

# NETWORKING, INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING, AND LINKEDIN

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.

## Informational Interviewing

Informational interviews are great ways to gather information for exploring career options. They generally involve 30-minute conversations with professionals about their careers and what they do in their jobs. Requesting and conducting informational interviews is about networking and gathering information about a particular industry or occupation—it is not about asking for a job.

### Preparation

Begin by making a list of people you already know who might have information to help in your search. Use your existing connections or tools, like WPI Alumni Connect, LinkedIn, or CareerShift, to identify additional networking contacts. Potential networking contacts include the following:

- Relatives
- Friends - especially those who have had internships at companies of interest to you
- Parents' friends and friends' parents

- Faculty and academic advisors
- Former employers and co-workers
- Neighbors and acquaintances
- Alumni

## Reaching out to a Potential Networking Contact

A phone call is the best way to reach out to a potential contact, as emails can easily get lost. If you have a phone number for a networking contact, call to introduce yourself and ask for an informational interview. Below is an example of an introductory phone call:

**Contact:** "Hello, this is Sally Smith."

**Student:** "Good morning, Ms. Smith. My name is Mike Jones. I received your name from John Green, who is a neighbor of mine. I'm a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and John suggested I reach out to you."

**Contact:** "Oh, yes. John mentioned you might call. What can I do for you, Mike?"

**Student:** “I know your schedule is busy, so I will not take much of your time. I am pursuing a career in civil engineering and John mentioned that you’re currently working as a Project Engineer at XX Company. It sounds like you’ve had a lot of great experience in the civil engineering field, and if possible I would like to arrange a time for an informational interview with you. My schedule is very flexible and I’m looking for only 20-30 minutes of your time.”

## Reaching Out by Email

If you do not have a phone number, email is the next best option. Below is a sample structure to help you draft an initial email asking for an informational interview:

Good morning, my name is \_\_\_\_\_.  
I am a senior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and am graduating in May with a Bachelor of Science degree in the \_\_\_\_\_ (field), and I’d love to find out more about working in \_\_\_\_\_ (industry, type of role, etc).  
You have a broad background in \_\_\_\_\_ (that industry, role, etc), and I’d love to talk with you about \_\_\_\_\_ (companies that would value my skills and strategies for getting into this industry, role, etc). Would you be willing to talk with me (or meet for coffee if the contact is local) sometime over the next week or two? When would be a convenient date and time for you?

## Preparing for the Meeting

Do your research and prepare ahead of time before the informational interview. Determine the objectives of the discussion, research the company and person, and prepare an agenda with questions to ask. Your questions should be thoughtful and specific, such as the following:

- What do you think are the most effective techniques for obtaining work in this field?
- What are the necessary skills and abilities for someone in this field, role, etc.?
- What do you like or dislike about your company?
- How did you get into this field?
- What do you like or dislike about the work that you do?
- What is the current demand for people in this field?
- Are there any industries, sectors, or roles that you think would best match my skill set? How do you recommend I position myself?
- Given your understanding of my skills and background, what barriers would I need to overcome to make a move into this field, industry, role, etc.?
- Are there particular companies or employers that might be good targets for me to pursue?
- Now that you understand my background and career goals, do you have any additional suggestions or advice for me?

## Conducting the Meeting

We strongly encourage you to conduct informational interviews, and other networking meetings, in person. You will develop stronger connections and can demonstrate your excitement. Face-to-face conversations also allow for better communication and provide your contact with a better understanding of who you are, your skills, and your strengths. The second best medium is through Skype/Google Hangout, followed by on the telephone.



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Begin the meeting by thanking the contact for taking the time to speak with you. Set the tone and clarify your purpose by stating your career goals and what you hope to gain from the discussion. Use your prepared questions to help drive the conversation. Always be mindful of the time—if you find that you are exceeding the time agreed upon, check with the contact to ensure they are able to continue the discussion.

