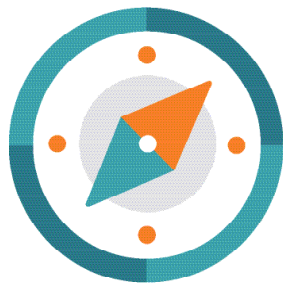


# Guide to Effective & Authentic Networking



Center for  
**CAREER**  
Development

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



## What Exactly Is Networking?

**Networking is the activity of connecting with others to gather and share information.**

For some, the prospect of networking can elicit feelings of discomfort or concern about feeling fake. As long as you focus on it being a process of curious exploration, those feelings can be replaced with excitement to build your professional community.

### **Networking is a two-way street.**

You may initially feel like you are asking most of the questions to another person, as opposed to an even exchange. While this may be true in many cases, keep in mind that your ideas and experiences, both now and in the future, may also be interesting to your contacts. People with whom you network might be interested in hearing about your research or projects related to their line of work, updates on life at Princeton as a student nowadays (if they are an alum), etc.

### **Networking happens across cultures.**

Before connecting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, be sure to research and observe cultural norms surrounding networking. Communications that seem polite in one culture may be considered strange or rude in another. If you find that certain norms are very different from how you typically operate, find a partner with whom you can practice and hone your style.

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*The currency of real networking is not greed but generosity.*

-Keith Ferrazzi, author, entrepreneur

### **Networking is NOT asking for a job.**

When connecting with someone, remember that the goal should not be to ask for an internship or job. Instead, always interact with others through a relational – NOT a transactional – approach. Seek to learn and gain advice from others; you never know where it may lead.



Since nearly 70 percent of individuals are hired by companies where they have a personal or professional connection (according to LinkedIn), networking is a critical aspect of the career exploration process. Beyond making personal connections with others in careers of interest to you, networking allows you to gain insight into many aspects of work, including:

- Trends within fields
- Personal career journeys (such as someone's post-college transition)
- Insights into organizations or companies (like workplace culture)
- Job search resources and interview practices
- Strategies for achieving your goals and roadblocks/hurdles to consider

Networking conversations can also open your eyes to career fields and jobs that you may not have considered. Approaching each conversation with both curiosity and an open mind will allow you to connect with others in an authentic and meaningful way.

# Work Your Network

## PHASE 1: LAY THE GROUNDWORK

### Know your “why”

Start by clarifying your goals and objectives for wanting to connect with others. There could be many reasons you may want to start networking, including:

- You are curious about exploring careers beyond those that are already familiar to you.
- You are considering summer internship opportunities and wonder which might be the best fit for you.
- You are very interested in a specific career and would like an insider’s perspective to determine if your understanding of the work is accurate.
- You have decided upon a specific location after graduation and want to better understand how to find opportunities in that area.
- You are preparing for an interview in a certain career field and want to gain insight and advice from someone who’s been through the same interview process before.

### Figure out your “who”

Whether or not you realize it, you already have a network. Networks do not just consist of high-powered people, like CEOs or executive directors. Rather, networks consist of people we know, people they know and people we make an intentional effort to get to know.

Start by taking an inventory of your network. In the chart below, list individuals or organizations with whom you would like to connect and learn more about work that interests you.

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>People you know</b> <i>Talking with these people about their career journeys can help strengthen existing connections.</i>	<b>Contacts you would like to make</b> <i>These can be as particular as an individual you would like to connect with, or as general as someone in a specific role or organization that interests you (e.g. “Someone who works in a law office.”)</i>
Friends and family		
Educators <i>Past teachers, faculty members, preceptors, administrators, tutors, etc.</i>		
People you admire		
Alumni from Princeton or other schools		
Affinity groups <i>Extracurriculars, religious groups, athletic teams, professional associations in a career of interest, etc.</i>		

## PHASE 2: “PLUG INTO” YOUR NETWORKS

### Find your people

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There are many resources you can use to find people working in your areas of interest. A great place to start is online.

