Networking is the process of discovering new connections and using existing ones between professionals. This term also implies moving beyond your immediate network and tapping into other people’s networks, which might be far-removed from your own. Everyone knows people who work in various professions, and thus already has a network. Networks can often stem from friendships or business relationships.

Networking is a planned process. In formal and informal settings, you will interact with and become known to people who can provide information about the world of work, job openings, personal contacts, and employers who are hiring. Networking is about talking with people and obtaining referrals so that every contact you make is based on a referral from a person you know on some level. You may feel a bit awkward asking for help this way in the beginning; it takes skill and practice to network effectively. Networking can be very helpful in uncovering job opportunities that are not advertised to the public, which may constitute over 80% of jobs.

The fact is—direct one-to-one contact with people, preferably face to face, is one of the most effective ways to get a job or internship.

Networking is most effective when it has mutual benefits. You may benefit from networking with alumni because the alumnus may be able to:

- Give you a better understanding about a particular field of work
- Give you a job or internship lead (i.e. potential opening)
- Give you information about a specific job or about a specific employer
- Give you advice on how to apply for a particular position
- Give you referrals of other people to talk to in the field or organization.

Alumni may benefit from talking with you because:

- You can give them an update on what’s happening at their alma mater
- You can give them a chance to share their opinions about their work and field (something that they may rarely get to do)
- You may be a great candidate for their employer and they may be valued for referring you for employment (some employers even provide monetary rewards to employees who refer candidates that become employees).

HOW DO I NETWORK?

TALK ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR GOALS
This does not have to happen in a formal, unnatural setting. Talking about yourself can include updating friends and family about what you have been up to in school and what you hope to do in the future. The more you talk about your skills and interests, what you have done, what you would like to do and where you’d like to do it, the more likely people will begin to see links between themselves and you. They will begin to share information about their own backgrounds and who they know and where they have been.

ASK QUESTIONS!
Most people are flattered if you ask questions about what they do and how they got there, and if you ask for their opinions and advice. Asking others questions can benefit you as well by helping you to better understand the ins-and-outs of a career field or organization. Additionally, the person you’re talking to will usually ask questions about you too, which provides you an excellent opportunity to showcase yourself as a young professional.

PLAN FOR NETWORKING!
Anticipate when you will be in a position to network and plan what you want to ask, and what you want to communicate about yourself and how. For example, it might be appropriate to take resumes to a career fair, but it would be awkward to take resumes to a social or sporting event. If you want to build your network in a particular field or area, one of the most effective strategies for doing so is informational interviewing.

Remember that everyone knows, not only the people in their own field, but also people in other fields and in other geographic locations, so oftentimes people you already know can connect you to other valuable contacts they have.

NEED HELP?
For support on how to network and informational interviews:

- UVA Career Center Open Office Hours Newcomb 170 or 1515 2nd Floor Study Mondays - Fridays from 1-5pm
- Schedule an appointment on Handshake.
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is the process of gathering career information from people who are already working in target occupations, organizations, or geographic locations that interest you. Informational interviews can happen in person, over the phone, or through e-mail. Plan to spend at least 20-60 minutes talking to a professional.

GAIN INFORMATION

The main goal of informational interviewing is to obtain information and advice on career fields, organizations, companies or job search strategies through one-on-one conversations with persons already working in a particular career. Informational interviews are initiated by the student. More specific purposes of informational interviewing include:

- Validating a career choice by investigating the day-to-day experiences of someone working in the field
- Narrowing the list of potential employers, to those who form the most likely market for your qualifications
- Making contacts and obtaining current information in fields that interest you
- Getting additional leads to jobs and/or informational interviews
- Developing a knowledge of the vocabulary of the field
- Gathering information that will make a positive impression on potential employers in a cover letter or a job interview
- Building confidence in your ability to discuss your career interests and goals.

DEVELOP YOUR NETWORK

Who you network with and/or choose to interview is ultimately up to you and your comfort level. However, remember that it is acceptable to contact alumni, even ones you do not personally know, to request an informational interview. Of course, if you have an intermediary connection (a person connected to someone you know), mention the name of the person you know with their permission.

LINKEDIN

career.virginia.edu/linkedin

is another useful database for career exploration and making connections. The University of Virginia Alumni, Students and Friends Group on LinkedIn is another resource for finding out where UVA alumni end up after graduation and beyond. You can also use the “Find Alumni” option (under the “Connections” tab), and even narrow your search by major.

