

Tips for starting a conversation with industry

Engaging in conversations with industry professionals is a great way to develop your professional networks, build your professional identity and learn more about your chosen field and job opportunities.

There are a range of ways you may connect and network with industry including: online through a platform such as LinkedIn; in-person or online at a networking event; or via email. In this activity guide, there are a series of guided self-reflective questions for you to answer in preparation for interacting with industry.

1. Preparation

How can you prepare and get started with networking?

It is best to start with a plan. With good preparation comes confidence, direction, and enables you to focus and be more comfortable with the activity, and also will then take a more professional approach. Set a networking plan. When you are ready to approach organisations or industry professionals, be sure to do some research on the organisation, the person you are meeting with, and if applicable the role. Have a think about your strengths and abilities from your experiences, and how you can add value to the organisation.

Define your Networking Plan (use the spaces below to write notes on the different topic areas)

Research on the organisation

Key people to meet with

Research on the role

Strengths and abilities from your experience

How you can add value to the organisation

2. Confidence

What is the best way to prepare for an interaction with an industry professional?

Practice your writing/speaking with a friend/fellow student/family member, and refine your points and questions. Remember, UQ has a range of support services, including online resources and in-person career development workshops and events, where you can get advice from a member of the Career Development Team. The more that you practice, the more confident you will become. Consider whether the first conversation will be face-to-face, or online, this will help you visualise the interaction.

Notes on reflection from practice sessions

3. Nerves

What do you recommend for students new to this who might have nerves?

Everyone gets nervous when they meet someone new for the first time. Again, practice and preparation is key here, but to help with your nerves, just remember, everyone gets nervous, practice your breathing, and take your time, talk slowly, but purposefully, and look them in the eye while you speak. This is a sign of both professionalism and confidence. Remember as well, the professional member knows that you are a student and will respect where you are at in your development. At the end of the day, when it comes to career recruitment, they need you, as much as you need them!

4. Approach, appropriate communication and professional dress

What is the best way to appear and look professional in these interactions?

Take a professional approach and use appropriate industry terminology. If you are meeting virtually i.e. Zoom, ensure that you are dressed professionally, and have practiced using the technology so that you do not have any technological challenges at the time of meeting, so that it runs smoothly. If meeting face-to-face, ensure that you are dressed professionally as per the industry protocols, and practice introducing yourself. Remember, you do not have a lot of time to capture their attention, so focus on your skills, experience, and disciplinary background to make the connection meaningful. Practice your elevator pitch!

Locate appropriate industry terminology

Notes on dressing and presenting professionally

Notes on your practice sessions (in-person and online)

Further hints and tips

Body language

- Feet should open as a triangle shape, which invites others into the conversation
- Establish eye contact, smile and relax.
- If there is food or drink, always hold the food in a napkin in your left hand. This way, it won't be greasy when you go to shake hands. Only have an amount you can hold in one hand, if necessary. Also, eat before an event, as you will be served nibbles - not a steak!

Introducing yourself/breaking the ice

- "Hi there, my name is _____. So, how long have you been working for _____?"
- "Hi there, my name is _____. I'm currently studying at UQ and am really interested in becoming a _____. What is your role in _____?"

Conversation starters

- "Did you study in Queensland? Which university did you attend?"
- "Did you get involved in student associations?"
- "Did you do any internships or vacation programs before you graduated?"
- "Do you think organisations in this industry value volunteer work?"
- "How did you adjust to professional life after you left university?"
- "What do you find is the most challenging aspect of your job?"

Organisation-relevant questions

- "What sort of skills or attributes would complement the existing team?"
- "What are some of the typical career paths? What sort of role might people move on to?"
- "What is the pace of work like? Are there peaks and troughs, or is it fairly consistent?"
- "What are some useful stepping stones or voluntary experience I should look for?"
- "Does the company have any preferences for the formatting or content of resumes or cover letters?"

Leaving a conversation

Unsure of how to end a conversation when you want to move on? Make sure you have open body language which could invite someone to the conversation.

- "It's been great chatting. Here's my business card. I just want to grab a quick drink/bite to eat before they disappear." (Get food/drink **and** move to new group)
- "Thank you so much for the chat. I really appreciated it." (Change body language to move out of the conversation)
- "Thank you so much for all the tips and insight. I've got a much better picture of the industry now. I'm just going to quick say hello to someone before they leave."

Closers

Always start with a thank you and an exit.

- "Thank you so much for your time, I really got a lot out of our chat."
- "Have you met _____? We are currently both doing an internship with _____." (Introduce)
- "I'd like to look into what we've been speaking about a little further, could I send you an email next week? Please take my card."
- "Thank you for your time. Hopefully I'll see you at the next event."
- "Thank you for your time. I'm very interested in 'company'. I'll definitely be applying for the next round."

5. Follow up

Do you have any advice for after meeting with the member from industry? Do I need to follow-up with them and if so, how?

The Career Development Team encourages you to follow-up with the industry professional afterwards. This may include connecting with them on LinkedIn (or another suitable networking platform), writing them a thank you email or investigating the range of employment opportunities at their organisation if it is of interest.

Follow-up and final reflections

For further details, please contact:

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