

NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

OVERVIEW

Does the word “networking” conjure up images of having to polish your pitch as you shop yourself around to random influential people you don’t know, hoping someone will take pity on our job search woes and provide you with a golden opportunity? If so, you may understandably never want to do it. Here’s the good news. Though you do need to be polished, networking doesn’t have to feel icky. In fact, it usually is more effective if it is authentic and enjoyable. Given that recent studies put the number of job openings that are actually advertised at about 30%, this makes networking essential if you hope to increase your chances of landing a position. Networking isn’t about trying to be somebody you’re not while you opportunistically look to capitalize on any employment possibility that is out there. At its best, networking is a process of having fun while meeting new people as you learn about industries of interest and build your professional community of potential colleagues, mentors, and connectors.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Smart networking starts with self awareness. What fields of work do you have a natural affinity for? What career paths interest you and why? Or, to broaden it a bit --What industries would you like to find out more about? What jobs seem like they would be compelling? The answers to these questions provide riverbanks for your networking plan. You don’t have to know exactly what you want to do to start networking, but you need to know what areas of industry or types of job functions interest you and why. If you struggle with answers to these questions, think about the kinds of classes you are pulled toward when reading the course catalog, or the section of a bookstore you always check out, or what topics of conversation among peers you effortlessly find yourself passionately engaged in, or the subjects of news article that you consistently click through when headlines pop up on your devices.

Still feeling a bit uncertain about your areas of interest? There are a number of online personality assessment tests that can help. Although not always perfectly accurate, they can provide opportunities to reflect on what about their outcomes you do or don’t agree with and why. Some are free and others cost between \$10-\$50. For examples of these tools, check out monster.com/career-advice/article/best-free-career-assessment-tools or themuse.com/advice/the-11-best-career-quizzes-to-help-you-find-your-dream-job. Of course, you can also speak with a career advisor in the Career Development Office to help gain additional perspective as you explore your professional proclivities.

IDENTIFYING INTERESTING PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS

Once you know the area(s) that you wish to explore, it’s time to figure out what organizations and people are doing the kind of work you want to know more about. By doing a bit of online research, you can start to zero in on a networking list that you can begin to contact. To start, search news articles about influencers in a particular industry. Read industry trade journals to see what organizations are doing the kind of work that catches your attention. Check out the keynote speakers at conferences in your areas of interests and what organizations they are from. In addition to web research, also be sure to let friends, family, faculty and your social networks know what work you are focused on learning more about and if they have any leads for people you should speak with or companies you should check out.

Once you have a list of organizations, use LinkedIn’s alumni tool to search for any Kenyon alumni that might work at these companies. Type “Kenyon College” into LinkedIn’s search bar and click on the school’s logo to get to Kenyon’s LinkedIn page. Then select the “see alumni” button and determine if any alums work at a company on your list. You can also sort alumni profiles by industries to learn where alumni with similar interests are working. As well, you can check out the Kenyon Career Network (KCN), available online at kenyon.wisr.io. The KCN includes more than 1,200 alumni who have signed up since fall 2018 and are eager to hear from you and offer their support. Search the KCN by name, location, company, industry, or even club affiliation. In addition, you can join communities on the KCN that host group discussions organized by location or area of interest. For more information on using LinkedIn or the KCN, refer to our [Professional Social Media guide](#).

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are different than a job interview. To start, you are the interviewer. In other words, you reach out to contacts from your list and share with them a bit about who you are and what you hope to learn about their field of work. The idea is to ask if they would be willing to give you 20 minutes of their time, at a future date, to answer a few questions you have as you gather information about their industry and/or profession. These conversations are intended to provide you with additional information beyond what you can find online, to help you start or recalibrate your career. You never want to ask for a job in an informational interview. Remember, your goal is to gather more data about the field. However, an informational interview done well may lead to a job offer. In fact, some studies show that one out of every twelve informational interviews results in a job offer. This compares to one job offer out of every two-hundred résumés sent online. The reason? When you are proactive, professional, and well-prepared, people take notice. Good help is hard to find, and if someone says yes to an informational interview and is impressed with you, they are more likely to help you find a place in their organization or be more willing to make a referral to a colleague they know who is looking to grow their team. This isn't *why* you do informational interviews, but it is why you approach them as professional networking opportunities and put your best foot forward.

