

Guide to Career Networking as a Student

Networking is a critical part of helping you as a student prepare for life after graduation by bringing you together with people who can support your career development and can connect you to jobs, informational interviews or career conversations with employers, and opportunities to share your story.

What is networking?

Networking is a rewarding, lifelong activity that is about building relationships with others to share and gain information.

Networking can occur in different formats. In-person it can happen at a career fair, an employer information session or even meeting for coffee with someone who works at an organization you would like to know more about. For many college students, networking starts with who is closest in their social circle: peers, faculty members in fields of interest, and sometimes family members or employers from part-time jobs or summer internships.

Online networking can take place in a number of ways. Sending a simple email is a great way to start the conversation, by cold outreach (when you contact someone who you do not have a connection with) or through an e-introduction (asking someone you know to introduce you over email). Professional platforms such as LinkedIn or Handshake allow you to add individuals already in your network, like your classmates, or send a request to connect with UW alumni or recruiters and hiring managers from companies you would like to work at one day. Additionally, the integration and adaptation of video chat platforms, such as Zoom and Google Hangouts has made it much easier to schedule video chats for informational interviews or career conversations in a virtual space.



Networking can also happen at any time: formally in the various settings described above, as well as informally such as speaking with a professor after class, or by chance, for example, running into someone at a cafe who was a panelist at an event you attended. Either way, you'll want to make sure you understand how to network and be prepared to make the most of the opportunities that come from it.



To further understand and demystify networking we recommend watching these short clips: [The Networking Reframe](#) and [The Two Types of Networking: Outbound and Inbound](#)

Two-page guide

For quick and easy reference, use this [two-page guide](#) to help you with building and strengthening your career network today.

Benefits of networking

Growing your network can open many doors for you including building contacts for career and industry exploration, job search support, and laying the necessary foundation for assisting you in meeting your career goals and aspirations.

There are several benefits for you to start building your network today:

Develop—and nurture—meaningful relationships

- > Deepen your connections with current and past colleagues
- > Meet with potential future employers
- > Build a supportive group of peers and mentors who want to see you succeed

Gain knowledge about specific positions, companies, organizations, and industries

- > Learn about their path to the role including: qualifications, training, connections
- > Get an idea of what their day-to-day looks like and how that fits into the bigger picture
- > Become familiar with their organizational culture
- > Receive well-rounded information to help with career discernment

Learn about opportunities for career advancement and personal growth

- > Increase your visibility and become top of mind for opportunities
- > Be in a position to learn about unadvertised positions
- > Gain access to information that is not available by web search
 - Examples: the recruitment process for a specific company, what to expect with their interviews, who to direct that next email to, etc.*
- > Receive referrals to other key professionals of interest

How to start

Identify people of interest and those who are in your current network. Again, think about your peers: classmates, friends you have met through RSOs, or co-workers. Your professors and instructors are also an excellent source to start networking as well. They are experts in their field and can share more information about their work, provide potential mentorship, write you letters of recommendation, and introduce you to other professionals in their network. Additionally, in some cases family members may be a great place to start your networking journey or even having conversations with your colleagues from part-time or full-time jobs, internships, or volunteer experiences.

As a University of Washington undergraduate, your current network includes UW alumni as well. Having this commonality allows for a soft entry into starting career conversations with them and learning about how they transitioned from undergraduate to professional in their field. Finding alumni with the same Humanities major as you or alumni in positions you are interested in is a great way to narrow down your search on who to meet. Asking faculty which alumni to talk to is a great strategy to identify potential connections, and tools such as [Husky Landing](#) or [UW LinkedIn Alumni](#) allow you to locate alumni with ease and programs such as [Huskies@Work](#) or [C21 Externships](#) are also excellent opportunities designed to help you expand your network.



Reach out

Once you have identified people to network with, the next step is to make the initial contact. Use these [examples](#) to help you craft and send a personalized message to individuals you may already know, UW alumni, as well as individuals you don't know yet and would like to meet.

> Create a customized invitation. On LinkedIn, you can add a note (300 characters or less) to personalize your invitation to connect with people you find through the alumni tool. It is recommended to always include a note -- people are more likely to reply to a message and accept the request to connect. Example:

"Hi <name>, I'm a current student at UW majoring in <subject>, and I was wondering if we could connect because I would like to get your perspective on <field of work, company, etc.>. Happy to talk at your convenience; thanks so much for considering this request."



The rationale here is that you want to establish the connection so that you're able to send a longer follow-up message once you're established with that person.

If they don't reply, don't take it personally! Not everyone checks LinkedIn on a regular basis. If you're looking to connect with several alumni in the same field, one tip is to start with alumni who show a lot of activity (posts, shares etc.) on their LinkedIn profile. They're more likely to respond quickly and actively connect than alumni who have a profile but haven't done anything with it in a while.

> Be patient. If you don't hear back in a few business days, send a gentle follow-up message.

> Be flexible. You are asking for their time, so be available and as accommodating as possible to their schedule.

Prepare

Reflect on your past professional experiences, your strengths and skills you'd like to develop, your career interests, and goals you would like to accomplish in the short and long term following your graduation. Taking time to reflect will guide you towards creating a more intentional network, recognizing and taking advantage of career opportunities, and help you build a development and action plan for post-graduation.

Research the individual and company or organization you are planning to meet with. Review their LinkedIn profile to give you a general sense of their career path and their previous and current roles and accomplishments. Explore their current organization's internet presence and identify their mission, values, how they deliver, and note any current projects, news, or trends that stand out to you. The idea is to collect this information in advance to help you curate thoughtful questions and have a more robust conversation.



Compile questions that will allow you to become more aware of the person you are networking about the ins and outs of their job, the organization, or the general career path. What is something they have accomplished they are most proud of in their role? What are the challenges of the role the job description doesn't say? What advice do you have for someone seeking entry into this position? Who else should I connect with? If you ask nothing else, asking who else you should connect with or have on your radar is one of the most important things you can do in any networking situation. Preparing and writing down a list of questions will allow you to make the most of your networking time whether that is in a one-to-one conversation or at an organized networking event.

Follow-up

Lastly, never forget the follow up. If you have the opportunity to connect, thank them for their time. Sending an email after connecting, ideally within 24 hours, detailing your appreciation is a nice gesture and will demonstrate your thoughtfulness. The message can be short, but allows you to establish a networking connection and possibly continue the conversation in the future. If you have the means, a handwritten thank you note is also welcomed, but not absolutely necessary.



Additional resources

[How to Get to Know your College Professors](#)

[An Introvert's Advice for Networking](#)

[3 Steps to a Perfect Informational Interview](#)

[How to Use LinkedIn as a College Student](#)