



NETWORKING: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

To put it simply, **networking is talking to people and sharing information**. We network regularly when we ask friends for their advice or recommendations for search engines, restaurants, auto mechanics, and grocery stores. We are constantly networking for information; it should not be any different when you are looking for a job. What you DO need to be aware of is **every person you come in contact with could potentially lead you to your next job or provide insight as to where you might fit in the marketplace**.

To be an effective networker, it is important to understand yourself, the skills you have and what you want to do next. For people who are unclear as to exactly what job or industry they are interested in, networking is a great way to research potential options. Strategies to do this can include informational interviews, attending career events or perhaps unplanned opportunities.

Being successful networking involves building effective and productive relationships. If you ask people for a job, the conversation stops as soon as they say “no.” Networking is about asking for advice, information and suggestions; if you do this the jobs will follow.

ATTRIBUTES OF A PROFESSIONAL NETWORKER

Honest and Genuine: Be honest about what you are trying to gain from a conversation with a potential contact. If you approach them asking for information, do not ask them about job openings.

E.g. “I am interested in finding a summer internship, but I am wondering if you could provide me with some insight into the rehabilitation industry to help me understand how my skills and experience could fit.”

Informed: Understand who you are in terms of your interests, strengths and motivators.

- **Remember that you do not need to have all the answers when networking.** However, be able to give the person some idea of what you are trying to do and why.
- **Find out information regarding the person you are speaking to, their company and industry.** Perform a Google or LinkedIn search, speak to mutual connections, visit the company website, and read press releases.
- **Being prepared enables you to ask better questions and illustrates your level of professionalism.** People are impressed when they see that you have taken the time to do research.

Practiced: The best way to get more comfortable with networking is by practicing what you are going to say about yourself, what you are looking for and how people can help you.

- **Prepare and practice your career story introduction.** Networking can be intimidating, especially if you are not outgoing by nature. It is normal to be nervous.

Professional: Treating everyone you meet as a source of information is key to being an effective networker.

- **Be willing to talk with people, as every individual has valuable information.**



@MacSSC

Student Success Centre | GH 110 | studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca

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- **Follow up with your contacts and let them know how their advice or referrals helped you.** This reinforces the impression that you are a professional, but it also shows your interest in and commitment to career planning and job searching. People like to know that they have helped; following up allows you to express your appreciation.
- **Keep in touch with your contacts without asking for anything.** By doing so, you will maintain a professional relationship without exploiting your contacts for resources.
- **Networking often involves luck.** Many alumni have mentioned that opportunities often come from, what seem to be, the most unexpected places at the time.

Specific:

- **Time is valuable.** When you are asking for an informational interview you need to be clear on:
 1. **Who you are:** recent graduate, experienced professional looking to make a career change, etc.
 2. **What you are looking for and how they can help:** e.g., advice, industry information, suggestions, so that you can make more informed career decisions and/or be more effective in your job search
 3. **How much time you need:** e.g., 20 minutes.
- When preparing for a social or industry event, think about who will be attending and what information they could provide in terms of your career planning or job search efforts.
- Decide on a question/area that you would like to get some advice or information on and use that as a topic of discussion for the evening. For example, if you see someone who is obviously comfortable at networking events, ask them for their advice on how you can build your skills in this area.

Reciprocal: This is often the most overlooked aspect of networking. To build relationships and to be a skilled networker, look for ways to give back to the people you speak with.

E.g. "Hi Heather, I came across this article and I thought I would pass it along to you. It reminded me of our conversation at the Bay Street Mixer about our shared interest in science fiction movies. Enjoy!"

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. – Maya Angelou



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TIPS ON FINDING PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH:

McMaster Alumni and Partners Network | mcmaster.firsthand.co

Tap into a database of over 500 alumni who have volunteered to have career conversations. Create an account and start connecting!

LinkedIn Alumni Tool

Research career paths to identify where people have worked, who you may know through connections
Go to the LinkedIn Homepage of any Institution | Click 'See all alumni' | Enter your keywords

Engage with Professional Groups on LinkedIn

Every profession and interest area has a Group on LinkedIn. Research the most common and useful groups in your field by checking out others' profiles. Create a list of 5-10 and ask to join. Then start engaging in the conversations and reaching out to members for a career conversation.



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NETWORK USING A CAREER STORY INTRODUCTION

“What are you doing after graduation?” and “What are you up to?” are common questions. A Career Story helps you to provide a succinct and memorable response that can help you to build your network. The idea is to use your Career Story to engage your listener and help them to make sense of what is most important to you.