Phone calls or emails to a contact should indicate how you found a person and/or organization's information, and why you are reaching out. Kenyon alumni in particular will want to support your goals, but they will need to know how they can best help you. When you reach out to contacts, be sure to include specific details about your interests and what you hope they might be able to provide to your professional exploration. Again, you never want to ask them specifically for a job or internship. The onus is on you to apply to positions in the field or at an alum's organization. However, you can ask for suggestions to improve your application materials once you make contact. The process as a whole is designed to help you gain a greater window into your potential career interests, and how to be a competitive candidate once you start your job search.

Sample Emails for Informational Interview Request

Sample 1: Advice on a Type of Job

Subject: Kenyon Class of [Class Year] Interested in Nonprofit Management

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

I recently found your name on the Kenyon Career Network and I see that you're currently working at [Organization Name] as an Event Coordinator. I am a Kenyon senior who has become interested in non-profit event management as a result of my campus leadership activities. I've enjoyed coordinating alumni panels and networking events for the Archon Society. As a result, I have become interested in the possibility of pursuing event planning for non-profits as a career path. Would it be possible to meet in person while I am home on break this winter from [dates], or to speak with you via phone some evening about the work you do? I would be very interested to hear more about your career trajectory and any advice you wish you had received when you started!

Thank you for considering my request, and also for joining the Kenyon Career Network.

Best,

[Your Name]
Kenyon College, Class of [Year]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[LinkedIn Link]

Sample 2: Advice on a Major

Subject: Advice for Kenyon Student Interested in Primary Education

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

I am a first-year student at Kenyon College and found your name listed as part of the Kenyon Career Network. I have been interested in primary education since my junior year in high school. As I prepare to declare my major, I believe it would be helpful to speak with you about your coursework at Kenyon College and your career path. I'd also be interested to learn more about the work you do in your current position at [Organization Name].

If you are available to speak with me in the coming month, I would like to arrange a brief informational interview, either by phone or Skype, at your convenience.

Thank you for being part of the Kenyon Career Network.

Best,

[Your Name]
Kenyon College, Class of [Year]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[LinkedIn Link]

Sample 3: Connecting via LinkedIn Message

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

I am a senior at Kenyon College and enjoyed coming across your LinkedIn profile. I see that you have worked at a variety of NGO's, both domestically and internationally.

As I gear up for my job search, I would value the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences searching for employment and working internationally. Your career choices look very similar to the path I am considering for myself and I'd welcome your advice and insights. Your most recent work in [country] is particularly appealing to me, since my senior comprehensive is tailored to the economic climate in that region of the world.

Would you be willing to speak with me, at your convenience, on the phone or via Skype? I may be reached at [email address] or by Skype at [Skype name]. Thank you for considering this request.

Best,

[Your Name]
Kenyon College, Class of [Year]
[Email Address]
[Skype Number]
[LinkedIn Link]

Sample 4: Referral

Subject: Referral from [Name]

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

[Name of Referrer], my [referrer's relationship to you], provided me with your contact information to learn more about your work at [Organization Name]. I am a junior at Kenyon College majoring in psychology with an interest in substance abuse and addiction counseling. I reviewed your LinkedIn profile online, and would love to speak with you more about the industry, and what I can do as a student to best prepare for a career in this field.

I would benefit greatly from hearing about your experiences, and would like to schedule a time to meet in person, or to speak over the phone or via Skype. If you are able to assist me in this way, I may be reached at the contact information listed in my signature. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
Kenyon College, Class of [Year]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[Skype Number]
[LinkedIn Link]

Sample 5: Speaker Follow Up

Subject: Follow-up from Kenyon [Event Name] Event

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

Thank you for coming to Kenyon College's [Event Name] event last night and for contributing to the panel discussion on [panel topic]. I was happy to hear about your career path, and to learn from the challenges you faced getting to where you are today. It has helped me to better formulate a plan to secure an internship for this coming summer. As a result of hearing you speak, I have a few follow up questions for you. Would it be possible to arrange a 20-minute informational interview? I will be in your area from [date-date]. However, if meeting in person will not work, I would also welcome the chance to schedule something by phone or via Skype.