SETTING UP THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

You’ve done your research, and now know who you want to speak with. Congratulations! You are now ready to arrange your informational interview(s). Contact each person you want to interview to ask for a time when you can meet to discuss his/her organization and, in particular, what this person does on the job. Be sure to make it clear that you are interested in gathering information and advice—not a job. Be prepared to explain the kind of information you want. If you feel a bit nervous about arranging your first few “interviews,” here are some ways to overcome your anxiety:

1. Practice what to say before you call or meet in person, perhaps even jotting down the important points and questions you want to mention.
2. Begin your interview process with people who are you are most comfortable talking to, such as family, friends, or previous employers.
3. Practice the process with an organization or in an area where you feel you do not have too much to lose (e.g. talk to someone working in a hobby area of yours).

If your anxiety is compounded by thoughts of wondering why any busy professional would be willing to take time to grant you such an interview, keep in mind that:

- People enjoy helping others—information and advice are free to give—jobs aren’t.
- People enjoy talking about themselves, their ideas, and their opinions.
- People may enjoy a break from their everyday routine.
- Very few people are actually so busy that they don’t have a free 30 minutes during the week.

An example of an initial phone conversation or email might be as follows:

"Mr. Adams, my name is __________. I was given your name by __________. I’m very much interested in advertising, but don’t feel that I have enough current information on the field. I thought that if I could talk to someone knowledgeable in advertising, like you, I would have a clearer picture of the profession. I’ve heard that your department has been doing some very creative things, particularly with your recent radio-TV campaign. Would it be possible for me to get 30 minutes of your time to speak with you on the phone or meet in person so that I could get your personal insights about corporate advertising?"

Note: If he or she cannot see you, ask to talk for a few minutes on the phone or the opportunity to email some questions. Also ask for names of others you might contact in the same career field.

In summary, there are four major strategies in contacting the individual with whom you want to meet. Use whatever approach feels most comfortable and appropriate for you.

1. Write a letter or send an e-mail, and follow it up with a phone call or in-person meeting. (Remember to proofread all your correspondence so that it is error-free and professional.) Introduce yourself, explain your interest in the individual’s organization and job, and propose a meeting. Also, mention that you will call to confirm a date, and then follow up with a phone call promptly. This will make it hard for you to be forgotten or ignored.
2. Call the person directly. The response will be quicker (whether yes or no). If it is a no, always ask who would be an appropriate person for you to contact. You should then begin again with that person.
3. Drop in on the person in hopes of meeting right away without an appointment. This approach is riskier, yet the spontaneity may be impressive and generate a favorable response.
4. Have one of your contacts (e.g., parent, friend, sibling, professor) arrange an appointment for you.
PREPARING FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

This is a critical step! Too many students set up interviews, then “drop in” for their appointments without doing any homework. Employers are often frustrated when they talk with a student who knows nothing about their field. Like any interview, preparation and research before the interview is key for success.

Also, the more you know about an area or an organization, the more intelligent and productive your questions will be – plus your interviewees will be impressed by the knowledge and preparation on your part.

Before your informational interview, plan open-ended questions that will stimulate discussion and enable both of you to learn about each other. See the list of sample questions on the following pages.

Plan ahead what you want to communicate about yourself: skills, traits, and goals. Think about ways to get these attributes across by means of the questions you ask and the way in which you conduct the interview.

Focus on the interviewee’s views, opinions, thoughts, and feelings rather than cold facts. Your interviewer will enjoy the interview more, and will feel more positive about you as a result.

PREPARE YOUR “30-SECOND PITCH”

Knowing more about your personal interests, motivations, and abilities will be helpful for you once you begin connecting with others to market your unique strengths. Having this information readily available can also help making your networking feel more productive. This can also be a good tool to develop your response to questions like “Tell me about yourself” or “Walk me through your resume.” Remember, this “pitch” is used to get the conversation started, so don’t stress about memorizing it verbatim or covering your entire career trajectory.

**Interests**
- What are my interests or passions?
- What do I get excited about?
- What motivates me?
- What makes me want to get up in the morning?
- What am I eager to learn more about?