Close by thanking the contact again and discussing any next steps, if applicable. Ask if there is anyone else who they recommend you talk to. This is a great way to expand your network.

## Follow Up

Send a thank you note or email to the contact within two days of a discussion. Also check in with them from time to time to provide updates on your job progress, highlighting how they have helped, and to ask about any potential new opportunities of which they are aware.

## Other 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.

## Professional Associations

Going to professional association meetings is a great way to meet people who are already in your field and gain valuable connections and information about potential opportunities. Many professional groups host conferences and career fairs that can help college students find mentors as well as internship and job opportunities.

## Any Other Events

Remember, you are ALWAYS networking. 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 full suit, which you should obtain as early as possible during your college years. If you do not have a suit, men should wear nice slacks with a button down, tie, and jacket, while women should wear a skirt or dress pants and blouse. Do not wear clothes that are too tight fitting, short, or low cut.

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.

Remember, you are ALWAYS networking. 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.

### Image & 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, yet 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:

- Ask if it is a good time to talk
- Research in advance of any meeting
- Request information, not a job
- Ask for referrals
- Ask for a resume critique
- Be courteous and send a thank you note

### 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 two hours per week 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 sell 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, check out some of the networking books available in the CDC Career Resource Library.

## LinkedIn

When you join LinkedIn, you get access to people, jobs, news, updates, and insights that help you be great at what you do. It is the world's largest professional network with more than 433 million members in 200 countries and territories around the globe. (Source: LinkedIn Corporation ©2016)

### Using LinkedIn to Enhance your Networking Strategy

LinkedIn is a widely used resource among professionals across multiple industries. More than 3 million companies have LinkedIn Company Pages, while LinkedIn members are sharing insights and knowledge in more than 2.1 million LinkedIn Groups. (Source: LinkedIn Corporation ©2014).

LinkedIn enables you to establish a professional online presence and market your skills and experiences as you work towards landing your next job or internship. Through LinkedIn you can identify potential employers, industries, networking contacts, and roles that you might be interested in pursuing and connect with thought leaders and networking contacts in your field.

Remember, LinkedIn is about establishing meaningful relationships that you can leverage in your professional pursuits. It is not about asking people for a job.

### Create your LinkedIn Profile

The first step in developing your LinkedIn page is to create your profile. Make sure your profile is complete and contains detailed information, but remember to include professional information only and avoid personal items.

Recruiters use LinkedIn to identify potential job candidates and will compare profiles to their job specifications. Search for profiles of people who do the type of work you are looking for and try to incorporate similar information into your profile. Always be truthful, but understand that you need to stand out.

Review your public profile settings to ensure you understand who can see what in your profile. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, you want people to be able to find you on LinkedIn, so a fully visible public profile is often the best way to ensure employers and networking connections can find you.

#### Profile elements include the following:

##### Photo

Upload a professional headshot of yourself. You should be alone in the photo and should be dressed how you would want an employer to see you. Profiles with photos are seven times more likely to be viewed by others. Profiles without a photo are perceived by employers to be inactive or incomplete.

##### Headline

Your profile headline is what appears under your name when you come up in a search on LinkedIn or in an external search engine. You can use up to 120 characters and should think of the headline as the slogan for your professional brand, making sure that

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it is both descriptive and contains relevant keywords. Examples include the following:

- “Civil Engineering Junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute”
- “Mechanical Engineering Student with a Concentration in Design”
- “Marketing Graduate Student | Social Media Specialist | Client Relationship Management”

## Contact Information

Post your email address so that employers who find you in a search can contact you outside of LinkedIn.

## Customized URL

Change the URL for your LinkedIn Profile to your name rather than the standard link with letters and numbers. If you are proud of your LinkedIn profile, you can put the URL on your resume, email signature, and business cards.

## Sections

Do your best to build up your Profile Strength by completing as many of the sections as are applicable to you and relevant to the type of role you are seeking. Users with the highest strength levels are 40 times more likely to receive opportunities through LinkedIn and to be found by others.

