

Networking/Informational Interviewing

GOALS

Networking is about relationship building. In all careers, people develop groups of contacts with whom they share information and resources in ways that are mutually productive. The relationships that people develop in their networks evolve over time and can last for decades.

Professional networks don't just happen; they are created. Whether you're looking for an internship, a summer job, or your first full-time position after graduation, you need to connect with people who can advise you on your search and help you access opportunities. Eventually, you will be in a position to return the favor or to pass it on to the next generation of young people.

STEP 1: FIND POTENTIAL CONTACTS

- **BRUnet** – Brown's online career network at alumni.brown.edu is searchable by industry, organization, geographic location and more.
- **3 F's** – Ask family, faculty, and friends for the names of people you might approach
- **Former/current supervisors** – Even those working in unrelated fields may know someone
- **Online** – LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter
- **High School** – Look into alumni databases, and talk to coaches, teachers, and counselors

STEP 2: ORGANIZE YOUR CONTACTS

- **Identify 3-5 interest areas** – Visit brown.edu/careerlab/advising to schedule an appointment with a CareerLAB advisor for help with this.
- **Create Spreadsheet** – Each column represents an interest area. For each column, list the professional contacts. Include their contact information and their relationship to you
- **Follow-up** – Once you've communicated with a contact, make notes about next steps.

STEP 3: MAKE INITIAL CONTACT

Introductory phone call or email – The goal of this message is to schedule an informational interview with your contact. Your message should focus on your interest in the work of the contact and it must be brief.

Sample Email

Subject: Career Inquiry from a Brown Student

Dear Ms. Jones: Professor Smith at Brown University suggested I contact you to discuss your work as a magazine editor. I am interested in editing as a possible career field and would like to learn more about the nature of the work. Are you available for a phone conversation to discuss your professional experience with me? Tuesdays and Thursdays after 3pm are best for me, but I am flexible and almost any time would work. I hope to hear from you soon.

*Best regards,
Ima Student*

STEP 4: HAVE THE CONVERSATION

- **Generate questions** – Once you've scheduled a phone or in-person informational interview, plan ahead. What questions will you ask? In what sequence? See the reverse side of this sheet for sample questions.
- **Begin and end with gratitude** – Etiquette counts! Begin and end by thanking your contact for making time to speak with you. Reiterate your interest in the field and let them know they have been helpful.
- **Wear a reporter's hat** – Think of yourself as a BDH reporter writing a profile on your contact. Your job is to ask questions and to listen. The interview is not about you—it is about your contact.
- **It's not about you** – Many contacts will ask you questions about your education, background, and other experiences. Any information you share about yourself should be brief and to the point. Get back to your questions quickly.

Sample Questions

Career path

- ◆ How did you select this career? What was your first job?
- ◆ Are there alternate routes to the same career/job?
- ◆ What are the levels or steps in this career?
- ◆ What do you like most about your work? What do you find most challenging?

Daily activities & work culture

- ◆ What is your typical day like? Is there a typical work schedule?
- ◆ Is overtime, flextime, part-time, job-sharing, travel required or possible?
- ◆ What is your work environment like? Casual or formal? Fast-paced or relaxed? Team-oriented or independent?
- ◆ What types of people thrive in this environment/career?
- ◆ How well can career and family responsibilities be managed in this field?

Entry-level positions

- ◆ What type of training is provided?
- ◆ What is the typical salary range?
- ◆ How much autonomy is there?

Education/training/experience necessary

- ◆ What background, skills, or experiences are necessary?
- ◆ Are there particular courses I should take? Does a particular concentration / major make a difference?
- ◆ Is a graduate degree necessary for an entry-level position? For advancement within the field?
- ◆ Is an internship advisable? What recommendations do you have for such internships?
- ◆ Are there gaps in my resume that need to be filled?

I want to learn more

- ◆ Can you recommend someone else whom I might talk to?
- ◆ What professional organizations are active and helpful to students?
- ◆ Are there journals, magazines, or websites that you recommend I read?
- ◆ What question haven't I asked you that I should be thinking about?
- ◆ What is the best career advice you have ever received?
- ◆ Do you have any more advice or suggestions for me?

Closing

Ask for job/internship search advice – Never ask your contacts if they are hiring, which can be annoying. It's more effective to ask for their general advice on your search. Example:

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today. Our conversation has been very helpful. I am still looking for a job (or internship) in this field and am wondering if you have any suggestions or advice for me.

STEP 5: FOLLOW UP

- **Send a thank you note** – An email is fine, although a mailed note handwritten on stationery is still the gold standard. Whatever the form, write 4-6 sentences in which you:
 - reiterate your gratitude
 - mention something specific from the conversation (“*I especially enjoyed hearing about your trip to Brazil!*”)
 - confirm that you will follow up on the contact's suggestions
- **Pursue leads** – Follow up on your contact's suggestions, whether it is a particular job listing, an organization to check out, or a specific person in the field. The key is to follow up as quickly as possible.
- **Update spreadsheet** – Enter a few notes about the conversation. Include suggestions for follow up: *Told me to contact her again in 6 weeks.*
- **Invite to connect via LinkedIn** – Use the invite to thank them again for taking the time to speak with you.