

Networking & Informational Interviewing Guide



SKIDMORE

CAREER
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

Networking and Informational Interviewing

Looking for information about a specific career field or industry?

Wondering how to get started in a career?

Thinking about changing career direction?

Looking for new ways to find job opportunities?

If any of these questions ring true for you, networking will be an important tool for you to use. Networking refers to the process of developing relationships with others who can assist you with your career search and hopefully help you uncover the “hidden job market”. Experts report that approximately 65% of all jobs never even get advertised. Employers often prefer to hire people through referrals, or they want to save themselves the expense of advertising online. The hidden job market is vast and word of mouth is really the best way of finding these hidden opportunities.

Networking does NOT mean asking someone you know (or have just met) for a job! It’s about connecting with people to help you make informed career decisions, get advice and possibly learn about future opportunities.

Building a network takes time and persistence. A strong network can help you at many points in your career and life.

How to Begin:

1. **Identify possible contacts through your personal network.** Start with who you know. This can include: family, friends, professors, coaches, neighbors, past and current employers, community groups, etc. Even if they aren’t working in the field you’re interested in, they may know someone who is.
2. **Expand your network.**

Use these resources to find potential contacts:

LinkedIn – is the world’s largest professional networking site with currently over 600 million members (about 300 million or so using the site monthly). Before searching the network, you need to set-up your LinkedIn profile. Then you can start connecting with Skidmore alums (there are currently over 23,000 alums on LinkedIn):

In the main search bar up top, type Skidmore College

Click on “See Alumni” box on the left

Search for Alumni by: where they live; where they work; what they do; what they studied and/or by what years they attended Skidmore.

Special Note about connecting on LinkedIn: When contacting Skidmore alumni through LinkedIn, it's best to follow this process, which will hopefully optimize your response rate:

Once you've searched and found contacts, click on each contact's profile (don't just hit the "connect" button at the bottom of the box).

Once on their profile, click "Connect" in the blue box.

Select "Add a Note" and write a short personal message, including who you are and why you want to connect.

Once an invitation has been customized, send invitation

Career Events – throughout the year, the Career Development Center sponsors a number of events which provide excellent opportunities to make new connections. Consider attending:

- **Career Jam** – Skidmore's largest on-campus networking event held annually during Celebration Weekend in the fall.
- **EACE Road Trips to the Real World** – students have the opportunity to attend employer site visits over the winter break. Host companies will talk about their organization, industry, internships, and jobs.
- **Winter Job Shadow Program** (sophomores only) - this is a great opportunity to shadow a Skidmore alum or parent in a career you are considering over the winter break.
- **ZEN Mentoring Program** (juniors only) – the ZEN Mentoring Program matches Skidmore students at the start of their junior year with Skidmore alumni/ae who have similar career interests. Mentors share their experiences at Skidmore and in the working world, listen to their student-partners' concerns, and look for ways to support them in achieving their goals.
- **Career Connections** (seniors only) – connect with employers and alumni from a wide variety of industries. There will be opportunities to attend employer info sessions, one-on-one chats with employers, and interview for post-grad opportunities.
- **Career Community Events** – employer information sessions, career specific workshops and panels and special tours of companies provide other ways of bringing employers and students together.

Use resources outside of Skidmore to find potential contacts:

- Professional and Regional Associations and Meetings
- Local or Regional Career Fairs
- Social Media sites

How to Proceed:

Informational Interviewing

Once you're ready to connect with people in your network, you may want to set up informational interviews. Informational interviews are meetings you arrange with professionals, where you "direct" the interview by asking them questions about their educational or career background, their current and or past positions, their specific career field or industry and/or advice on a job search. It's also important that you're ready to talk about yourself!

Alumni have told us that while they really want to help, they are very busy, so it's important to get to the point without actually asking for a job or internship. Let them know clearly how they can help in your search.

Making Initial Contact

Most likely, the best way to initiate a contact with someone you don't know is through email. It's important that you are clear about your objectives when reaching out. What do you want to learn? What are you hoping to get out of the conversation? Write a brief note introducing yourself, telling them how you got their name and what you'd like to discuss. Then ask for a brief, 20-30 minute meeting, if possible in person, but if not, through phone or Zoom. If you don't get a response, try sending a follow-up e-mail. If your second attempt is also unsuccessful, move on!