You can add various media to enhance your profile, such as uploading images or videos of your Projects, links to publications or electronic portfolios, documents of your reports, or even your resume to your Summary. You are also able to reorder the sections of your profile according to their relevance.

The more your profile contains keywords for your field or career area, the more likely you are to be found by employers searching for people on LinkedIn or through a search engine, particularly when the key words are

used in your headline, summary, work experience, and skills/expertise sections. Great ways to find relevant keywords including searching job listings of interest or LinkedIn profiles of people who currently hold the types of positions you are seeking.

## Summary

Your summary can be up to a few short paragraphs and should include details about your background, current status, relevant key skills, accomplishments, specialties, experiences, and what you are looking for.

## Projects

Use this section to highlight the projects on your resume and any others you think are relevant to the type of position you are seeking. Be sure to include descriptions of what you did, whether you worked on a team, any methods or technical skills used, and results. You may include any of the following:

- great problems seminar
- interactive qualifying project (IQP)
- major qualifying project (MQP)
- class projects and labs
- independent projects or research

## Experience

List key jobs and leadership and volunteer experiences and include a description of what you did in these experiences. You can pull this information directly from your resume. Because you are not limited by space restrictions in your LinkedIn profile like you are on your resume, you can include additional relevant details.

## Education

Add Worcester Polytechnic Institute and the degree toward which you are working (as well as any degrees attained from other institutions). Fill in your dates



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attended and list any activities in which you are involved. You should also include your GPA if it is a 3.0 or higher.

## **Skills/Expertise**

This section allows you to list up to 50 skills or areas of expertise. Use this section to list relevant skills that would make you attractive to employers and make sure this information aligns with the Skills section on your resume. You can also add soft skills (e.g., Communication, Project Management, Presenting, Data Analysis, etc.) and expertise within your major (e.g., Civil Engineering, Bioinformatics, etc.). This section allows you to include important industry keywords that will come up in searches.

People can endorse you for your skills or write personal recommendations for you, both of which will be visible on your profile. These endorsements add credibility to your profile and listed areas of expertise. Likewise, you should endorse other people for their skills to build your relationship and encourage them to endorse you in return. You can remove skills from this section that may no longer be relevant and can also remove skills that other people endorse you for that you do not want on your profile.

## **Certifications**

Add any certifications you hold that are relevant to your field.

## **Courses**

You can choose to list relevant courses you have taken that might show specific knowledge areas in your field. Do not list all of your courses – just the most relevant and advanced courses.

## **Honors & Awards**

Add significant awards or honors to this section. Choose the ones you are most proud of, particularly if they are relevant to your field.

## **Publications**

If you have been published in a professional journal, you can site that publication. In addition, you can include a link to the publications or upload documents.

## **Languages**

Add any foreign languages you speak, if applicable.

## **Organizations**

You might add organizations to which you belong here (e.g., professional organizations, clubs, sororities/ fraternities, sports, honor societies, etc.)

## **Additional Information**

This section is optional. You can add interests or advice on how to best contact you. Focus on skills and experience – your profile should function as an online resume and should not include a lot of personal information.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations are like references, and they matter to recruiters who are looking at you as a potential candidate. Try to get a few recommendations from people you have worked for or with in a job, project setting, or volunteer experience. You should also recommend others, as this is a great way to support your peers and get noticed by recruiters. When recruiters view your peers' profiles, they can also see your recommendation and profile.

## **Add Connections**

Once your profile is complete, begin connecting with as many colleagues, former co-workers, peers, professors, staff, alumni, family, and friends as you can. The more connections you have, the more searchable you become to employers. To get started, establish a goal of 100 connections that are meaningful to you from a networking standpoint. Continually be thinking about new connections to add – developing your connections should be an ongoing process.





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Once you find someone with whom you want to connect, click “Connect” under their name.



