1. Simplicity.
Mentors are often experts with intense schedules and overwhelming responsibilities; thus, the last thing they want is to further complicate their lives with a lofty new commitment of a mentee. So, don't show up on their office door asking them to be your formal mentor, because they will run in the opposite direction. If you want to causally build a connection, keep it simple! The role of mentors is to advise/guide/train you, as needed.

- Make every interaction a light exchange, where only one thing is addressed at a time. If it is easy, they will be open to further interactions. Especially in the beginning, don't bombard them with a myriad issues to be solved in a meeting, don't burden them with the weight of figuring out your life for you, don't bring personal drama into the meeting, nor expect them to be your therapists.
- Make your interactions quick, enjoyable, and productive; so that over time, he/she will see that the many small gatherings have accumulated, and helped you progressed professionally, and without requiring much time or effort from him/her. It's about many 'baby steps' that build on each other, and which deepen other over time. The easier the interactions, the more likely they will want to stay invested in this mentor-mentee relationship.

2. Short
Mentors are probably very busy people, you should respect their limited time, so keep it short! To start, request only a brief meeting (e.g. 20-30 minutes), and stick to it! At the 20th minute (fyi, a soft iPhone timer helps), stop and thank your mentor for their time, and leave. That way, next time that you ask to meet with them briefly, they will be open to meeting up again, since they know that you truly abide by the requested limited time. If you are done early, that's fine, close the meeting early and don't drag it out unnecessarily (you don't want their last memory of you to be of a random, tangential conversation). On the other hand, leave it up to them to extend the meetings if they want, and if their time permits.

3. Strategize
Especially for your first meeting, you only have limited time, and you want to make a positive impression to encourage further meetings; so you better be strategic in order to make the most of out it! Create a small agenda as your base for your conversation:

a. Give a brief (1-minute), introductory bio about yourself/background ("I grew up in A, I studied/have a degree in B, I have worked in C and D, and came here to gain experience in E."). That will give them a chance to get to know a little something personal about you. That might also lead them to find a personal link with you (whether it be your hometown, or a similar career trajectory). Also, something you mentioned might peak their interest by which they will remember you. Above all, this will give them a context to whatever you will be inquiring about later. Note: keep this bio general, it is a summary, not a verbal recital of your resume (btw, it’s ok to have your resume on-hand, but don't provide your resume unless they ask for it - keep the gathering casual, this is not an interview).

b. Immediately state your goals for this meeting, as they are probably wondering why you requested this meeting. Also you need to get to the point, as you don't have much time (e.g. "I requested this meeting because I wanted to ask for your thoughts on X since you area an expert in this area/have had a similar path", etc).

c. Dive in! Spend the heart of the meeting asking your key questions and getting his/her thoughts. Stick to few questions (i.e. 3-5, not too many), as you don't have the time, and the discussion might also go off track. You might not get through all your questions in the allocated time, so start with the *key question*. Bring a pad of paper, and take notes.
4. Smart
Show that you are smart and diligent, do your homework, and come to the meeting prepared. Don't waste their time by showing up without focus; show that you are worth them investing their time. Furthermore, mentors will feel as though it was a fruitful meeting if you were organized: you laid out a goal, and by the end, they helped accomplished the mission.

- If you are seeking insight on a particular topic, do some research to be able to ask specific questions about them/the company/their area of expertise. You want to dive right into the topic, and not spend this valuable meeting getting an introduction to the topic.
- If you are seeking their guidance to help you make a decision, then have some options clearly laid out (e.g. "I am torn between X and Y... These are the pros/cons of each", and avoid a vague "I have no idea what to do next.").
- If you they ask you about a subject (i.e. some article, organization or person) that you don't know, be honest and acknowledge not knowing. Do not lie, as they might engage on a conversation on that topic with you on that subject, and being caught lying makes you look foolish and deceitful. Answer in a confident manner, and wisely inquire about this subject as there is a good reason they mentioned it (e.g. "No, I didn't know about X, please tell me more...", "No, I haven't met Y yet, why do you mention them?"). The fact that you came prepared (as demonstrated through other questions in your conversation) already shows that you are savvy. Do not apologize for not knowing, they realize that you are not expected to know everything (that is why you are there, seeking to learn from them). That said, read up on this subject afterwards, you should definitely learn about it next time that you meet with your mentor (if the subject comes up again, there will be no excuse for not knowing second time around).

5. Sincere: sassy or shy.
Be sincere, be yourself. Don't try to be someone that you are not, nor imitate your mentor's personality/ways/path to force a connection (if they are VIP's, they get enough imitation from their fans). Whether you are sassy or shy, just be genuine. In their perspective, you might stand out because you are different; on the other hand, you might stand out because you share something similar. You can't predict what will make you memorable in their eyes, so just be yourself. Ultimately, the chemistry is either there or it isn't, there's nothing that you can do to make that happen, so you should just be natural. Above all, you are engaging in a relationship where there should be trust, so aim to be always honest. Plus, if you are yourself, your mentor will be better able to help guide you on what is best for you.