Thank you once again for your insights last night. I look forward to connecting with you soon, if possible.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
Kenyon College, Class of [Year]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[Skype Name]
[LinkedIn Link]

Preparing for an Informational Interview

Once you schedule a call or an in-person informational interview, you want to be sure to do your homework on the person, their position, the organization, and the industry. Look over the company's website, thoroughly read your interviewee's professional online profiles and/or portfolios. Read any articles or studies they may have published, and watch any of their videos from conference presentations or industry interviews. You have about twenty minutes to ask the questions that will help you the most in understanding more about their profession. You don't want to waste your time or theirs by asking questions you can easily find answers to online. What is it that they can offer invaluable insights on? Remember, you'll only have time for four or five questions, so make them count. Questions to consider include:

- What problems do you most enjoy solving in your work and why?
- What are the three main activities you spend your time on and how does each rely on others in your organization?
- What do you enjoy most about your work and what is the most challenging aspect of your job?
- What expectations did you have about this work when you first started and have they been met?
- From your perspective, what does a person doing this work need to have a natural propensity for, versus what can be learned on the job?
- What are the key hard and soft skills, as well as experience, someone interested in this work needs to have to be competitive when entering this field? How are these similar or different to what is needed to progress in this field?
- Why did you choose to work for your current company? What factors should someone interested in this work consider when vetting possible employers?
- Who do you see as your company's main competitor and why?
- Are there any companies to keep an eye out for due to their recent innovations?
- Are there any current industry trends that are changing the way companies do business?
- What kind of changes in the economy affect your organization or work?
- If someone wanted to stay current on industry trends and influencers, what resources would you recommend?
- What do the employment prospects in this industry look like? What are the types of entry-level positions that most effectively set people up for future success?
- What are the pitfalls or opportunities of the field that you wish someone had told you about at the onset of your career?
- I would assess my top skills to include [list of skills]. Is there a particular aspect of this industry that you would recommend I learn more about, given these strengths?

At the Informational Interview

If your informational interview is via Skype or in-person, be sure to dress as you would for a job interview. Thank the contact for their time, and let them know that you will remain mindful of the twenty minutes they agreed to. Ask if it would be okay if you took notes. This way you can log key names, resources, and insights. Remember, this is a time to hear from them, so even though it may feel like a conversation, you want to be sure they are doing most of the talking. At the end, you could ask them if they'd be willing to review your résumé and give you feedback. If they agree, you can email this to them or if they have time, you can review a hard copy together. When you see the end of your session approaching, you should share that your twenty minutes is almost up and ask if there is anything that you didn't get to that they think would be essential for someone considering this field to know. If at that time they invite the conversation to go longer, it's fine to continue, but do wrap up appropriate to the extra time they indicated they could extend the meeting to. Before you leave, be sure to ask if there are other people in the field that they would recommend you reach out to as you continue to gather more data about the industry and related professions. Be sure to close the session on time and thank the contact again for their help.

Following an Informational Interview

You did the hard work of making a new contact, now you want to follow up with a thank you note and be sure to stay in touch. Similar to a job interview, it's best to email a thank you within 24 hours of your meeting, and then to follow up with a handwritten note too. If you haven't done so already, connect via LinkedIn and then follow the contact's company on

LinkedIn and on other social media platforms. This way when you see the company has made the news or the individual has changed positions, you can send a brief congratulations. It is also helpful to put a 3-month recurring reminder in your calendar to check in with them or connect in other ways via social media. Let them know about any updates with your job search; share links to interesting articles or videos you've come across related to their work; like a post of theirs on LinkedIn; retweet a professional tweet of theirs that you like; or just email to let them know you were recently reflecting on your conversation and again wanted to thank them for their assistance. As long as you keep these outreaches short and sweet, contacts will usually love hearing from you and appreciate your collegial approach.

Sample Informational Interview Thank You Email

Subject: Thank You

Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

Thank you once again for taking time today to speak with me about your career path and entry-level opportunities in the [industry] field. I enjoyed our conversation, and look forward to beginning my search. I also appreciate the referral to [Referral Name], and will be connecting with [him/her/them] soon. I truly appreciate the insight and advice, and I will update you on my progress. Thank you again for answering my questions and providing great insights.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Kenyon College, Class of [Year]

[Email Address]

[Phone Number]

[LinkedIn Link]

NETWORKING EVENTS

Whether through Kenyon or professional associations, you'll have the opportunity to attend networking events where mixing and mingling is the core purpose of the gathering. These are great opportunities to build professional contacts in a more social setting. To get the most out of the event, keep the following tips in mind:

Dress Appropriately. It can feel awkward to attend any event and realize you miscalculated your wardrobe choice. Be sure to check the event invitation to see what dress is indicated. If one isn't stated, err on the side of caution and dress in a way that you can easily take off a suit jacket, or lose the tie, or slip into flats, to bring your fashion into alignment.