#### LinkedIn

[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

Identify individuals, organizations and specific roles that may be of interest to you. Be sure that your LinkedIn profile is updated and well organized, so new contacts who read your profile learn can about you.

#### TigerNet

[www.tigernet.princeton.edu](http://www.tigernet.princeton.edu)

Find Princeton alumni with whom you’d like to connect, including their contact information using the Alumni Directory search tool on TigerNet.

Beyond online resources, opportunities to engage in face-to-face networking are all around you, including: professors’ office hours, speakers at Princeton, career fairs and other employer events on campus, coworkers and managers during summer internships or volunteering, contacts you have through on-campus jobs and professional conferences.

Your Princeton experience offers you chances to naturally engage in networking, sometimes without even realizing it. These include:

- Participating in student organizations and volunteer opportunities such as serving on department committees
- Connecting with alumni and other students during Reunions
- Getting involved with local Princeton alumni clubs near your hometown, post-graduation location or the place where you’re working for a summer
- Participating in the Center for Career Development’s City Treks and Princeternship program
- Shadowing alumni and other professionals at their jobs

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*Talk with many people about what you are doing and what you would like to do. Also take the time to listen to what they are doing, their successes, and their pain points. This way, you can build a genuine connection.*

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## Reach out for informational interviews

Once you have mapped out your “who” and “why,” start your outreach. When connecting with a new contact for the first time, you should email them to ask for the chance to set up an informational interview.

Informational interviews are informal conversations with others for the main purpose of collecting information for your own career exploration process. Informational interviews can act as entry points into networking with people working in jobs of interest to you.

If you’re feeling apprehensive about reaching out to new contacts, remember that many people are flattered by a request to connect and talk about their



### **Subject line: Request for career guidance from a Princeton sophomore**

Dear Inge,

As a current sophomore at Princeton, I am considering a career in journalism and am excited to explore this career path. I [found, received] your information [on Princeton’s LinkedIn Alumni page, from Jane Doe, etc.], and am interested in learning more about [your experience at abcxyz company, your role as xyz, how you determined a career in this area was right for you, etc.].

I would appreciate an opportunity to learn more about your experiences, as well as any advice you might be willing to share with me. When time allows on your end, could I take you out for coffee at a location convenient to your office or schedule a time to talk with you for about 20 minutes on the phone?

I look forward to the possibility of connecting with you and thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,  
Theo Tiger



### **Subject line: Fellow Tiger connecting about your choreography career path**

Dear Amir,

As a current senior at Princeton, I am curious about becoming a choreographer. I was recently conducting some searches in the Princeton alumni LinkedIn group and noticed your profile.

I find your path from being a part of [dance group xyz] at Princeton and writing about dance in your senior thesis, to working for a dance nonprofit and becoming a choreographer, to be very interesting and admirable. I am involved in a variety of dance-related groups on campus, and feel that my study of anthropology alongside my passion for connecting people with meaningful performances may point towards a career in choreography.

I’m currently exploring next steps for my career post-graduation and was wondering: do you have a few minutes to connect via phone to discuss your career path and experiences with me?

Many thanks in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Tamara Tiger

## Networking Guide- Email Invitation Examples for Graduate Students:

**Subject line: Request for career transition guidance from a Princeton Ph.D. student**

Dear Julia,

*I hope this message finds you well!*

*My name is Justin Tiger, and I'm a Ph.D. candidate in chemical engineering at Princeton. As I am planning to defend my dissertation next spring, I'm currently exploring my next career step after Princeton and hoping to learn more about technical consulting.*

*I found your information on Princeton's TigerNet and noticed you've been with [company name] for a while after Princeton. I would appreciate the opportunity to learn more about your transition from Ph.D. to work and experience at [company name] as well as any advice you could share with me. If time allows on your end, I was wondering if I could schedule a time to speak with you for about 20 minutes over Zoom or phone.*