Goal: Listener will walk away (1) remembering what you are good at, (2) knowing the type of opportunities you are pursuing and (3) with a positive impression of you.

Creating a Career Story

There is no set formula for a Career Story, but these examples and templates might help you develop yours. Keep in mind that you might have several Career Stories: different ones you use for potential employers and recruiters at career fairs and company information sessions, with friends, with current colleagues, etc. Your Career Story is about you, but it makes key information about you **accessible** to each of your different target audiences. Here are some examples of what a Career Story might look like:

SITUATION: Job Fair: I will be graduating in the spring with a major in Gerontology and want to apply my knowledge of health and engagement in a care-based environment. When I job shadowed in a long-term care facility recently, the role and industry were both a great fit with my experience and education. I know your organization is a leader in the area of convalescent care, which I studied extensively in my Fall semester. Can you tell me a bit more about your organization’s training program?

SITUATION: Information Session: I graduated from McMaster in December with an Honours Political Science degree and have been working as an agent for a local real estate firm since that time. I was excited to learn more about your firm’s expertise in real estate law and need for new talent with solid communication and critical thinking skills. My recent experience and education seem to be a great fit for the role. Could you tell me more about your planned expansion?

SITUATION: Informational Interview Opportunity: This is the first meeting of the Canadian Public Relations Society that I’ve attended, and I am gaining so much relevant information. I’m still a student and haven’t started working in the field yet—I want to make sure I’m a good fit for the industry. I enjoy establishing meaningful relationships with people, and I am very involved in my community. I find reciprocity is the best way to foster relationships. Would you have 15 minutes to share some of your insights into the industry later next week? I would love to hear an experienced professional’s perspective on the industry’s change and continuity over the past 10 years.

SITUATION: Recent Completion of Studies: I just received a certificate from McMaster University in non-profit leadership. I am really interested in learning more about this field. My goal is to find an entry level role where I can contribute and develop my skills. In the past, I have demonstrated effective teamwork, leadership and communications skills that I am confident could make great contributions in your industry. I’m interested in finding out how I can best prepare myself for an entry level role.



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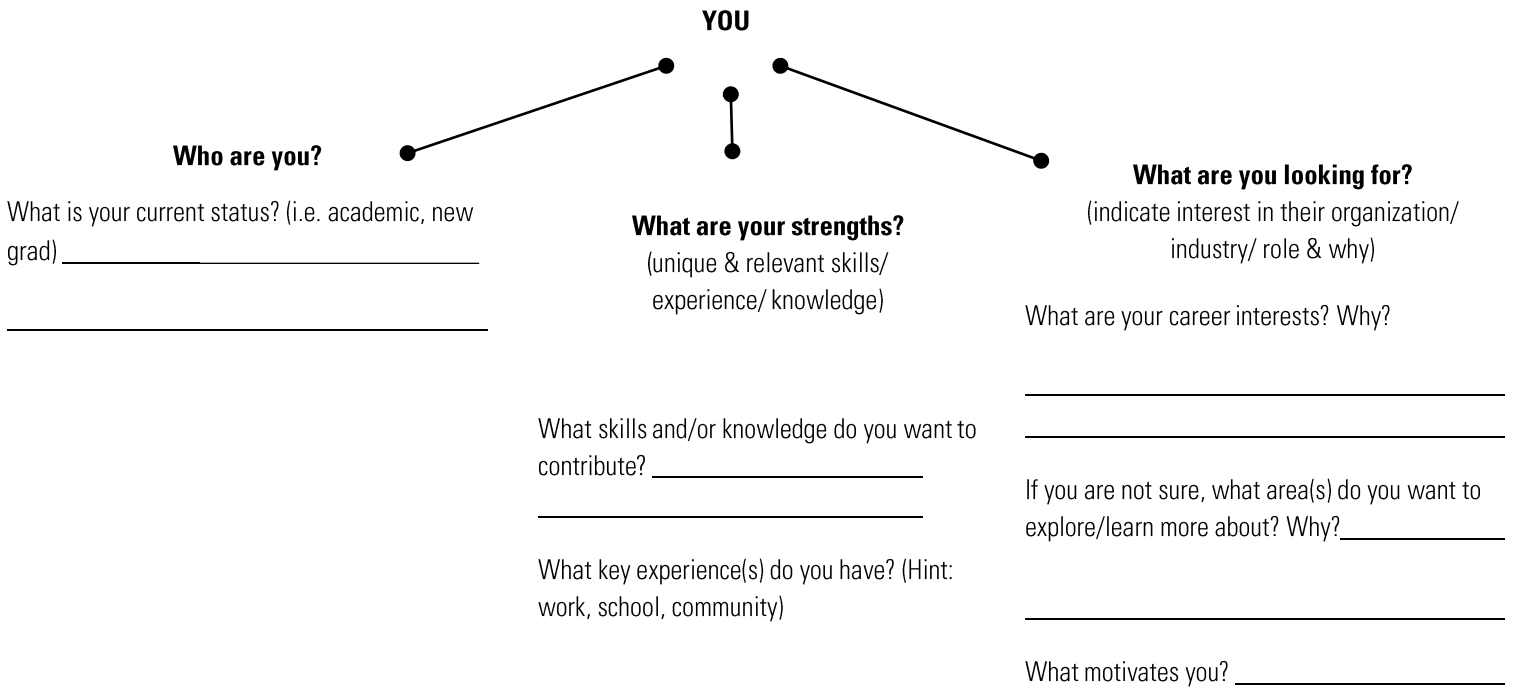
KNOW YOURSELF

