

# NETWORKING GUIDE

- Tessa meets her roommate's mother during Family Weekend and learns about her involvement at a New York City publishing house. As a result of talking with her, Tessa is given two names to follow up with about a summer internship.
- Eric talks to his Hamilton physics professor about his interest in finding a way to do applied physics at a corporation and is referred to a former colleague who now works in business.
- Emily spends time during spring break meeting with two recent Hamilton grads in New York who work in advertising and gets the inside scoop on anticipated openings.
- During a December holiday party, Will meets and talks with his father's friend who works for a local brokerage firm and is invited to meet with him in the office.
- Cara learns about the ins and outs of the theater world in Boston through informational interviews with several people. It results in a job offer three months later.

Networking is the process of developing personal contacts for the purpose of career exploration or job/internship assistance. As seen in the examples above, networking typically takes one of two forms - spontaneous or structured – and has the potential to meet different needs.

Networking can be done spontaneously by looking for opportunities to talk informally with others about your career interests. Good times for doing this might include: Fallcoming and Family weekends; fall, winter, and spring breaks; holiday parties, travel, visiting friends and relatives, family reunions, etc. An effective way to do this is to develop a two-to-three sentence synopsis of what you think you want to do career-wise and what information you need to move forward with your decision or plan.

“I would like to do some type of work with animals but I don't want to be a vet. I've read a bit about wildlife rehabilitation and it sounds interesting but I'd like to know what other options there are. Do you know anyone who works with wildlife?”

A more formal networking strategy is to conduct *informational interviews*. These are structured conversations with people who work in a career field of interest to you. Typically, these are scheduled meetings, conducted in person or over the phone, in which you ask a series of questions to learn more about a career field and/or get advice about landing a job/internship.

It is important to take advantage of both forms of networking. Your strategy will depend on the nature of your connections, your specific goals, and your comfort level. For example, you wouldn't need to schedule a formal meeting with your aunt but you might do so with a Hamilton alumnus/a. Introverts might be less apt to strike up a conversation with a passenger sitting next to them on a plane, whereas this might be an excellent strategy for extroverts.

## WHY NETWORK?

Networking is the way that most people end up hearing about a job opening! Your particular goal(s) will depend on where you are with your career plans. For example, your goal(s) might be to:

- learn about an industry, career field, and job function to see if it interests you;
- establish relationships with people that may help in your job search
- learn about job openings;
- get comfortable articulating your career interests in a professional manner.

## WHO TO NETWORK WITH

Networking in its most basic form is talking to people who can help you progress toward your goals. The first step is to develop a list of potential contacts. Begin by thinking about people that you know who might be willing to help you. Even if some of these people do not work in your field of interest, they may be able to connect you with friends and/or colleagues of theirs who do. Consider:

Family friends	Neighbors
Relatives	Professors
Former Employers & co-workers	Personal friends and their contacts
Recent alumni	Local Politicians
Religious Leaders	Club/Organization affiliations
Classmates	Parents of classmates

While it may be beneficial to speak with everyone on your list, you'll probably want to prioritize based on: the people you are comfortable speaking with, how focused you are with your career goals, and/or your plans to be in a specific geographic area. For example, while on campus in the fall, you might talk to a professor or a recent graduate who's on campus for the weekend, whereas you might schedule an informational interview with a family friend or an alumnus during winter break. The remainder of this guide will focus on the strategy of *informational interviewing*.

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

### Visit vs. Phone Call

Your first step when planning for an informational interview is to decide whether to meet with your contact or talk with him/her on the phone. A face-to-face conversation is preferred because it allows you to:

- obtain more career information & assistance since people are likely to spend more time with you;
- check out the office environment;
- be introduced to other professionals who may become additional networking contacts.

However, due to time and travel constraints, an in-person conversation is not always possible. In this case, an informational interview may be conducted over the phone.

Email is not an appropriate means of conducting an informational interview because it puts too much responsibility on your networking contacts to craft answers to your questions.