Your mentor's main role is to advise and/or train you. You might have a 4.0, but you do not know everything. Be sensible and be sensitive to what they say. You might go in to the meeting hoping to hear something, but instead, you will hear the mentor suggesting other alternatives that you might not like, or which you haven't considered. Don't be arrogant and dismissive of this feedback, instead be humble, and LISTEN to what they have to say; mentors are experienced and often know more about the field, the players and the current trends, so there is probably a good reason they are suggesting it. You don't have to agree with everything, but, trust them and take the time to follow-up on what they say or contacts which they give you; it might save you time or open doors for you.

7. Sweet.
Politeness goes a long way, and it really stands out, especially nowadays where manners seem archaic. Be grateful for this opportunity, not only when you enter the meeting ("Thank you for making the time to meet with me."), but also as you say goodbye ("Thank you again, I really appreciate the time and all the great feedback that you gave me today."). Mentors are likely to be more receptive to others if they feel truly appreciated. Plus, a sweet gesture leaves a positive memory, and makes them more likely and open to continuing the exchange.

- If you want to leave them with a good impression, afterwards send them a brief, 2-3 sentences, thank you email or note, highlighting something that stuck with you from the meeting (e.g. "Thank you again, I learned a lot about X...", "I have never considered Y, and I will be following up on it...", etc).
If you had a great conversation on a particular topic, feel free to send them something (e.g. email an recent article) that might link back to something that you both discussed. But not gifts; otherwise, it'll make them feel awkward about meeting up again.

If, after a significant period of time interacting, you are reaching a close to this chapter in your life (e.g. because you are moving to a new job/school/city), it is nice to present them with a thoughtful, but affordable gesture (e.g. a book, a token from your home, a bottle of something they enjoy) to thank them for their time and efforts with you over this period. Aristotle said "the roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet". Such appreciation at the end of a journey often leaves a long lasting, 'sweet taste' to the interaction that was shared.

If you want to maintain the mentor-mentee relationship over distance, it is up to you (not them) to make conscientious efforts to stay in touch (e.g. emails/calls when something pertinent comes to mind, holiday notes). These are small, yet meaningful ways to keep the connection alive throughout time and distance. Any teacher will tell you, it's nice to be remembered and valued. Depending on their comfort level and availability, they might reciprocate. Some relationships can last over time, and some may even lead to friendships or future collaborations. TBD...

8. Sporadic, not stalky.
So how often to meet with someone whom you want to have as a mentor? After that initial meeting, keep the formal meetings sporadic; basically, as needed. Do not stalk them for more meetings, unless there is some follow-up material to discuss. You want every encounter with your mentor to be purposeful and productive; hence, have fewer quality meetings, instead of many unnecessary gatherings. However, if you cross paths casually, by all means greet them, and if time permit, talk briefly. If they see you and ask for you to stop by to catch up, by all means do, and do it shortly after seeing them. Also, if you asked for their thoughts on a decision (e.g. suggestions for a job/graduate school/post-doc), it's courteous to update them with news of your acceptances/your decision, and thank them for helping you in the process. As you share developments in your career over time, your relationship will evolve. In sum, you want your interactions to continue progressing; but as necessary.

We all hope to find a mentor, who will always be on the sidelines, guiding us as we develop professionally. The truth is that you will come across various potential mentors throughout your life (some might be assigned by schools/jobs, some might stem from your own initiative, some will be spontaneous connections which organically evolve). Ultimately, you can only do your part: recognize these positive influences, and make the most of these relationships. However, the rest of the relationship is up to the mentor... if after a few attempts they aren't responding, don't hunt them down, just let them go. The relationship will grow if there is reciprocity, if the mentors feel the chemistry too, if they reach back out to you, if they have the time to nurture the connection, if they aren't overwhelmed by other responsibilities or other life circumstances... Be flexible with whatever time and efforts they can give you, every mentorship relationship is different. Further, be aware that this might change over the years (e.g. it might be less frequent, or it might become an email exchange versus an in-person exchange). Life gets complicated, so don't be upset if they come and go. Like many other relationships in life, not all are meant for the long haul; some mentorships last a short period, some last years. It is OK if your mentors aren't on the sidelines throughout your entire life; remember, it is a team of coaches/teachers over the years that will help you fine-tune your talent.

10. Secret.
Don't be shy about reaching out to someone. You have absolutely nothing to lose, and so much to gain! Also, don't be intimidated by mentors, no matter how famous they are. Here's a secret: many mentors get a high from advising mentees, there is both an emotional reward to "giving back" (especially if they too once benefitted from a mentor when they were younger), and there is an ego boost to be sought after for guidance (some even brag about how many mentees they have!). So if they make time for you and they reciprocate the exchange; then, they too are interested, they want to help, and they want to see you succeed. So go for it, and appreciate the support and guidance for however long it lasts!

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