It is important to reflect on your previous experiences to identify what makes you unique. In doing so, you will be able to articulate what you are interested in and how you can contribute to those environments.

TIP: Learn to praise your own skills and be confident about what you can offer. It's perfectly alright to promote yourself or market your skills. Be sure to tailor to your audience.

Keep in mind the main components of a career introduction:

Who you are, what contributions can you offer (skills, experience, and/or knowledge), what type of role interests you and/or why you are interested in their organization. What are the **select key points you want to use to start your conversation and peak the listener's interest?** With only 30 seconds or less, choose the points that will make an impact!



Now that you will have more awareness of yourself and what type of information you could share in your Career Story, what are the **select key points** you want to use to start your conversation and peak the listener's interest?

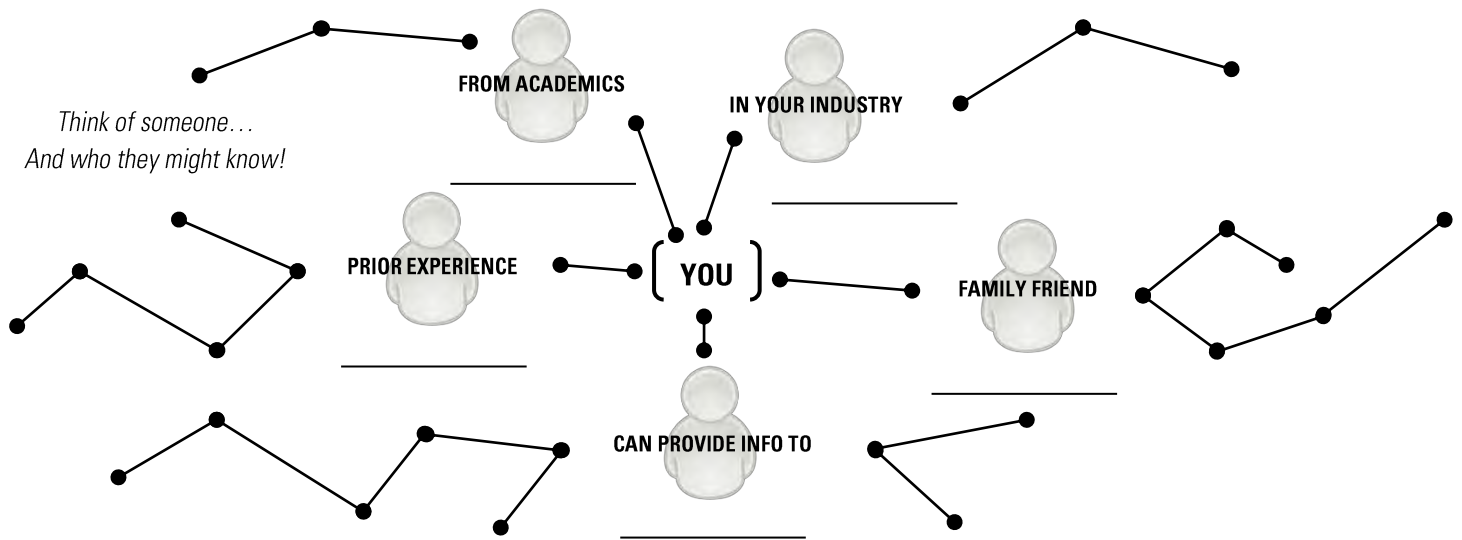
*****Remember to tailor your intro to your audience, make eye contact, have a good handshake and listen effectively.**



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IDENTIFY AND GROW YOUR NETWORK

During your job search, you never know where an industry connection, informational interview or job lead may come from, so never discount anyone as a potential networking contact. Take a moment and complete the following exercise to help you understand who is already in your network.