Research Attendees. If a list of registrants is available beforehand, identify participants who are working in fields or for employers of interest, and make sure that you find a way to approach them at the event. Research their field, employer, or industry to inform your questions and guide conversation.

Know Yourself. It will be important to share the skills you enjoy utilizing which have led to successes in class, work, athletics, and/or co-curricular life. Be prepared to offer some information about your interests, talents, skills, and accomplishments.

Identify Goals. Research career fields of interest so you can share possible target industries or companies. It's okay to have multiple areas of interest. What professional aspirations are you aiming toward? Practice a brief introduction that can be delivered in 20 - 30 seconds. It will be very hard for participants to help you if you haven't furnished them with a sense of who you are and where you're headed.

Engage Authentically. As challenging as it can feel sometimes at these types of events, be confident and be yourself. Networking is a chance for you to build new relationships, and that is hard to do if your personality can't shine through

due to nerves! If you're unsure of how to start, try identifying commonalities such as a shared interest, passion, academic path, hometown, college sport, club, residence hall, or faculty contact. Any of these topics can be a great place to kick off a networking conversation.

Ask Questions. Prepare a short list of questions prior to the networking event. Make sure that you are genuinely interested in hearing responses or you might seem stiff or insincere. Don't feel the need to stick strictly to your list, but having a few questions in your head can be a nice safety net. Some examples include:

- Tell me a little about your experience at Kenyon.
- How did you get interested in _____?
- What made you choose your particular specialty area or career path?
- Tell me a little about the day-to-day reality of your job.
- What do you find most challenging? Rewarding?
- How did you make the decision to return to graduate or professional school?
- What skills/personal characteristics are necessary for success in your position or organization?
- Where are you planning to go from here? What are your goals?
- What do you wish you had known prior to entering your field?
- If you were in my position, what would you do next?
- Are you aware of any internship/shadowing/job opportunities that I should look into?
- Do you know of anyone else who I might benefit from speaking with?

Follow Up & Stay in Touch. Be sure to ask for a business card or contact information before you wrap up your conversation. Follow up after the event with contacts that you make within 24-48 hours. Send an email, thanking them for any specific advice and include a reminder of who you are by sharing your LinkedIn page. Make sure you hold up your end of the bargain by following through on anything you've said you would do (including send a résumé, connect on LinkedIn, etc.) If you didn't talk at the event about them helping you with anything specific, try to avoid any requests in your initial follow-up email. That can come a week later. (See Thank-You Note Guide below.) Keep all correspondence professional without typos or abbreviations used in texting.

Thank-You Note Guide For Networking Events

Opening--*Personalize your introduction. Remind them where or how you met, as well as what you discussed.*

- **Topic Reminder.** Thank you for taking time to speak with me about [topic] at yesterday's [event].
- **Shared Interest.** I hope your travels back to [city] went smoothly. I enjoyed meeting you and talking about [shared common interest] at [event].

Body--*Inform the individual of the impact they had on you. What will you do as a result of the conversation?*

- **Personal Impact.** I feel [feeling] after speaking with you at [event] yesterday. The insights you provided from your experience helped me understand [something about your career development process or the industry].
- **New Career Interest.** Following our conversation at [event] yesterday, I researched [new industry] and discovered that [industry/job/company] is a great fit with my professional interest. Thank you for the wonderful advice and guidance.
- **Requested Follow-up.** I am following up on your suggestion to [get name of contact/ to share my résumé/for links to job openings]. *(Only do this if the contact offered, otherwise wait for your second follow-up email to make a specific request).*
- **Your Next Steps.** I appreciate your suggestion to [identify their suggestion] during our conversation. I plan to [what will you do?]. I'm excited to pursue this and will let you know how it develops.

Conclusion--*Keep the relationship open to future correspondences.*

- **Wish Them Luck.** Thank you again for your time. Good luck with your upcoming [project discussed]! I look forward to staying in touch.
- **Share a Resource.** The book I mentioned that may interest you is [name of book] by [author]. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I will let you know what plans I confirm for the summer.
- **Stay in Touch.** Thank you for the wonderful conversation at [event] this past week. Your insights were helpful and motivating. I will [list things you intend to do as a result of their advice] and will keep you updated as my plans progress. May I contact you with additional questions as I navigate this process?
- **Honor the Network.** I am continually impressed by the generosity of the Kenyon network. I'm grateful to you and the rest of the Kenyon alumni community's dedication and support of students. I look forward to remaining active in the Kenyon community long after I leave the Hill.

