

Building Collaborations and Networking

-- Insights from the 2nd ACL Year-Round Mentorship Session

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Top Principles for Building a Collaboration and Networking

- Reach out to new people through email and conferences. Try to find people that **align with your research interests**.
- **Study the background/work** of the person you are reaching out to (pros and cons / initial baselines/ideas, etc. of their work). It can serve as a good starting point for conversation.
- Grab opportunities as they come.
- The collaboration will happen naturally **with evidence of people's interests and the nice union of expertise A and B**. It happens when the two groups want to achieve something together with both interests.
- Take advantage of **local resources**, e.g., working on research with local universities and industry labs, and then through them, you can reach out to more people and establish collaborations.
- It is good to **confirm the schedule and expected outcomes** before the collaboration starts.
- Collaboration is about who takes responsibility for each part, so it is key that you have something **you can contribute**.

When reading papers for your research, **check out the people working on interesting topics in your area**. Try to find them and reach out to them by email and conferences. It is very interesting to find people that align with your research interests.

When you reach out, **good communication** and **background preparation** is key. It is helpful to target emails to the recipient, showing that **you really care**, and the person can provide **specific contributions**.

The key for **long-term successful collaboration** is the **trust** you essentially need to build up for this collaboration. This trust is something that needs to be built up along with the topic.

Selected Questions from the Audience

What if we don't have a reply to our emails?

A: Talking to the Ph.D. students of that lab/professor is also a good resource. The Ph.D. students will be heavily involved in the project. Because students won't get hundreds of emails every day, and they will have more time to commit to the project and specific collaboration.

How important is it to frame the final expectations of the collaboration? Does it have to be outright or a go-with-the-flow approach? Or something else?

- Setting expectations of everyone's role, amount of effort, author order
- Balance your own research and this collaboration

A: The project can be benefited from both a well-defined project and a go-with-the-flow approach to improve it as the project progresses. The well-defined approach is efficient but might not suit everyone. The other approach can be more adventurous. The amount of projects in parallel is important. It is always a balance of resources and people in mind. You can set up the research schedule, and, along the way, you can make adjustments. It is still necessary to inform the necessary people, e.g., each person's role and effort and expectations in this collaboration. There can also be something different from the original plan to happen, and then each party needs to adjust. Mostly the authorship should be well defined. Focus on the trust and the impact of the collaboration.

How to make the best of collaboration from professors? And how to build trust? It feels intimidating as an undergrad.

A: Basically “honesty” is the best way to gain trust. We receive many emails from undergrads. No professors are expecting undergrads to know everything. You can ask questions even if they are simple or bold because it shows you read the work and are deeply interested/passionate about the topic, and profs also cherish questions that are not pigeonholed.

Pros and cons of collaboration with industry, vs. academia?

A: Even with industry, it is case-dependent. Some industries have collaborations with you with PR goals and publications. With government and industry, there is usually a well-defined outcome or deliverable, e.g., to justify whether the outcome is worth the investment. There could be some consequences if you don't meet certain requirements initially defined. For academia as a collaboration, usually the publications are more the goal. You can start with a relatively broad theme, and adjust as time goes by. In academia, you can use your creativity, but for translational projects, you really need to have something concrete to come out.

Other Useful Links

1. We welcome edits and suggestions to this sharing (by suggesting edits/commenting on this [Google doc link](#)).
2. Blogs of all previous mentorship sessions: <https://medium.com/@zhijing-jin>
3. We also welcome note-takers for future ACL Mentorship events. Welcome to join our slack channel (you can receive the link after applying to our program through our [official website](#)), and indicate your interest to be a volunteer note-taker.