

A Guide to Networking

Networking is about talking to people, building relationships and sharing information. We are constantly networking for information. We network regularly when we ask people for their advice or recommendations for restaurants, and grocery stores. It is important to be able to articulate your skills, interests, motivations and be curious about learning more about other people, companies, career paths.

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 wondering if you could provide me with some insight into the rehabilitation industry to help me understand how my skills and experience could fit. I am interested in finding a summer internship and what types of roles would be strategic."

Informed

- Remember that you do not need to have all the answers when networking. However, you need to give the person some idea of what you are trying to do and why.
- Make the most of the informational interview by researching in advance the profession you're investigating and the company you're visiting. Identify your goals for the meeting.
- 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.

Prepared

- Prepare and practice your career story introduction, including your interests, strengths and motivators.
- 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.

Professional and Reciprocal

- Send a thoughtful thank you message within 2 business days. Respond with your contacts in a timely manner. This shows your interest in and commitment to career planning and job searching.
- To build relationships, look for ways to give back to the people you speak with. Keep in touch with your contacts without asking for anything. Let them know how their advice or referrals helped you. People like to know that they have helped; following up allows you to build your reputation as someone who is dependable.

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



Introducing Yourself with an Elevator Pitch

1. Understand the purpose of preparing to network

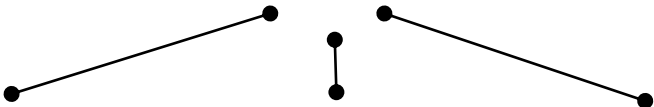
Preparing will help you feel more confident in yourself and make great first impressions. Your objective is to let professionals know:

Who you are | What you do or want to do | Your skills and strengths | Your experiences that relate to your skills and strengths | Why you're contacting them | Your interest in the organization, industry or role

2. Identify what you want to communicate

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 are most relevant to your listener. Then, end with a question to ask them about their organization, role or industry to keep the conversation going.

YOU



Who are you?

What is your current status? (i.e. academic, new grad) _____

What are your strengths?
(unique & relevant skills/
experience/ knowledge)

What skills and/or knowledge do you want to contribute? _____

What key experience(s) do you have? (work, school, community)

What are you looking for?
(indicate interest in their organization/
industry/ role & why)

What are your career interests? Why?

If you are not sure, what area(s) do you want to explore/learn more about? Why? _____

What motivates you? _____

3. Prepare your outline and practice

Use this space to add your outline.



Examples by situation

Here are some more examples to help you develop an elevator pitch for different situations. Clearly communicate your goals so others know how they may help you.

Job fair

I will be graduating in the spring with a double major in Science and Economics, and I want to apply my knowledge of chemistry and business at work. Recently, I job shadowed a pharmaceutical sales rep, and I found that 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 respiratory diseases, which I studied extensively during my thesis research. Can you tell me a bit more about your firm's new graduate training program?

Company information or recruitment session

I graduated from McMaster in 20XX with an Honours English degree, and I've been working as an agent for a local real estate firm since. I'm excited to learn more about your firm's expertise in real estate law and the need for new talent with solid communication and critical thinking skills. My recent experience and educational background seem to be a great fit for the role. Could you tell me a bit more about your planned expansion?

Talking to an employer who isn't hiring

I'm just about to complete my studies, and I know that you probably don't have opportunities in your organization right now. However, I'm wondering if you'd let me buy you a coffee in exchange for 15 minutes of brainstorming. I'm hoping your experience and knowledge of the field can help me generate some new ideas about employers who might benefit from someone with my skills.

Talking with an acquaintance or new contact

I'm thinking about training as a chiropractor. At the moment, I'm researching other professions that allow a lot of one-on-one time with people. I want to work with people who are well, in addition to those who are injured. This summer, I'm hoping for paid or volunteer work to give me an idea of what's right for me. I'm wondering if you might have advice or ideas of anyone I can follow up with about potential opportunities.

At an informational interview

This is the first meeting of the Canadian Public Relations Society that I've attended, and I'm gaining so much relevant information. I'm still a student, and I 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'm very involved in my community. Do you have 15 minutes to share some of your industry insights in the next few weeks? I would love to get an experienced professional's perspective on the industry's change and continuity over the past 10 years.



Identify and Build 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. 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/XX	✓	This week- Email Stacy about the course she took and her thoughts – Sean mentioned he was interested in a similar training.

Brainstorm a list of people you know. Family and friends | Classmates | Professors | Teachers | Past employers / Colleagues | Community leaders | Volunteers | Coaches / Teammates | Spiritual Community...