Follow-Up Asks--*After you send an initial thank-you note, wait at least a week before writing to make a specific request.*

- **Résumé Review.** I greatly appreciated your advice on opportunities to consider toward furthering my experience. Before I apply to these positions, would you be willing to review my résumé to ensure it is appropriately tailored for the industry?
- **Informational Interview.** Thank you for speaking with me about your work at [company]. As I am interested in pursuing a career in the field, would you be willing to [meet or schedule a call] for an informational interview to continue our conversation?
- **Referral to Contact.** When discussing my interest in [topic], you mentioned that you know [Contact Name] at [Company Name]. Would you be willing to introduce us for an informational interview so that I may continue to explore my interest in the field?
- **Job Application Advice.** Thank you for your advice at [event] last [week/month]. As you suggested, I will [list things you intend to do as a result of their advice]. Additionally, I am applying to [position] at [company] and wondered if you had suggestions on how to leverage my [experience discussed] to stand out in the job application?

Stay in touch--*Track your contacts, and email occasionally, even if just to check in.*

- **Share Progress.** Since our conversation back in [month] at [event], I took your advice and [what you did].
- **Share an Update.** I'm excited to share with you a recent development in my [job search/grad school search/life]. Since we last spoke, I [update]. Thank you again for your advice and guidance. I would not have discovered this [opportunity/program/career interest] without it.
- **Share an Article.** I recall you talking about your [interest] at [event] back in [month]. I recently read this article about [topic] in [source] and thought of you. (Link to article, or include issue date.)

NETWORKING FOR PROSPECTS

In your research, you may come across organizations that perfectly match your areas of interest. You may discover, however, that you can't find anyone in your network that either works there or who knows somebody that is employed by that company. You also don't see any positions actively listed on the website or on national job boards. If you've tried all the ways to connect with someone on the inside and have come up short, you can still reach out. In these situations, when you are interested in an organization and wish to inquire about possible openings there, you will need to send a prospecting letter. Address your letter to a specific individual, usually the person who supervises the functional area where you would like to work. Generally, you can find this information out by looking at the company's website or by searching for individuals who work at the organization via LinkedIn. You can also try searching for email addresses on voilanorbert.com. When you reach out, be as specific as possible about the type of position that interests you. Ideally, your research will reveal the job titles used by this employer. If not, use generic job titles commonly understood in the field.

Sample Prospecting Letter

When prospecting, it is often more effective to send a letter via land mail, as it's more likely to be opened. Then, follow up with an email, attaching the original letter and your résumé. See the Career Development Office's Cover Letter Guide for details on sending letters via mail.

HANNA HALL

44 Constitution Drive, Washington, D.C. 20001
202-555-2553 | hh@gmail.com

April 30, 2019

Asiya Abadi, Education Director
101 W. 31st Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Dear Ms. Abadi:

I am impressed by your organization's commitment to teaching core school subjects through drama. As a recent graduate of Kenyon College's Dance, Drama & Film Department, I am seeking a full-time opportunity in which I may apply my theater background and previous tutoring experiences to serve students in New York City communities.

I was inspired to read on your website how the Creative Arts Team works with energetic and passionate actor-teachers to carry out its mission. As someone with the requisite background, including training with the prestigious Dramatic Arts in Education Foundation, I have demonstrated the ability to develop deep dialogues among youth and facilitate content integration through the use of drama-based techniques. My Kenyon College degree and my internship experiences have taught me how to bring ideas to life--individualizing lessons so that students may learn in a unique and creative way.

My attached résumé elaborates on the details of my skills and experiences. I would appreciate the chance to meet with you and discuss how I might be a vital part of your team. I will call you next week to see if there is a possibility to talk further.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Hanna Hall

Sample: Prospect Letter Follow-Up Email

Subject: Potential Candidate

Dear Ms. Abadi,

It is with great enthusiasm that I reach back out to you today. Last week, I sent you a letter of inquiry and résumé (both attached), noting my interest in working with your team of drama educators. I believe my undergraduate work as a Dance, Drama, and Film major at Kenyon College and my training with the Dramatic Arts in Education Foundation would offer a solid background for contributing to your extraordinary efforts.

I left you a voicemail earlier this morning hoping to connect. I'd welcome the opportunity to speak further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Hanna Hall

202-555-2553

hh@gmail.com

[LINKEDIN.COM/IN/HANNA-HALL](https://www.linkedin.com/in/hanna-hall)