



NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Statistics make it clear □ only about 15% of the jobs available are advertised through traditional means such as newspapers and the Internet. The remaining 85% are filled through some sort of direct contact with a hiring official. That is, 85% of the jobs are filled through networking and informational interviewing. It is imperative that job seekers develop comfort, confidence, and skill in approaching others for information about their career options and job search strategies.

What is Networking?

Put simply, networking is connecting with people you know □ and people that you happen to meet □ and letting them know that you are looking for career and/or job information. Anyone you know can be a member of your network including:

Immediate family members

Extended Family Members

Teachers/Faculty

Friends who are working

Friends □ parents, spouses

Your religious community

Neighbors

Your health care professionals

Previous supervisors

People at your gym

Clerks at stores you frequent

Other people you trust

□ and other people who know a lot of influential people, including:

Local news reporters

Real estate agents

Local politicians

Professional association members

Golf club pros

Chamber of Commerce staff

Career counselors

Insurance agents

Restaurant owners

Effective networking is not just walking up to someone and saying, □ please tell me who's hiring and where I can find a job. □ Effective networking requires you to have a well-thought out strategy, including a brief introduction of who you are and what you are looking for. Consider this introduction to be your elevator speech □ one that you could give to a total stranger with whom you happen to share an elevator ride and at the end of the ride allows that person to know something about you. In essence, it is your commercial.

Here's an example:

COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE NETWORKING COMMERCIAL	EXAMPLE
<p>1. Here's who I am.</p> <p>2. Here's what I want to do.</p> <p>3. Here's the benefit to you.</p> <p>4. Here's what I'd like to ask of you.</p>	<p><i>Hello, my name is George Atwell. I am a computer programmer with several years of work and education experience and a degree in Computer Information Technology. I am looking for an opportunity to work full-time for a company with a commitment to technology. I have demonstrated skills in creative problem solving, writing computer programs, and using pre-designed software to create specific applications. Some of my accomplishments include passing my MOUS certification the first time with 100% accuracy and developing an Access application for tracking customers that reduced staff hours needed for a variety of tasks. I would like to ask your support in exploring all my options. Do you know of any openings within your organization for a person with my skills and background? Can you suggest anyone else for me to speak to about this?</i></p>

Networking is a term and a practice that is often done incorrectly and unprofessionally, which leads to making a very poor first impression on someone who might be able to help you out. Prepare in advance but at the same time, let it happen naturally. Just be prepared to take advantage of every interaction with others and every appropriate opportunity to enlist their assistance.

One last tip effective networking is a two-way street. In addition to asking for something, you need to be prepared to give something back. This might include sharing a copy of a news article that is relevant to a prior conversation you had with one of your contacts or sharing some information you learned about the industry from one of your other contacts. It also includes being willing to help fellow job seekers by sharing leads and lessons learned. You get what you give! Helping others creates opportunities for them to help you.

Think for a moment. Who might serve as networking contacts for you?

	Name	Title	Company	Address	Phone	Email
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						

What is Informational Interviewing?

An information interview is more formal than simple networking. It is a structured meeting through which a student or other job seeker gathers information from a professional about a career field, an occupation or an organization. This information can be used to help make a decision about a major or career or to help find out about job openings and qualifications required in particular fields. An Informational Interview is NOT the same as an employment interview and is not intended to get you a job □ it is about finding information that can help you make critical career decisions and effectively prepare for future employment interviews.

How Do I Begin?

- **Interview a friend, relative, faculty member, coworker (current or former) or member of an organization to which you belong.** Some persons in your circle are likely to have information about the career field you are investigating and know someone to whom they can refer you.
- **Let your fingers do the walking.** Use the phone book to identify organizations that are in the field that interests you. While it is best to speak directly to a person with kind of job that most interests you is best, talking to someone in the Human Resources is also a possibility. That person may be able to direct you to the most appropriate contact.

How Do I Arrange My Interviews?

Most students arrange their interviews by phone or email. Others prefer to send an introductory letter and follow it with a phone call. People who grant informational interviews are generally willing to share 20-30 minutes of their time to share their expertise and perspective. Please be flexible in your scheduling, and always ask your contact for his/her most convenient time to talk. Remember to prepare in advance a script of what you are going to say and what you are going to want as a result of your contact.