Name	Contact Info (email, phone, workplace and title)	How they can help	Follow-up items	Date Contacted	Thank you sent	How you can help them
Sean Wu	swu@gmail.com	Worked at CAS	-Let him know that I'm following his advice. -Thank him once I have contacted his referral.	Jan 21/16	✓	This week- Email Stacy about the course she took and her thoughts – Sean mentioned he was interested in a similar training.

Who do you know? Family and friends | Professors / Teachers | Past employers / Colleagues | Community leaders | Volunteers | Coaches / Teammates | Spiritual Community | Past clients | Professional connection, hairstylist, Doctor, Dentist, Lawyer, Accountant, realtors etc. | Others

TIP: Take this chart and make it your own. You may wish to use Excel, a notebook or an app. Find what works best for you!

From a referral: E.g. Good Morning Hans, I was referred to you by Sean Wu, a colleague of yours at CAS. I am recent graduate from McMaster with an interest in social services. I am looking to learn more about the not-for-profit industry and would like to hear more about positive impacts you have made with CAS. Sean gave me an overview of the strategic goals you have implemented in the last two years and I am very intrigued. Would you have 20 minutes to meet and discuss these topics in the next two weeks?



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Ensure you follow up in a timely manner on referrals and thank both the Informational Interviewer AND your referral!

PREPARE FOR CONNECTIONS

Networking Checklist:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| ✓ Updated resume | ✓ Professional attire |
| ✓ Networking cards | ✓ Practiced handshake |
| ✓ SAR Statements | ✓ Confidence |
| ✓ Career Story Introduction | ✓ Enthusiasm |
| ✓ References | |

After assembling your networking checklist, you should be ready to network in both planned and unplanned situations!

The Informational Interview: Effective One-on-One Networking

What is an Informational Interview?

It is a conversation designed to produce information. They provide an opportunity to expand your network and learn more about a company, career path or what you can do with your degree. Whether you are looking to explore career paths, finalize career choices or decide which organizations to apply to, no print or online resource can give you such personalized information.

Keep in mind, they are NOT job interviews!

Direct Benefits of an Informational Interview:

- Gain knowledge of what you could do in a particular occupation
- Develop insights into the skills and attributes needed to be successful
- Learn about exciting new industries and career options
- Learn how other graduates with your degree have used their academic training in a real work setting
- Expand your network professional network

Indirect Benefits of an Informational Interview:

- Get an inside edge on job leads within the organization
- Utilize your expanded network in your job search
- Improve your communication skills



Conducting the Informational Interview:



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Be Professional	Be Prepared	Be Appreciative
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be on time• Turn off your phone• Use your manners• Dress appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research in advance• Have thoughtful questions ready• Take notes• Know the contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen intently• Send a thank you• Follow up on action items• Follow through



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Here are some guidelines to follow when making the initial contact with a potential interviewee:

1. A quick and clear introduction of who you are, how you found the contact, and what you want from them.
2. A brief explanation of why you contacted them as opposed to someone else (e.g. I am very interested in Company X, and read about your involvement with Special Project in the news).
3. Your contact information and a link to your LinkedIn profile or personal web page.
4. Wait until you have scheduled an interview to send them your resume, unless they ask for one before that point.
5. Email is the best first contact because it allows the person to respond at their convenience. If you plan to connect by phone, practice what you want to say, and try calling early in the morning before their day gets busy.

Sample Introduction Email:

Email subject: McMaster Alumni Informational Interview Request

Dear (name of potential interviewee),

I am an alumni from X program at McMaster University. I received your contact information from (referral/ McMaster Alumni and Partners Advisor Network/ LinkedIn/ Professional Association) and I am very interested in speaking with you about your professional experiences to learn about (reason for contacting) issues and trends I should keep in mind as I explore options in (X) area. I was wondering if you would be willing to talk with me at your convenience for 20 minutes in the next couple of weeks?

Thank you very much for your time and I hope that we will have the opportunity to connect in the near future.