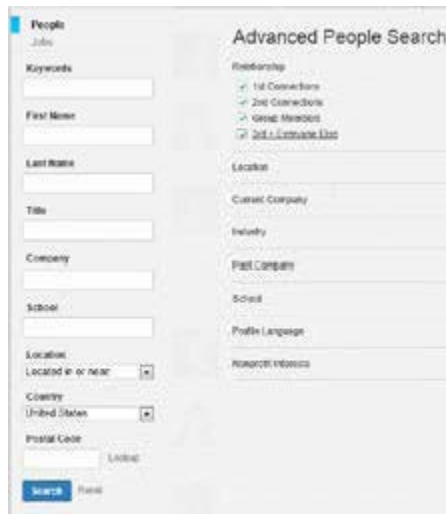
When adding connections, write a brief personal note asking to connect. Always personalize your connection requests.



## Advanced People Search

You can use the Advanced People Search to find WPI alumni in a company, industry, or role that interests you. You can also use this search to identify managers or individuals working in your dream field or company. Simply click “Advanced” next to the search bar at the top of the page. If you identify a good contact, you might consider reaching out to ask for an informational interview.

Stay connected with your contacts. For example, learn their areas of interest and forward them an article they might be interested in, or ask a question about current challenges and opportunities in their field.



## WPI Alumni Search

By visiting [linkedin.com/alumni](https://www.linkedin.com/alumni), you can search for WPI alumni currently working in companies or fields in which you are interested. You can use various criteria such as where they live, company name, job function, major at WPI, and skills to narrow your search to identify the best contact to reach out to.

## Groups

Join groups that align with your areas of interest. These groups might include any of the following:

- professional associations
- alumni
- majors
- industry of interest
- sports
- fraternity or sorority
- volunteer interests
- WPI Career Development Center – join the CDC group to receive timely updates regarding CDC and Employer events and articles, as well as advice on job search and LinkedIn topics.



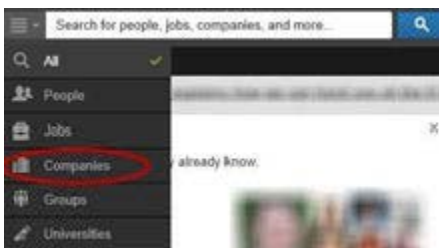


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Once you join a group you can follow career discussions, post questions, and review job postings. Look for profiles of people in roles that interest you. See what groups they belong to and join those groups as well. Review group members to build a list of companies of interest and identify other key contacts.

## Companies

Select “Companies” from the drop-down menu to the left of the search bar. Search for companies in your industry that you would like to work for. See if you are already connected to anyone at the company (1st or 2nd degree connection), and reach out and ask for an informational interview to learn more about the company, the field, and available opportunities. It is a good idea to “Follow” companies you like so that you can stay abreast of news and job openings.



## Jobs

Click on the “Jobs” heading and open up the “Advanced Search” options to focus your search results on the type of job you are looking for within specific industries or locations.

When you see a job of interest, check to see if you are connected to any current employees (1st or 2nd degree). Reach out and ask for an informational interview to learn more.



## Remember

- LinkedIn can be a powerful networking tool that enables you to find a person you'd like to connect with, send a connection request and introduce yourself, and request an informational interview.
- Check in with your contacts from time to time to maintain your relationships. Provide updates on your job progress and highlight how they have helped.
- Check the CDC's event schedule for LinkedIn Labs to learn more and enhance your LinkedIn approach.
- Come to the CDC for help either by scheduling an appointment or coming in during drop-in hours. We can answer questions regarding LinkedIn and help you identify how to best incorporate it into your job search strategy.
- Reference our Informational Interviewing tipsheet for tips on how to prepare for and conduct **informational interviews**, including sample questions.
- Review some of the networking books available in the CDC Career Resource Library.

**Career Development Center**  
Project Center  
508-831-5260 | [cdc@wpi.edu](mailto:cdc@wpi.edu)  
[wpi.edu/+cdc](http://wpi.edu/+cdc)

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