*I'd be happy to provide any further information that'd be helpful! Thank you in advance for considering my request and I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Kind Regards,  
Justin Tiger*

**Subject line: Request for a brief chat for start-up career exploration from a Princeton graduate student**

Dear Dr. Jing,

*I hope this message finds you well! My name is Chloe Tiger, and I'm a second-year Ph.D. student in sociology at Princeton. I am curious about career opportunities beyond academia, especially related to diversity and inclusion. Recently, I conducted some alumni career searches via LinkedIn and found your profile.*

*Your career journey from being a diversity fellow at Princeton to becoming a founder of a startup working on racial equity and inclusion in the community is very inspiring and admirable. As a head of diversity fellows this year at Princeton, I am eager to learn more about your graduate experiences at Princeton and your current role at [company name].*

*I know you are very busy but I would truly appreciate it if you had any availability for a brief chat via phone anytime next month.*

*Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I hope to have the opportunity to connect with you in the near future.*

*Sincerely,  
Chloe Tiger*



## PHASE 3: PREPARE

Once you receive positive responses, you'll be moving into the next stage of networking: preparing for your first interaction or informational interview with each contact. A little preparation will go a long way.

### Confirm logistics

Be sure to confirm all meeting logistics with your contact ahead of time: date, time, location, and method of communication (in-person, phone, video chat, etc.). In order to be courteous from the get-go, it is best to defer to the plans that would be most convenient for your contact.

### If conducting your informational interview by phone or video chat:

- Be aware of time-zone differences between your and your contact's locations.
- Find somewhere quiet and private, where you will not be interrupted and where you have a reliable signal.
- Confirm ahead of time who will be calling and the best number or username with which to reach your contact in order to avoid any last-minute confusion.

### If conducting your informational interview in person:

- Confirm the location ahead of time. Ideal settings are public places where you could talk easily and uninterrupted, such as a cafe or an office. Suggesting a location near your contact's office is always a plus.
- Plan your mode of transportation to the location and give yourself more time than you think you'll need to get there.
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early; it sets a strong impression if you are at the location and ready to go before your contact arrives.
- If you're having a conversation over coffee/tea or a meal, offer to cover your contact's bill, if possible.

However you connect with your contacts, be sure to be very responsive as you're making plans and then follow through on those plans. Being a no-show to a planned meeting or ghosting a contact is unacceptable and could damage your professional reputation.

### Do Your Networking Homework

You should be ready to talk about yourself and ask informed and specific questions about your contact during a networking conversation. This requires some research ahead of time. Familiarize yourself with your contact's professional background and current affiliations so you can build your questions from this information, connect with your contact on similarities and demonstrate the level of time and attention you've given to preparing for the conversation.

Resources for gathering in-depth information about your contacts include (but are not limited to): LinkedIn profiles, company websites (particularly the staff or team pages), professional bios, publications written by your contact(s) and articles/news about them or their company.

If something in a contact's background strikes you as particularly interesting or similar to something in your own life, make a note of it and ask more about it when meeting with them.



## Prepare your questions

When preparing the questions you want to ask in your networking conversation(s), keep in mind the information you've gathered in your research as well as your "why" (see Phase 1). Build your questions around the topics that genuinely pique your interest.

### Examples of effective networking questions:

- How did you choose this career and get to where you are now after graduation?
- How has the field changed since you started? What are the leading professional organizations in the field?
- How does your organization compare with its competitors?
- If you had to do college or graduate school all over again, what would you do differently?
- (For alumni) What aspects of your Princeton experience did you find to be particularly useful when you were first transitioning from college to work?
- What skills, personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What next steps would you recommend for my (concentration or career) search?
- Could you recommend anyone else in your network with whom I can connect?
- Can you tell me more about your workplace culture as I consider an opportunity with this company?

### Some Questions to Avoid:

- How much money do you make?
- What do you hate about your job?
- Does your company have a job/internship opening I could apply to right now?
- Can you get me in touch with your company's hiring manager for a position?
- Can you recommend me for a position at your company?

