

Networking

Many people hear the word “networking” and immediately feel a sense of dread, picturing being in a room full of strangers, forced to make small talk. Yes, that type of networking is important, and can be a useful way to connect with people who you would otherwise not have access to, but it is not the only way to start building your professional network.

► Start Building Your Network Now

You do not need to wait until you are actively looking for a job to start building your network. As a student, you have a lot of opportunities to connect with others who are or will be professionals in a shared industry. Join a student club dedicated to your major, and participate in department events. Look out for opportunities to get to know your classmates and instructors.

► Request an Informational Interview

An informational interview is a conversation with someone in a profession you are interested in. You can ask questions and get advice on how to progress in your chosen field or at a particular company. It allows you to explore what a day on the job looks like, ask questions about the company's values or what attributes look for in new hires. Use this information to inform your job search.



► Look for Existing Connections

Think of people you have met who can help you build your knowledge of careers, companies, or industries you are interested in. Individuals do not need to have a direct line to your dream job to offer valuable insights. For example, you may know someone who works for a company you would like to join, but in a department outside of your specialization. They may provide you with crucial information about the company's workplace culture, existing goals, or future hiring priorities.

► Use Social Media

Network on Social Media by following relevant companies and organizations, or by joining interest groups. You can direct-message contacts, introduce yourself using your elevator pitch, and ask informational questions. Be mindful of what information is publicly visible on your profile. Use a professional profile picture and email address when using social media for networking purposes. Consider creating a designated professional networking profile on a site like LinkedIn.

Networking Events

Making connections is an important part of finding and growing your career. Even if you feel awkward speaking with people you do not know, there are strategies to make the most of these opportunities.

► Research the Event

Look at the purpose of the event, planned activities, and attendees. This will help you strategize how to use your time effectively.

► Have a clear goal in mind

Ask yourself what you want to achieve during the event and what steps you will need to take to get there.

► Have an Elevator Pitch ready

Be prepared to sell your potential with a short script describing your educational and professional background.

► Practice conversation starters

Have some open-ended questions prepared, so you are ready when an opportunity for connection presents itself. Questions like: What are you most excited to be working on right now? How did you hear about this event? How did you find yourself on this career path?

► Bring a friend

There's nothing wrong with bringing someone for support. Just make sure that you don't end up spending all your time together – you still want to meet your goals!

Cultivate the Connections You Make

Following up after a networking event (within a week) increases your chances of turning connections into meaningful relationships. It shows your dedication and interest, and will make you stand out. Send contacts a **brief** message that includes a reminder of how you met, why you are connecting, your elevator pitch, and a thank you for their time. You may also want to propose another meeting or informational interview, and suggest a date and time when you could meet.

The Elevator Pitch

An Elevator Pitch is a short summary of your professional and educational background and career goals. The purpose is to introduce yourself and make connections that can open up professional opportunities.

Building Blocks of an Elevator Pitch

Highlight key facts that you can use in your pitch:

Education	Work Experience
Notable Skills	Goals
What achievement are you most proud of?	
What do you want the listener to remember about you?	

Preparing the Pitch

Use the information above to make your pitch. A successful elevator pitch will: A) grab the listener's attention, B) introduce who you are, C) outline what you have to offer, and D) summarize what you hope to accomplish with the interaction.

- ▶ Keep your pitch short and to the point. The standard is 20-30 seconds (or ~70 words). You won't be able to include everything, so aim for what is most relevant to your audience.
- ▶ Inject your pitch with personality. Professional does not mean impersonal. Be authentic in your pitch and make a lasting impression.
- ▶ Make minor adjustments based on the situation or opportunity. You may need to highlight different skills or educational achievements based on who you are speaking to, or adjust your tone for an email versus an in-person event.

Example Elevator Pitch

Hello, my name is Jane, and I am a Kinesiology student at the University of Winnipeg. I am also a certified rehabilitation assistant with 3 years of experience in clinical settings. I find fulfillment in helping patients recover and seeing them regain the ability to accomplish daily tasks. I would love to hear more about what you do and the opportunities available at your clinic.

MY ELEVATOR PITCH: