would work with me on my paper as hard as I
- He could write a recommendation letter in a day
But ...

- You are 1 of N students
- Your paper is 1 of M papers
- He reviews P papers a year
- He teaches Q courses a year
- He attends X committee meetings a week
- He travels Y times a year

Do the math!!! He only has \[
\frac{(365 - 14 - 52 \times 2 - Y \times 5) \times (8 - X/5) - 4 \times P - 3 \times Q \times 16}{N \times M \times 52}
\] hours / week for you.

N=5, M=10, P=20, Q=2, X=5, Y=4      Answer = 0.54
Then ...

• You realize how busy your advisor is
• You become so understanding that you don’t have the heart to ask him for time
Think hard about what you want from him

- News on new research initiatives?
- Feedback on your research progress?
- Opinion on related work?
- Comments on your writing?
Turn every session to self-Q&A

• Instead of “What do you think about XXX?” ask “I think XXX should work because of A, B, and C in decreasing order of importance. So I plan to start with A. What do you think?”
Prioritize what he can do for you

• “I would appreciate feedback on the camera-ready version by this Friday”
• “Your schedule this week looks full, but can you squeeze in a half-hour meeting on Wed afternoon?”
• “The deadline for travel grant application is in two weeks. Thanks!”
#A4 My advisor could sub as an English teacher

ETS TOEFL GRE

You are somewhere here

Done
Get feedback on your writing from all possible sources

• Get feedback from native-speaker friends
  – On any writing with a theme (e.g., emails)

• Take courses on technical writing
  – Technical writing courses
  – On-campus language centers
  – Community college courses
  – Online writing courses
Leave your advisor to be what they are good at: *editor of your work*

- Help you structure a paper
- Check if all relevant related work is accounted for
- Help you with the flow of writing
- Help you choose a venue for publication
  - Slightly different from traditional role of editor because an editor comes from a publisher
#A5 My advisor could sub as a speech coach

You wanna be like

You wanna hire

Instead you torment your poor advisors
Some ideas in decreasing order of adoptability

• Give up on improving your spoken English in a few months
  – Instead, spend time on your slides
  – Script your talk
  – Every punchline you’d like to deliver, use pop-up text boxes

• Try

• Become a chatty person
Tip #2 Find someone with more knowledge on your advisor’s quirks!
Who knows her better than you?
• Not only wonderful people but great advisors
• They knew what I needed when I needed it
• They were almost omniscient
• They were very close to being supermen
• They helped me so much with my writing
• And with my presentations
• And I had friends who helped me to decipher their comments
Not all are as lucky as I ....
Neither are some more to come
This talk is for them!
Expert-sourced Wisdom (II)

• “It should be interesting to your students.”
• “I’d give a different talk if the audience is mostly Asian.”
• “Have a meeting in a room without a laptop or a phone”
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"My advice is to learn all the tricks you can while you're young."