**Networking in Your Field of Interest**



**Introduction**

Speaking to people in areas that interest you (sometimes called informational interviewing) is often the most effective way to discover accurate and up to date information about organizations and occupations. This form of information gathering supplements traditional [career-focused](https://careers.yorku.ca/student_topic/conduct-occupational-research) and [industry-focused](https://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/c.php?g=679511&p=4790369) research with the added benefit of enabling you to meet people in your field(s) of interest and grow your network. Networking and informational interviewing can sound difficult and potentially overwhelming but at its core, it simply involves asking questions, and meeting people that are doing things that interest you.

### ****Learning Outcomes:****

By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

* Identify connections between coursework and possibilities for further study and/or career paths.
* Conduct career-focused research related to your coursework.
* Reflect and determine next steps based on the results of the information you collect.

This activity has been adapted from resources created by York [University Career Centre](https://careers.yorku.ca/students-and-new-grads/handouts).

**Step 1: Identify Potential Interviewees**

For this assignment, you will need to find at least three people working in areas or organizations that interest you and are related to this course. You can begin a quick search by checking out an organization’s website, LinkedIn pages and social media accounts. There are also multiple resources available to help you do this on [York’s Career Centre](https://careers.yorku.ca/) website. Additional resources:

* [INFO-GO](http://www.infogo.gov.on.ca/infogo/) (Ontario government)
* [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/) ([LinkedIn Resources](https://careers.yorku.ca/student_topic/create-a-professional-linkedin-profile) &[LinkedIn Alumni Tool](https://university.linkedin.com/content/dam/university/global/en_US/site/pdf/TipSheet_AlumniTool.pdf))
* [Conduct Occupational Research](https://careers.yorku.ca/student_topic/conduct-occupational-research)

You may already have direct connections to people in your field of interest or may want to ask people you know to connect you with people in the field. Consult with [Peer Career Educators](https://careers.yorku.ca/students-and-new-grads/services-events/dropby) for ideas on how to find people to add to your list. This is an important skill you will use throughout your life.

In the space below, write the names, emails, occupations, and places of employment of at least three people in your field.

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**Step 2: Prepare Interview Topics & Questions**

Before you reach out to your contacts, make a list of five to six questions that you want to ask. Be sure to think about what information would be most valuable to you and let that guide your questions. The list below can get you started.

**Human Resources**

* Are most positions in this field/organization full-time or contract?
* What are the primary functions/roles that people perform in your field/organization?
* What are the most highly valued skills, experience, attitudes, and training of people in this field/organization?

**Knowledge Dissemination**

* How is knowledge shared in this field, e.g., conferences, online communities, newsletters/journals etc.?
* How do you find and connect with people in other organizations or locations who share your interests and concerns?
* Which professional associations or special interest groups are active in this field?
  + Do you belong to any of these and if so, what do you value about these communities?
  + If not, why not?

**Key People / Organizations**

* Who are the leaders or innovators in this field/organization? What are their most significant contributions?
* What do you think this field/organization does well?
  + What has led to this success?
* Where do you think this field/organization needs to improve?
  + Why?

**Prospects**

* What do you think will be the most significant changes in this field/organization in the coming years?
* What new challenges or opportunities do you think these changes will create?

**Course Connections**

* In what way does [specify relevant course concept or topic] inform your sector, organization, or occupation?
* How has your sector, organization or occupation addressed [specify relevant course concept or topic]?

**Sample Interview Questions Focused on a Career Path or Skill Set**

* Why did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
* How did you get to this position?
  + What experiences, contacts, strategies, decisions were involved?
* What is a typical day on the job like for you?
* What skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?
  + How did you learn these skills?
* What opportunities are there for advancement in your position or occupation?
* What makes this occupation, position or organization exciting/satisfying?
* How would you describe the work culture of your organization?
* What advice do you have for someone interested in this field/job?
* Is there a particular resource you would recommend learning more about your field or occupation?
* Is there someone you would be willing to introduce me to who could answer some of my questions about this occupation?

**Step 3: Arrange for an Interview**

Once you have prepared your questions, contact the people on your list. Request a 15–20-minute meeting for an informational interview. This is a common practice in the world of work, so they will understand your request. You are aiming to secure at least two to three interviews so you may need more than three contacts to secure these.

Whether you make first contact by phone or email, include the following:

* A brief introduction of yourself.
* A brief explanation of why you are reaching out.
* A request for a 15–20 minute interview with a suggested method of connection e.g., online meeting, phone-call, in-person meeting.

You can use the following template to help you guide your requests or develop your own. You should sound polite, professional, and positive.

