Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Center for Career Exploration
RESOURCES

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BROWN UNIVERSITY

Networking and Informational Interviewing

When you engage in a networking conversation you will have two goals: information and advice.

- Information refers to educating yourself about the specifics of a job or industry that interests you.
- Advice refers to job or internship strategies. Whether you're looking for an internship, a summer job or your first full-time position after graduation, you need to connect with people who can advise you on your search and help you access opportunities.

Step 1: Find Potential Contacts

- **BrownConnect+:** A platform designed to enhance your career journey by connecting you with alumni through various interactive features for mentoring, networking and exploration.
- **3 F's:** Ask family, faculty and friends for the names of people you might approach Former/current supervisors: Even those working in unrelated fields may know someone
- **Online:** LinkedIn, LinkedIn.com/alumni, Facebook, Twitter
- **High School:** Look into alumni databases, and talk to coaches, teachers and counselors such as study abroad or significant domestic study away experiences.

Step 2: Organize your Contacts

- **Identify 3-5 interest areas:** Visit Handshake to schedule an appointment with a Career Counselor for help with this
- **Create a spreadsheet:** Include contact information, their relationship to you, when you spoke to them and notes about your follow up plan. If you have several areas of interest, you can use multiple worksheets.
- **Follow-up:** Check your spreadsheet frequently to make sure you're completing your follow up plan for each contact. try to use keywords from the job or internship posting in your description of your experiences. Some employers use applicant tracking systems to seek out these keywords.

Step 3: Make Initial Contact

Introductory email: The goal of this message is to schedule an informational interview with your contact. Your message should focus on your interest in the work of the contact and it must be brief. If you're using the BrownConnect tool to reach out, you can use the template provided there.

EXAMPLE OF AN EMAIL TO AN ALUMNI:

Subject: Career Inquiry from a Brown Student

Dear Ms. Jones,

As a Brown student considering editing as a possible career, I am very interested in hearing more about your work at Magazine, Inc. Specifically, I would like to learn more about the details of your work. Are you available for a phone conversation to discuss your professional experience with me? Tuesdays and Thursdays after 3 p.m. are best for me, but I am flexible and almost any time could work. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Best regards,

Step 4: Have the Conversation

- **Generate questions:** Once you've scheduled a phone or in-person informational interview, plan ahead. What questions will you ask? In what sequence? See below for sample questions.
- **Begin and end with gratitude:** Etiquette counts! Begin and end by thanking your contact for making time to speak with you. Reiterate your interest in the field and let them know they have been helpful.
- **Wear a reporter's hat:** Think of yourself as a BDH reporter writing a profile on your contact. Your job is to ask questions and to listen. The interview is not about you—it is about your contact.
- **Share, but keep the focus on your contact:** Many contacts will ask you questions about your education, background, and other experiences. Any information you share about yourself should be brief and to the point. Get back to your questions quickly.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- **Career Path**
  - How did you select this career? What was your first job?
  - Are there alternate routes to the same career/job?
  - What do you like most about your work? What do you find most challenging?

- **Daily Activities and Work Culture**
  - What is your typical day like? Is there a typical work schedule?
  - Is overtime, flextime, part-time, job-sharing, travel required or possible?
  - What is your work environment like? Casual or formal? Fast-paced or relaxed? Team-oriented or independent?
  - What types of people thrive in this environment/ career?
  - How well can career and family responsibilities be managed in this field?

- **Entry-Level Positions**

- What type of training is provided?
- What is the typical salary range?
- How much autonomy is there?

- **Education/Training/Experience Necessary**
  - What background, skills or experiences are necessary?
  - Are there particular courses I should take? Does a particular concentration/major make a difference?
  - Is a graduate degree necessary for an entry-level position? For advancement within the field?
  - Is an internship advisable? What recommendations do you have for such internships?
  - Are there gaps in my resume that need to be filled?

- **I Want to Know More**
  - Can you recommend someone else whom I might talk to?
  - What professional organizations are active and helpful to students?
  - Are there journals, magazines or websites that you recommend I read?
  - What question haven't I asked you that I should be thinking about?
  - What is the best career advice you have ever received?
  - Do you have any more advice or suggestions for me?

- **Closing → Ask for job/internship search advice**: Never ask your contacts if they are hiring, which can be annoying. If you haven't covered these subjects already, you can consider asking your contact if:
  - They can suggest companies or organizations in their field that you can target
  - They can suggest other people you can reach out to
  - If they know of industry specific websites or databases that employers use to post jobs in their field

SAMPLE CLOSING

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me today. Our conversation has been very helpful. I am still looking for a job (or internship) in this field and am wondering if you have any specific suggestions or advice that could help my search.

Step 5: Follow Up

- **Send a thank you note**: An email is fine, although a mailed note handwritten on stationery is still the gold standard. Whatever the form, write four to six sentences in which you:
  - Reiterate your gratitude.

    - Mention something specific from the conversation (“ I especially enjoyed hearing about your trip to Brazil ”).
    - Confirm that you will follow up on the contact’s suggestions.

- **Pursue leads:** Follow up on your contact’s suggestions, whether it is a particular job listing, an organization to check out or a specific person in the field. The key is to follow up as quickly as possible.
- **Update spreadsheet:** Enter a few notes about the conversation. Include suggestions for follow up: Told me to contact her again in 6 weeks.
- **Invite to connect via LinkedIn:** Use the invite to thank them again for taking the time to speak with you.