### Composing a Networking email or letter

Regardless of how you plan to conduct your informational interview (in person or by phone) you will need to make initial contact in order to introduce yourself and request an appointment. You may do so via email or traditional letter and in either case, it should be no longer than 3-4 short paragraphs.

There are four things you want to accomplish in your email/letter:

- (1) Your first few sentences need to compel the person to read on. To introduce yourself, provide relevant information that connects you to the person and their career field. Such information may include: your interests (career, personal, or academic), a person you know in common, your Hamilton connection, etc. For example, you might say that you became interested in their career field as a result of a specific course or extra-curricular activity.

*“As a result of economics courses I’ve taken at Hamilton, I’ve become interested in “micro-financing”. I’d like to explore how I could use that interest within a nonprofit organization.”*

Don’t start off by saying "My name is..." because it’s not necessary - they'll see your signature at the end of the letter.

- (2) Explain your motivation for contacting them - what you want to accomplish by speaking with them. Communicate to them what you already know about their career field or organization and what kind of information you are seeking. While it may feel more comfortable to ask generally for “any help you can provide,” don’t be vague about what you need. This puts too much pressure on the reader to figure out what you want.
- (3) Request either a face-to-face meeting or a scheduled phone conversation to conduct your informational interview. Give specifics about your availability - days or times of the week that you are generally available (during business hours). If no dates are provided, the reader is more likely to put the email/letter aside.
- (4) Mention that you are attaching a copy of your resume so that the contact can get a sense of your background.

Once you have drafted an email/letter, review it by putting yourself in the shoes of the reader; imagine how *you* would respond. If you don’t feel compelled to reply, then you need to rewrite.

Your email/letter and resume should be sent 2 - 3 weeks in advance of your desired meeting time. If you do not hear back from your contact within a few days, re-send your original email and then follow up with a phone call to determine whether they received your correspondence and to reiterate your interest in an informational interview. The more lead time you give the person, the better the chance you'll find a mutually convenient time to have a conversation.

### **Travel Logistics**

Once you have confirmed a meeting, ask your contact for directions, the best mode of transportation - subway, walk, car, bus, etc. - and about parking. They may also be able to provide you with an estimate of transportation time between destinations (i.e., hotel to their office, their office to the next site).

Allow plenty of time to get to your meeting(s), including time for the unexpected, such as getting lost, train running late, etc. If you plan to conduct multiple interviews in one day, leave sufficient time between interviews for reflection, transition, and travel to the next interview - about one hour.

### **Preparing for your Conversation**

You need to be able to clearly and succinctly articulate your career interests in order to be in a position to receive the greatest help from your networking contacts. Think through in detail how you became interested in a particular field, steps you have already taken to learn about the field, what you already know, and what you still need to learn.

Before your interview you should be reasonably informed about: 1) the career field (i.e., advertising), 2) the functional area or department in which your contact works (i.e., media planning), 3) the organization your contact works for (i.e., Saatchi & Saatchi), and 4) a bit about your contact (i.e., Hamilton connection, class year, major, title).

Read the organization’s web site, including their: mission and history (typically under “About Us”), organizational structure (departments and business groups), products and services, & employees (staff bios).

In an informational interview, *you* ask the questions and direct the interview. Therefore, *you* must be prepared with questions. Some possible questions are included in this guide but most should stem from what you want to know. Prepare between 5-10 questions. If one of your goals is to find a job or internship, it is appropriate to ask your contact for advice regarding the process. However, it is not appropriate to ask them to ask her/him to get you the job.

*“If I were interested in applying for <position> at your organization, how would you suggest I go about the process?”*

If you feel uncomfortable presenting yourself and/or need additional help with interviewing skills, consider practicing with a friend, in front of a mirror, or with a career counselor.