Hello (name of individual),

My name is (your first name, last name). I attend York University and am in a course focusing on (course topic). I am particularly interested in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I am in the process of gathering as much information as I can about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to better understand how this field might align with my future goals.

I learned about the work you are doing in this area from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I would be grateful to (speak or meet) with you (online, over the phone etc.) for 15-20 minutes. I am interested in your perspectives on this field and (organization name), how you came to it and any advice you might have for someone interested in this field. If this is agreeable to you, please let me know when you would be available to speak.

Thank you,

Name & Last Name

Review the Career Centre tips for [practicing good email etiquette](https://careers.yorku.ca/student_topic/practice-good-email-etiquette) to make sure you present yourself well.

**Step 4: Conducting Interviews**

You should dress in [business casual attire](https://resumegenius.com/blog/career-advice/business-casual?utm_source=google&utm_medium=performancemax&utm_term=&utm_campaign=18128645407&utm_adgroup_id=&utm_content=&utm_device=c&gclid=Cj0KCQiAi8KfBhCuARIsADp-A55Ifwl53bfNwsm5NF881aOGSdyOJN-9ijCl59OxPxEqtD-DuH-nDmkaAoVoEALw_wcB) unless it is a phone interview. You should ensure your surroundings are quiet and ensure you won’t be disturbed.

Here are some tips for a successful interview:

* Remember you are not asking for a job – you are building relationships and gaining information, not asking for favours.

**Beginning your interview:** Build rapport with your interviewee by thanking them for taking time out of their day to meet with you, engage in some small talk.

* Discuss your background, why you are interested in the field/organization, and why you decided to contact them.
* Confirm that your interviewee is comfortable with you taking notes (or recording); as you are note-taking be sure to keep the conversation flowing.

**During the interview:** Respect the time frame that you agreed to meet.

* If you do have more questions for them or want to continue to chat after the 15-20 minutes that was agreed upon, give them an opportunity to end the conversation. e.g., “We’re coming up at 1:30 pm and I want to respect your time. I’ve enjoyed speaking with you, and you have provided valuable insights. I would be happy to continue chatting, but I want to respect your schedule.”

**Ending your interview:** Thank them for their time and ask if they would recommend anyone that you should talk to so that you continue to speak and connect with new people.

* You may also want to ask if they are comfortable with you staying connected to update them about your own progress or to discuss new findings in the field.

**Step 5: Follow-Up & Show Your Appreciation**

After you have successfully conducted your interview, send thank-you notes within 24 hours of each meeting. You can follow up with individuals over email, thanking them for their time, and highlighting key insights that you gained from speaking with them. If you are comfortable, you may also want to ask if there is anything you can do to return the favor.

You can use the refer to the template to help you think about your “Thank You” note but make sure your thank-you note sounds genuine and appreciative.

Dear (name of individual),

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and discuss \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ this (morning, afternoon, evening). I was very interested to hear about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. [Mention the aspect of the interview that you found most interesting or applicable to you]

I hope we have a chance to meet again.

Thank you again for your time,

Name & Last Name

**Step 6: Create a Working Document of Your Network**

Now that you have connected with people in your field of interest, you have begun to develop a network for yourself! You want to keep a record of your interviews and any information or insights you found to be valuable. You can put this information in a chart like this, so you don’t forget anything.

[My Non-Profit Network (.docx)](https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/2971/2023/02/My-non-profit-network-example.docx)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| My Non-Profit Network | | | | |
| **Name** | **Contact** | **Meeting Date** | **Interview Notes** | **Follow Up Notes** |
| Cheryl Brown | cheryl.b@cnc.ca | Met online on February 2nd | Provided helpful insights on how to secure financial support for Canadian charities. | Open to staying connected; interested in my research on non-profit organizations. Enjoys coffee and offered to meet on in six months. Follow up in August. |
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**Step 7: Reflect on What You Have Learned**

For each of the interviews you conducted, respond to the following questions:

***What?***

* What aspect of this interview surprised or interested you the most? Explain.
* Based on what you learned in these interviews, which of your skills, interests and goals do you see as being most valuable in these fields, organizations, or occupations?

***So What?***

* In what ways did the information and insights that emerged in these interviews alter or reinforce your interest in this field, organization, or occupation?
* What connections or relevancies do you see between what you’ve learned in this course, and what you learned in this interview?

***Now What?***

* If you wanted to do so, what steps could you take to begin gaining relevant experience to learn more about this field, organization, or occupation?
* What did you learn about how this field, organization or occupation will change in coming years? How might these changes alter the career opportunities available?