**Personal**
- What is important for people to know about me right away?
- Where am I in my professional or academic career?
- Where would I like to be?
- What are my goals?

**Past Experience**
- What experiences have I had in the past that are important to me?
- What have I learned about myself?
- What have I learned about certain professions or academic fields?
- Where have I started to develop expertise?

**Portable Skills**
- What skills have I gained that I feel are part of my strengths?
- What activities do I engage in on a regular basis?
- What skills have I developed that I feel confident in using?

**Call to Action**
- What next steps would I like to happen?
- Why am I interested in this company/role/industry?

SAMPLE PITCH

Hi, I’m [insert name here], and I’m interested in creating plans to help big businesses be more sustainable.

I’m graduating in May with a major in Environmental Thought and Practice, but my study abroad trip in Costa Rica, where we assessed ways to maintain biological diversity in the face of economic development, truly deepened my commitment to sustainability.

I think my internship with the UVA Office of Sustainability and Athletics helped establish some key skills in this area as well.

Looking forward, I’m pursuing roles where I can contribute to sustainable initiatives in for-profit businesses.

Could you tell me more about the role you are recruiting for in corporate social responsibility?
QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Remember: you are conducting the interview. You will often find that one or two prepared questions on your part will naturally lead to a free-flowing conversation in which you will learn a great deal about your interviewee. However, also remember that it is easy to let the conversation get off track, and then you leave without gaining the information you wanted. Listed below are sample questions. You are encouraged to think of others that meet your needs more specifically.

NOTE: be sure to pick questions that are not easily answered by information on the organization’s website or LinkedIn page.

OCCUPATIONAL FIELD QUESTIONS

Preparation
- What credentials or degrees are required for entry into this kind of work?
- What types of prior experience are absolutely essential?
- How did you prepare yourself for this work?

Present Job
- Describe how you occupy your time during a typical workweek.
- What skills or talents are most essential for effective job performance in this job?
- What are the toughest problems you must deal with? Apart from external motivators, such as salary or fringe benefits, what do you find most rewarding about your job?
- If you were to leave this kind of work, what factors would probably contribute to your decision?

Career Future/Alternatives
- If things develop, as you’d like, what sort of career goals do you see for yourself?
- How rapidly is your present career field growing?
- If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different types of work do you feel that you could do?
- What types of employers hire people with your background; what are some representative job titles?
- Which related fields are you exploring? Have you explored in the past?

Lifestyle
- What obligation does your work place upon your personal time?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, place of residence?
- How often do people in your line of work change jobs?

Job Hunting
- How do people find out about these jobs? Are they advertised in the newspapers (which ones?), by word-of-mouth (who spreads the word?), by the personnel department?
- How does one move from position to position? Do people normally move to another agency (company, division), or do they move up in the agency (company, division)?
- If you were to hire someone to work with you today, what factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why?
- Educational credentials
- Past work experience
- Personality, personal attributes
- Specific skills, talents
- Applicant’s knowledge of your organization, your department, your job

Advice to Me
- How well suited is my background for this type of work?
- Can you suggest other related fields?
- What educational preparation do you feel would be best?
- What types of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend?
- If you were a college student and had it to do over again, what would you do differently to prepare for this occupation?

Referral to Others
- Based on our conversation today, can you suggest other people who may be able to provide additional information?
- Would you suggest a few of these people who might be willing to see me?
- May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?

ORGANIZATION QUESTIONS

- What is the size of the organization/geographic locations?
- What is the organizational structure?
- How does the size and structure of your organization compare to that of others in your field (in this city and/or nationally)?
- How does the work of your division or office fit into the work of the organization as a whole?
- What is the organization’s commitment to diversity?
- What is the average length of time employees stay with the organization?
- How much freedom is given to new hires?
- What types of formal or on-the-job training does the organization provide?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- What are the arrangements for transferring from one division to another?
- How much decision-making authority is given to new hires after one year?
- What new product lines or services are being developed?
- Where is the organization expanding? How does it compare with its competitors?

FOLLOW UP!

Remember to send thank-you notes! A few lines thanking them for their time and help will convey your appreciation and will keep you in their memory. Be specific about information you learned during the interview.

Additionally, you should keep a record of your interviews for your own information. Names, titles, addresses, dates, and major points of discussion will enable you to remember who told you what, and how to get back in touch with your contacts.