Sample Email for first contact:

Dear Ms. O'Connor,

I found your profile in Skidmore's Career Advisor Network and am grateful that you have offered to help Skidmore students with their career questions. I've just started my senior year, and my goal is to secure an entry-level editorial position in book publishing in the Boston area after graduation. I interned last summer at a major NYC magazine publisher, have started my own fairly successful e-zine, and have worked with SkidNews for the past three years. I would appreciate hearing your advice on conducting an effective job search and uncovering job leads. I'll be in the Boston area over the break and hope that we could set up a short meeting if possible. If that's not convenient, I'm also happy to speak over the phone or Zoom. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe '26

➤ **Preparing for your Informational Interview**

Do preliminary research on the company or industry, dress appropriately and have a list of questions to ask. Also, make sure you've developed your "pitch" about yourself – a 30 second introduction including your name, class year, major, career interest, and perhaps something unique about yourself that will help the person remember you. To network successfully, you need to have a basic understanding of your own interests, needs and skills.

➤ **Developing a list of questions**

Your informational interview will be most effective if you formulate questions that reflect your genuine curiosity about careers and your specific job search needs. Here are some questions to draw from:

Personal Background Questions

- What has your career path been like since graduating from Skidmore?
- What was your undergraduate major? How big a role did it play in your career choice?
- Did your college education provide sound preparation for this job?
- What do you enjoy most and least about your work in this field and why?

Job and Company Related Questions

- What is your typical day like?
- What kind of hours do you work?
- What skills do you use most on a daily basis?
- What are your major responsibilities?
- How much variety is there in your job?
- What are the demands and frustrations that typically accompany this type of work?
- What skills are needed for candidates to be successful in this type of job?
- How would you describe the culture or personality of your organization?
- How does your organization compare with other organizations in this field?
- What is a typical career path in your company?
- How is the hiring done at your company?

Career Field Questions:

- What credentials or educational licenses are required for entry into this kind of work?
- What kind of work experience would employers look for in a potential job applicant?
- What kinds of courses are most valuable to work in this field?
- What changes have occurred or are occurring in your field?
- What challenges do you see evolving in your industry?
- What kind of work / internship / volunteer experience do employers in this field most value?
- What is the typical salary range for entry-level / mid-level / experienced candidates in this field and geographic region?

Job Search Questions:

- What job search approaches or strategies do you suggest?
- What types of resume, cover letter or other materials are preferred by employers in the field?
- What are the most important professional associations affiliated with the field?
- Can you recommend specific publications or resources that would be helpful for conducting research about this field?
- How might I uncover opportunities in this field?
- What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were in my shoes?
- Would you suggest others I might contact to request additional Info Interviews?

How to Nurture Your Network:

Remember, networking is about developing a relationship, not having a one-time conversation. In order to keep the conversation going, so you're comfortable reaching out again and will hopefully be remembered by your contacts if and when an opportunity presents itself, you should do the following:

1. **Send a thank you note** – within a day of meeting or speaking with someone, send a thank you note highlighting what you got out of the meeting and thanking them for their time. If a specific tip or suggestion was helpful, let them know! If requested, send your resume along.

Here's an example of a thank you note:

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you so much for spending the time talking with me about my interest in pursuing a career in marketing. Your advice on how to use my liberal arts background to enter the field was extremely helpful. and I've already begun to edit my resume to reflect what we discussed. I feel like I have a much clearer understanding of the skills and experiences necessary to succeed in this field. I will follow up with the contact you provided and keep you posted on my job search. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

2. **Follow up on all leads provided** – this is the best way to grow your network. Make sure you let the new contact know where you got their name.
3. **Maintain contact with your network** – this is the hard part. If agreed to by the contact, it's good to try to stay connected throughout the year, even if just sending updates or greeting cards. Regular communication with your network will help to strengthen your connections and make it easier to reach out when you have a specific need. Make sure to connect on LinkedIn.
4. **Be thoughtful and strategic** – think about what you really need to know at whatever point you're at in your career and talk about that. Ask thoughtful questions and be prepared to offer your assistance should you have a suggestion or contact to pass on to them. It's all about building mutually beneficial relationships and you never know when you can help someone else!
5. **Track your connections** – it's easy to forget who you spoke with or when you last contacted someone. Make sure you document each connection: name of contact, date of connection, what was discussed, follow-up, etc. This will keep you organized and remind you when it's time to re-connect with someone in your network.

HAPPY NETWORKING!!!