Sincerely,

Name

Degree received

Contact information (phone number)

Personalized LinkedIn URL

TIP: Don't be discouraged if people don't respond to your first request- they may be just busy. A friendly follow up a week or so later is appropriate. You are showing your level of commitment and professionalism by following up.



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QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

About them

1. How did you get into this field?
2. How has the field changed since you started?
3. What advice do you have for someone starting out in this work?
4. What motivates you about this work? What excites you most about your job?

About the Job

1. What does a typical day look like in this job?
2. What are the key competencies required to be successful in this line of work?
3. What do you find most challenging?
4. What percentage of your time is spent collaborating with colleagues/ working alone/ working with clients/ traveling/ updating your knowledge?

About the Field of Work

1. What is the employment outlook for this industry?
2. Is there a shortage of skilled people in this field?
3. What are some key industry trends you have noticed?
4. Are there prospects for entrepreneurship in this field?
5. How is technology changing the industry?
6. What do you think the industry will look like in 5 years?

Company/Organization

1. What made you decide to choose this company?
2. What does this company do differently than its competitors?
3. Why do customers choose this company over others?
4. What can you tell me about the corporate culture here?

Advancement

1. What is the background of the people holding the senior positions in this field today?
2. Is there a typical career path for someone in this field?

Fit

1. Considering my background, which competencies should I focus on to fit into this company or profession?
2. What sort of lifestyle is typical in this field? How many hours per week do people generally work? Are there seasonal busy times?
3. Considering all the people you've met in your line of work, what personal attributes are essential for success?
4. Taking into account my skills, education and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?

Skills, Experience and Education

1. Based on my experience, is there anything that I should be doing or taking to make me a successful candidate for a role in this organization or industry?
2. What are the soft skills that are important for a successful candidate to possess?
3. What is the ideal educational path for someone in this position?
4. I am interested in obtaining further training at some point, but want to get involved in this field right away to verify if it's a good fit. Where would I start looking to get some entry-level experience?
5. What companies might hire someone with my background?
6. What do you think of my resume? How can I market myself more effectively?
7. How would you recommend that a new graduate go about getting into this field?
8. What additional education would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
9. If you weren't doing this job, what other work would your skills and experience qualify you for?
10. Given my skills in X, Y and Z, what other types of work do you think I should consider?

More Information

1. What professional journals, organizations or websites do you recommend?
2. Who else would you recommend I speak with? What information might they be able to share with me? May I use your name when I contact them?



PROFESSIONAL



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NETWORKING AT EVENTS

Conversation Starter Ideas:

- Compliment the venue, food, number of attendees.
- Ask if they have ever been to this type of event before: Brings up places of past employment, hometown, reason for attending, etc.
- Mention why you were interested in this event and how you couldn't pass this event up. What interested them in attending?

Fostering Conversations:

- Use the list of *Questions for Informational Interviews* below to keep the conversation flowing. Remember to give 100% of your attention to each person you are talking with.
E.g. "That's really interesting, I'd love to hear more about your experience."

Conversation Ender Ideas:

- It was great to meet you today. Thank you for sharing your experience with me. Would it be okay to connect with you on LinkedIn to stay in touch?
- I was thinking I would attend the Job Search workshop beginning in the next few minutes, have you attended a similar one in the past?

10 TIPS FOR NETWORKING AT EVENTS

1. **Quality over quantity.** It is easy to identify people who are just looking to get their cards handed out. By having meaningful conversations, your networking will be much more effective and have genuine interest in maintaining the relationship.
2. **Listen more than you speak.** Listen carefully and with intent. Try and gather as much great content as you can while showing your interest in every conversation.
3. **Body language speaks.** Show you are confident by walking with your shoulders back and head up. Listen intently with good eye contact and a genuine smile. Read other people's body language to help enter/exit conversations.
4. **Jot down the information** you collected in your phone or on the back of the business card to recall your conversation and send a personal follow-up message to your new connection.
5. Nametags should go on your **left lapel**, and your jacket/resources should be in your **left arm**. This allows for a confident handshake with your right hand and a clear view of your nametag.
6. **Make lateral connections** at events. You might find it more comfortable to approach people in twos, and supporting each other in introductions and conversations.
7. **Do your research.** This is a great way to prove your interest and stand out from the crowd. Research companies, the industry and relate current events to the industry.
8. **Carry tissues and small mints in your pocket.**
9. **Debrief after event.** Consider what worked well during the event, favourite conversation topics and tips to these lists.



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10. **Be honest, informed, practical, practiced and reciprocal** to get the most out of events, expand your comfort zone and build your professional network.