### **Conducting your Informational Interview**

On the day of your interview(s), make sure you know how to get where you’re going and allow plenty of time. Plan to arrive early in order to relax and mentally prepare for your conversation. Call if you are unclear about directions and/or if you are running late - but try to avoid this in the first place!

#### *Dress*

Your attire should be appropriate for the industry. For business and law, wear a suit. For most other fields, “business casual” is recommended (see “The Students’ Guide to Interview & Info Session Attire”)

#### *Introducing Yourself and Conducting the Conversation*

First impressions are important. When you introduce yourself, make sure to look the person directly in the eye, smile, offer a firm handshake, and thank him/her for meeting with you.

*You* need to frame the conversation by explaining why you requested the meeting and what you hope to accomplish.

*“As I mentioned in my letter, I’ve recently become interested in micro-financing and am hoping you can give me some ideas of career options I might explore in the nonprofit sector.”*

Tell your contact that you plan to take 30 minutes or so. It is appropriate to refer to your notes and questions and to write down information that you find helpful. Let the conversation flow naturally; don’t be rigid about sticking to your original questions.

Though you may be looking for a job/internship, it is *not* appropriate to directly ask your contact if they can get you a job. Rather, ask them questions about what advice they can offer you in regard to your job search. For instance, you might ask for: names of typical entry-level opportunities; types of organizations likely to offer these positions; qualifications most sought after for these positions and your competitiveness; feedback on your resume; etc.

An important aspect of networking is expanding your base of contacts. So, with each informational interview that goes well, ask the person if he/she might suggest others with whom to meet.

*“Based on our conversation today, are there other professionals with whom you think I should meet?”*

Gauge your contact's level of interest and be respectful of their other commitments. As you near the agreed-upon time, *you* should begin to wrap up and draw the conversation to a close.

(Glancing at your watch) "I'm noticing that our appointment is coming to an end. The information you have provided me is very helpful. Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to meet with me."

Your aim is to develop a *relationship* with this person. If you conduct your meeting in a professional and courteous manner, he/she may be willing to help you beyond the informational interview.

### **Follow Up**

Show appreciation to your new professional contact for his or her time and information by sending a thank-you letter or email within two days of the informational interview. If you need help crafting a thank-you letter, consult the Career Center's *Correspondence Guide* or meet with a counselor.

If your contact advises you to get in touch with specific individuals, be certain to follow-up.

If you sense that your contact might be helpful to you in the future, look for opportunities to keep in touch with him/her by periodically sending a note or email when you have a question or information to share (i.e., you followed through with a suggested contact, landed a job, or completed an internship). Remember, the way that most people ultimately find a position is through a personal contact.

*"People aren't strangers if you've already met them. The trick is to meet them before you need them"* - Harvey Mackey

## Sample Informational Interview Questions

You will probably ask 5-10 questions in any given informational interview, depending on how much time the person has available. Choose your questions carefully, and select them according to what will generate the most helpful information for YOU!

### **The Fundamentals** (these are probably the most important to ask):

- How did you get started in this field?
- What do you like about your job? What do you not like about your job?
- Do you know of anyone else in this field that you think it would be beneficial for me to speak with? (ask for specific names) May I have permission to use your name when I call or contact them?

### **Present Job:**

- Describe what you do during a typical work week.
- What skills or talents are most essential to be effective in this job?
- What are the greatest challenges you must deal with?
- What do you find most rewarding about the work itself, apart from salary, fringe benefits, travel, etc?

### **Preparation:**

- What educational degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this field?
- What kinds of prior experiences are absolutely essential?
- What did you personally do to prepare yourself for this work?

### **Lifestyle:**

- What obligations does your work place upon you outside of the ordinary work week?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, etc.?

### **Hiring Decisions:**

If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following factors would be most important in your hiring decision, and why? (Educational credentials, Past work experiences, Personality, personal attributes, Specific skills, talents, Applicant's knowledge of your organization, your department, your job)

### **Supply/Demand:**

- What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
- How do people find out about these jobs? Are they advertised?
- Is turnover high? How does one move up with your organization?
- Do many people in your line of work accept positions abroad? Where? Why?
- How much do wages or salaries vary in your line of work (by employer, region, etc.)?