## Be professional during the conversation

### Respect your contact's time.

Everyone's time is a commodity, even when someone is excited to connect with you. Consequently, you should keep your initial conversation to 30 minutes. Keeping tabs on the clock and wrapping up your conversation within this timeframe will demonstrate respect for your contact's time. This could also make your contacts more willing to schedule follow-up conversations with you and/or refer you to other contacts of theirs.

### Listen twice as much as you talk.

Be attentive during the conversation and practice active listening. Give your undivided attention to your contact; refrain from having your phone or laptop out during the conversation in order to cut down on distractions. Ask open-ended questions to get the conversation going and ask clarifying questions when needed. Seek to understand, not to judge, what the other person is saying.

### Stay positive.

Communicating a positive attitude through both your words and your body language is essential to making a good impression. When telling a story about a challenging situation from your past, be sure to frame it in a positive way and wrap it up with what you learned from it.

### Re-frame sensitive questions.

For example, if you are genuinely curious about the tough parts of someone's job, instead of asking: "What do you hate about your job?", ask: "What are some common challenges you face in your role?"



## PHASE 4: MANAGE THE RELATIONSHIP

### Track your process

Any process can become overwhelming if not well-organized. A simple spreadsheet can serve as a useful tool. You can design your network tracking system however works best for you, but usually you'll want to capture the following information: your contacts' names; contact information; current positions and companies; dates of your conversations with them; notes/takeaways from these conversations; and follow-up steps you've taken or plan to take afterwards. You can find an example of a tracker here:

<https://bit.ly/309qqnQ>.

### Follow-up and say "Thank you"

Sending a thank you email after each conversation takes only a few moments of your time and leaves your contacts with a strong impression of you as a courteous professional. Take the time to personalize your thank-you note; refer to specific topics or takeaways from the conversation that were particularly impactful to you or about which you plan to follow up.

#### Subject line: *Thank you!*

*Dear Inge,*

*Thank you very much for taking time to connect with me and share your wisdom and experience as a journalist. I especially enjoyed hearing about your adventures abroad, as well as the many interesting places you have lived throughout your career.*

*Thank you also for referring me to your colleague Hector. I look forward to hopefully connecting with him soon. Many thanks again!*

*Sincerely,  
Theo Tiger*



- If you get along well, you both may be interested in staying in touch and possibly developing a mentor or professional relationship. In this case, you may end up communicating regularly.
- If you ever have a negative experience, don't give up on your networking efforts. Conversations \ that don't go well could be due to differences in personality or someone having a bad day. It's always best to send a thank-you email and move forward to other things.

You can use the network tracking system to stay in touch in ways that don't feel forced or fake. Record takeaways or follow-up items from your conversations. Then, use them as segues for keeping in touch and updating your contacts over time. Examples could include:

- If a contact suggests that you contact one of their colleagues, check back in with them once you've done so. You can discuss what you learned from their colleague, ask other questions that arose and thank them for their help.
- Ask if your contact would be open to sharing their thoughts about your resume and experience.
- Add people on LinkedIn following your informational interviews with them.
- If your contacts mention a milestone in their lives, reach out to congratulate them.
- If something you discussed with a contact comes up in a class, the news, a publication or a project you're working on, tell them about it.
- Use transitions in the year (e.g. holidays, the start of new semesters) as excuses to reach out to contacts whom you haven't heard from in a while, wish them well and update them about yourself.

### Strategize if & how to keep in touch

How you remain in touch with a certain contact will depend on the nature of your relationship. There could be many outcomes from an initial conversation, including:

- After gaining insight into someone's workplace or career, you may no longer be interested in exploring that profession. In this case, it is fine to not pursue any further connection with a contact after sending a thank-you email.

One day in the future, you may find yourself on the receiving end of a request for an informational interview or networking conversation from a student or a new professional. From your experiences here and now, you will know just how to pass it forward!