How Do I Prepare for The Interview? What Questions Should I Ask?

Determine which of the purposes below relate to your needs and note the preparation tips and sample questions:

Purpose	Preparation Tips	Possible Questions
Exploration: To answer questions you may have about a specific career field and/or positions that are typically available in that field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn a little about the person's field and organization through resources in the Career Library or on the Internet.• Develop a list of questions or "points to remember" that will help keep you on	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe your major activities during a typical work week.• What skills, abilities and personal qualities do you find most important in your work?• How did you enter this field? What preparation did you have (classes, activities, experience)?• What academic major would you recommend as preparation for your field? Are there specific courses you would recommend? What types of experience, paid or unpaid, would you recommend as preparation for this type of work?• What do you like most about your job?• What do you see as disadvantages to working in your type of job?

	<p>track during the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a résumé is optional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your type of work affect lifestyle (number of hours and flexibility of schedule; formality of dress; vacation)? • How rapidly is this career field growing? How would you describe future prospects in the field? • What are the trends in this career field? What are the implications of these trends for someone trying to enter the field? • What are entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level salary ranges in this field? • Into what kinds of related work do persons in your field sometimes change? • Do you recommend any professional associations for this field? • Could you suggest the names of other persons who might further expand my knowledge of this career field?
<p>Getting Ready: To answer questions you may have questions on issues in the field and on improving your qualifications and résumé.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a résumé to the interview. • Use knowledge you have gained from reading and talking with others about the career field and organization to ask informed questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My reading (or research, or other sources) indicates that (name the issue, trend, concern) is an issue in this field. How is this issue affecting the work in this organization? • What do you see as other significant issues (trends, concerns) in this field, and how do you see them affecting your work? • How well suited is my background for this field? Is there any critical education or experience missing? • For what positions should I realistically apply? Can you suggest other related fields that might be logical for me to explore? • How well does my résumé work for this field? How could I improve it? • What could I do to improve my qualifications for positions in this field? • Could you suggest the names of other persons in this career field with whom I might talk?
<p>Job Hunting: To answer questions you may have about job hunting strategies and upcoming job openings.</p>	<p><i>Same as for Getting Ready</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do people at my level find out about jobs (internships, co-op jobs, full-time permanent positions, etc.) in your field? • Can you suggest particular sources (published listings, employment agencies, executive recruiters, etc.)? • What advice do you have for the person job hunting (or seeking career-related experience) in this field? • Please tell me more about the organizational structure and management style of this organization and how it compares to other organizations. • What types of formal or on-the-job training does the organization provide? • Does the organization offer tuition reimbursement? • What advice do you have for applying at this organization? • What other organizations would you suggest I contact about openings? Could you recommend particular persons for me to contact?

Do I Thank My Contact After the Interview?

Most definitely, just as you would after an employment interview. Within two to three days of the interview, send a brief thank you letter. This letter can be handwritten or word-processed (but be sure it is free of errors). You might want to call attention to some particular information that you found helpful. An email thank you is acceptable; however, a letter is preferable.

Plan to stay in touch with the persons who have helped you. Keep them informed of your progress and, as you begin job hunting, inquire about new referrals and job leads. Share your success as you make career decisions and land that professional job. Your contacts take pride in helping you achieve success

A Few Additional Reminders:

- Dress in the most professional attire that your wardrobe allows. The closer you are to interviewing for a job, the more critical professional dress becomes.
- Arrive on time. And if you ask for 20-30 minutes of a person's time, stick to the limit.
- If an emergency or unexpected problem arises which prevents your going, call the person immediately.
- Refer, as needed to your list of questions during the interview.
- Take few notes during the interview. Concentrate rather on listening carefully and attentively.
- Talking with people doesn't have to be a formal process or one you practice only when job hunting. Chat with people casually about their jobs on a daily basis. Curiosity can open many doors!
- Avoid impressions about an area of work or a particular organization based solely on whether the person being interviewed was likeable or the surroundings were attractive.
- Enjoy the experience! Since you are the interviewer, you do not have the same pressures as in a job interview. At the same time, the experience helps you develop your interviewing skills-firm handshake, good eye contact, relaxed but erect posture, clear speaking, careful listening.

Adapted from *careers.gmu.edu*