### **Career Future:**

- If things develop as you would like, where do you see yourself five years from now?
- If your job was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work could you do?
- How rapidly is your career field growing? How would you predict future prospects?

### **Advice:**

- How well suited is my background for this type of work?
- What kinds of experiences, paid or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend/

## Sample Email Requesting Informational Interview

Subject: Meeting in December  
From: sbutton@hamilton.edu  
Date: November 20, 2007  
To: [pshields@simonschuster.com](mailto:pshields@simonschuster.com)

Dear Ms. Shields:

I am exploring the fields of publicity and marketing and my friend Christine Anderson recommended that I speak with you to learn more about the role of publicity and marketing in the publishing industry. I had an internship at a PR agency in NYC last summer, and while I enjoyed the opportunity to represent clients and products to the public, I did not particularly like the huge number of potentially intrusive phone calls that I had to make to publishers and publicity agencies. I would love to get your perspective on the nature of the publishing industry and the specific tasks of the marketing department. I will be visiting Christine in the city on Friday, December 15th and then again around New Year's. If possible, I would be very interested in meeting with you at your convenience.

Thank you very much for your time.

Gratefully,

Sally Button  
Hamilton College

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Subject: Meeting with you in December  
From: kdunham@hamilton.edu  
Date: October 3, 2007  
To: [dbruce@portlandclinic.org](mailto:dbruce@portlandclinic.org)

Dear Dr. Bruce:

I am a senior psychology major at Hamilton College looking into options for the next year or two that would allow me to gain relevant field experience to help me achieve my goal of going to graduate school in psychology. I obtained your name from the alumni database at the Career Center and think you would be a good person to talk to about the field of psychology. I know that you are a clinical psychologist in the Portland area and I would enjoy the opportunity to meet with you some time over my winter vacation to talk to you about your job at the Portland Clinic, any relevant field experience you had before your current position and your experience in graduate school.

I am from Scarborough, Maine, so if you have some time between December 18 and January 14 to meet with me, I would really appreciate the opportunity to sit down and talk with you. I do not have any major travel plans and am very flexible when it comes to a time and a day to meet. Please contact me if you would be willing to discuss your experiences in the field of psychology with me.

Thank you for your time,  
Karen Dunham

## Sample Letter Requesting Informational Interview

Hamilton College  
198 College Hill Road  
Clinton, NY 13323

September 12, 2007

Mr. Leonard McShane  
Dean of Students & Faculty, High School  
The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools  
1362 East 59<sup>th</sup> Street  
Chicago, IL 60637

Dear Mr. McShane:

As a college undergraduate concentrating in English with a sincere interest in developing relationships with students, I am strongly considering a career in teaching at an independent school. I believe that literature opens grounds for children and adolescents to become engaged in issues that are important to them and relevant to difficult problems or questions in their own lives. As a senior writing tutor at Hamilton College's Writing Center, I am impressed by the emphasis The Laboratory Schools place on helping high school students write effectively and clearly through the Writers' Center. In addition, The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools' mission to "celebrate both our cultural differences and our common humanity" is an ideal I strongly support.

I understand that you are probably not in need of new faculty, especially at this time of year, but I wonder if it would be possible to visit the high school and meet with someone to talk about what it is like to teach in a prestigious private school like the Lab School. If at all convenient, I would love to observe a class and/or talk to a faculty member teaching English in order to gain a sense of what the curriculum consists of, and what schools like The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools offer to students.

Currently, I am at Hamilton College in upstate New York starting my senior year, but I will be in Chicago later this month and would be grateful if I could meet with someone from the school. If you have any questions or would like to contact me, you can reach me at (999) 999-9999 or at [lorley@hamilton.edu](mailto:lorley@hamilton.edu). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Linda Orley