

NETWORKING

Networking is the process of developing and maintaining relationships with people who can provide you with information, advice, and referrals. As part of your job search, networking can help you with the following:

- Increase your visibility in the professional world and market your skills and abilities to contacts within your field of interest.
- Tap into the unseen job market—the 80-85% of jobs that are never advertised but are filled by referrals through existing employees or industry contacts.
- Stay up to date with current industry trends and changes in the job market and get a first-hand look into occupations and companies about which you want to learn.

Networking Opportunities

Career Fairs

Career fairs are great opportunities to meet a wide variety of employers, including WPI alumni. You should consider volunteering to help with set up during the morning of a fair so that you can talk to employers before the fair even begins. Make sure to do your research before the fair to familiarize yourself with the companies attending. Being knowledgeable about the company will really help you stand out.

After you talk to a company representative at the fair, make sure to ask for their business card so that you can follow up and continue networking beyond the fair. If they don't have a business card with them, be sure to get their name and email address. You should also send a follow-up email within a few days of the fair to thank the employer for your conversation and reiterate your interest in their opportunities. See the CDC's **Thank You Note Writing** tipsheet for a guide.

Company Information Sessions

Companies regularly come to campus to present information about their organizations and potential opportunities. These sessions tend to be smaller events in which you should take advantage of the time to speak with employers either before or after their presentations. The employers who attend are often the same people who recruit at career fairs, and sometimes employers will leave interview slots open for students who impress them at information sessions. After you attend a session, you should send a thank you note to follow up. Be sure to include something in your note that will help the presenter remember you and your conversation.

Networking Nights and Career Expos

Networking nights and career expos provide an opportunity for you to interact with alumni, fellow students, and other professionals in an environment that is less formal than a traditional career fair. These events typically target a specific industry or population, such as Civil Engineering or Life Sciences & Bioengineering.



Even though a networking night or career expo is less structured than a career fair, you will still need to prepare by doing your research on the companies that will be in attendance. Know who they are, what they do, and prepare thoughtful questions to help get a conversation started. Be sure to get a business card or take down contact information so that you can follow up later.

Any Other Events

Any opportunity to interact with someone in your field or who can potentially help you is a networking event. Always be prepared to talk about yourself, your interests, and your long-term career ideas. Prepare and practice your Elevator Pitch so you are always ready to make a great first impression. See the CDC's **Elevator Pitch** tipsheet for guidance on what to include.

Things to Consider

What to Wear to Networking Events

You should always dress in business professional attire when you attend a career fair. If possible, you should wear a suit. If you don't own a suit you could try borrowing one from a friend or make a quick trip to a nearby store or thrift shop. If you are unable to acquire a suit, dress as professionally as you can with what you already have. Wear nice slacks or a skirt with a blouse or button down, tie, and jacket. Do not wear clothes that are don't fit well, are too short/low cut or are rumpled/torn/stained.

Information sessions are a bit less formal, but you should still wear business casual. If you are attending the information session and intend to talk to the employer afterwards, you should definitely wear more professional clothes.

Professional association general body meetings do not usually have particular dress codes, but the professional events they hold typically do have guidelines for attire.

If an unplanned opportunity arises to talk with someone, don't worry that you are not quite dressed for the occasion – rather, focus on having a good conversation.

First Impressions

- Make sure your posture is upright to show your self-confidence.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Make sure to talk loud and clear; do not talk in a quiet tone.
- Always have positive facial expressions; make sure you smile, nod your head up and down, and are engaged.
- Practice and solicit feedback on your handshake. It should be firm, not too strong nor too weak.

Networking Do's & Don'ts

The purpose of networking is to gather advice, guidance, and suggestions, not to ask, "Do you have a job for me?"

Do:

- Research in advance of any meeting
- Request information about the company and/or industry
- Ask for referrals
- Ask for a resume critique
- Be courteous and send a thank you note



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Don't:

- Ask for a job or to have your resume circulated
- Show up unprepared
- Focus entirely on yourself – this is a learning experience
- Overstep your time limits
- Forget to say thank you

A Few Final Tips

- Set networking goals. Know who you want to meet and what you want to find out from them.
- Build networking into your schedule. For example, set aside time every month to identify new contacts and follow up with existing contacts. Come up with a schedule that works for you.
- Know what to say. Practice how to market yourself with a 1-minute presentation or elevator pitch.
- Don't get discouraged—be persistent, and remember that most opportunities are found through networking.
- Make developing a professional relationship with a contact your primary goal, instead of just focusing on getting a job.
- Join professional organizations to meet people in the industry you would like to enter.
- For more information, schedule an appointment through your **Handshake** account.

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