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MANAGING OBSTACLES

It is inevitable that not every pursued networking opportunity will be successful. This is not necessarily a negative outcome, as often it can afford you the opportunity to ask for feedback, and may detach you from an unsupportive connection. Whatever the goals of your networking efforts – to find a job, to gain information, or to establish industry roots – having a positive perspective to manage obstacles is invaluable.

Flexible: If your connection does not lead to the outcome/information you were vying for, try and identify another possibility.

Risk-Taking: Change happens outside of your comfort zone. You have worked hard academically and you owe it to yourself to make positive changes to build your career.

Confident: Keep up the optimism and remind yourself that there are opportunities that you are qualified for. A large part of networking is seeing where you will fit well, so remember that this is all a part of the process.

Persistent: A closed door from one party does not close other doors. Be gracious and learn from this experience and continue to make, foster and build additional connections.

Adapted from "Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities," Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Spring 1999.

FOSTER AND MAINTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP

Best practices for **Thank You Letters:**

- Send a Thank You Letter within 24 hours of your networking connection.
- Recall key takeaways from your conversation.
- Send a 'Contact' request on LinkedIn and be intentional about opportunities to stay in touch, be reciprocal.
- Allows you to emphasize your appreciation and solidify your interest and goals.

Sample Thank You Letter:

Email Subject: Thank You

Hi Craig,

It was a pleasure speaking with you yesterday at the Alumni event about your history with XYZ Inc. I enjoyed hearing about your organization's growth and the challenges that the company has overcome since its founding in 1995.

From our conversation, I am eager to learn more about XYZ Inc., and particularly the development of the new internship program for new grads. It was great to speak with you about your experience in communications and I am looking forward to speaking with you further during our information interview next week. Thank you again for your time and your valuable insights.



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Kind regards,

Name

Degree received

Contact information (phone number)

Personalized LinkedIn URL

*Tip: Always look for ways to build your relationship and keep in touch. **Holidays** are a great time to reconnect.*



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FINAL THOUGHTS

1. Make your primary contacts the friends and colleagues who know and respect your **accomplishments** and really want to help you.
2. Observe common and even uncommon **courtesies**. Ask if the person has time to talk to you. Be flexible about his or her schedule. If possible, try to meet in the persons' office (offer to bring coffee!) so they have their resources handy, but also be prepared to meet outside of work hours. Determine a meeting place that's mutually convenient. Be ready to pick up the cheque and leave a tip. If your contact offers to split the cheque, accept graciously.
3. Move **beyond the superficial**. Handing a business card to someone does not constitute a networking relationship.
4. As you advance in your career, you'll need to develop **reciprocal relationships** within your network. When you're a student or recent grad, it's okay to ask for information without having much to give back right away, but it's also nice to make sure that your contacts know that you will help out if you can.
5. **Don't make unreasonable requests**. You can't expect your contacts to rearrange their schedules for last-minute requests, to respond to requests for job leads instead of information, to provide you with lots of contact, or to pass on your resume to HR or a hiring manager.
6. If someone provides you with contact names, **let them know** when you've followed up with their contacts.
7. **Keep networking** even after you've landed a job: get to know people in other departments, and attend association meetings, events and conferences.
8. Networking is reciprocal, so if someone who helped you asks for support, don't brush them off. **You never know** when you'll need their help again.
9. Remember that it's normal to feel **intimidated** when you start networking. Practice helps, but even practice won't get rid of nerves completely, so just jump in! Eventually, you'll start to feel less nervous and more excited as you start making valuable contacts, finding useful information, and focusing your goals.
10. When you land in a new position, let your contacts know how they can contact you, **thank them** again for their help in clarifying your career goals, and offer your assistance to them if they need it.



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PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING STRATEGY MINI-WORKSHEET

Creating a professional networking strategy can be very beneficial in helping you fulfill your career goals. Write down your goals and start crafting an action plan.

What are my current goals? (To find a job, to find out more about an occupation, etc.)

What information/advice do I need? (On transitioning to the job market, qualifications to pursue)

Who can help me with this?

How may I help them?

Date Contacted:

Result and Follow Up:

NEED HELP WITH NEXT STEPS?

In partnership with the Student Success Centre and Alumni Association, Alumni Career Services offers career support for alumni within 10 years of convocation. From exploring career options to searching for your first job after graduation, we can assist you through our suite of programs and services tailored for alumni. alumni.mcmaster.ca/careers