From a referral: E.g. Good Morning, I was referred to you by Sean Wu, a colleague of yours at CAS. I am recent graduate from McMaster with a strong 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 in the field. 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 at your convenience?

Resources to Build Connections

MacConnect | <https://macconnect.mcmaster.ca>

Tap into a database of 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.



The Informational Interview: Effective One-on-One Networking

An informational interview is a conversation that’s 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 want to explore career paths, finalize career choices or decide which organizations to apply to, an informational interview is often the best way to get started.

Benefits of an Informational Interview

- Expand your professional network and improve your communication skills
- Develop insights into the skills and attributes needed to be successful in an organization, occupation, or industry
- Learn about exciting new industries and career options
- Gain knowledge of what you could do in a particular occupation
- Learn how other graduates with your degree have used their academic training in a real work setting
- Get an inside edge on job leads within the organization

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

Setting Up Informational Interviews

When you request a meeting, consider using email or LinkedIn. When you reach out:

- Explain who you are (student or recent graduate) and that you’re asking for help: People like helping others, so consider a phrase like, “I’d love your help,” to increase the chances of a positive response.
- Be clear: Make a specific request, tell them what you are looking for (advice, industry information, suggestions to make more informed career decisions), how much time you’re requesting (20-30 minutes), and in what format (virtual, phone, in-person).
- Show your enthusiasm: Explain why you want to meet this person, highlighting your admiration for their career or work, your passion for a specific industry, or make note of a shared interest or connection.
- Be very flexible: Acknowledge their busy schedule and express appreciation for even a short meeting.
- Avoid seeming like you’re only looking for a job: Focus on learning about their career and/ or industry. The goal is obtaining advice, information and building rapport. You can let them know you are looking, though be clear about your purpose of the meeting.
- Create an email signature that includes, your name, degree name, phone number, LinkedIn URL.
- 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. Response rates vary greatly.



If you ask people for a job, the conversation stops as soon as they say “no.” Networking is about asking for advice and information; if you do this, the jobs will follow, as will your professional network.

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/ MacConnect/ LinkedIn/ Professional Association). I was really interested to learn about your career accomplishments in the ACB area as they align very closely with my own aspirations. 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 (area).

I was wondering if you may be willing to talk with me at your convenience for 20 minutes in the next couple of weeks? I recognize your role is demanding and I can be flexible around your schedule.

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 / Career Area

Contact information (phone number)

Personalized LinkedIn URL



Questions to Ask

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?

About the industry

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

About the 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?

Culture

1. What sort of lifestyle is typical in this field? How many hours per week do people generally work? Are there seasonal busy times?

Skills, experience and education

1. Based on my experience, do you have any suggestions about further training and/or experiences that could increase my candidacy for a role in ()?
2. What are the soft skills that are important for a successful candidate to possess in this occupation?
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. Taking into account my skills, education and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?
6. Are you familiar with which companies might hire someone with my background?
7. Would you feel comfortable giving me feedback on my resume? How can I market myself more effectively?
8. How would you recommend that a new graduate go about getting into 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, is there other types of work that you may think I should consider?

More information

1. What professional journals, organizations or websites do you recommend?
2. Note: This question depends on established rapport. Can often be a good follow up questions, after you have followed up with a thank you and update of how you took action on their suggestions

Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with? What information might they be able to share with me? May I use your name when I contact them?



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, reason for attending, which can be helpful conversation starters.
- 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 to Ask 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?

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 and interest.
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. Write 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 also 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 and what you would do differently.
10. Be honest, informed, practiced and curious to get the most out of events, expand your comfort zone and build your professional network.



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.

Curiosity: Wonder about unexpected opportunities with every conversation and each event.

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

Foster and Maintain the Relationship

Thank You Letters

- Send a Thank You Letter within 24 hours of your networking connection.
- Recall key takeaways from your conversation.
- Send a request on LinkedIn with a personalized note.
- Be intentional about opportunities to stay in touch and 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 recently.

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.



Kind regards,

Name

Degree received

Contact information (phone number)

Personalized LinkedIn URL

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 with scheduling. Determine a meeting place that's mutually convenient, or online.
3. Always look for ways to build your relationship and keep in touch. Holidays are a great time to reconnect.
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 contacts, or to pass on your resume to HR or a hiring manager. Focus on rapport.
6. If someone provides you with contact names, let them know when you've followed up with their contacts and how the conversation went.
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.
9. Remember that it's natural to feel intimidated when you start networking. Practice helps, but even practice won't get rid of nerves completely, so just get started! 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.



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 Support?

In partnership with the Student Success Centre and Alumni Association, Alumni Career Services offers career support for alumni within 5 years of graduation. 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.

<https://alumni-careerservices.mcmaster.ca/>

