

HOW TO CONTACT EMPLOYERS



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Career Planning Service
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INTRODUCTION

Contacting and interacting with employers is at the core of an effective job search. An employer has no idea you would like to work for them unless you tell them! Even when they are not currently hiring, employers have a vested interest in meeting good potential employees who are interested in their organization, and most will be happy to answer questions or to accept CVs for future consideration.

Why would I contact employers?

- To find out if the company has any current openings/summer opportunities etc.
- To find out more about any advertised positions
- To ask for advice and information
- To follow up on an application or interview
- To arrange an information interview

Who do I speak with?

Depending on your objective and the size of the organization you might contact:

- A Human Resources Representative or Recruiter
- The Head of the department you wish to work in
- A current employee of the company/department

HOW TO FIND CURRENT EMPLOYEES

You can find current employees via:

- The staff information/contact us page on company websites
- News reports (Google news)
- A direct call to the company to ask!
- LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media sites
- On-Campus events such as career speaker talks, company information sessions, and career fairs

Using LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professionally-oriented social networking site which can be used to profile your experience and credentials, research potential employers and gain information on different career paths and skill sets:
<http://www.linkedin.com>

To make the most of LinkedIn:

- Build a complete profile; include a professional photo and a brief summary
- Connect with other members (start with family, friends and professional contacts)
- Join like-minded groups, including the CaPS LinkedIn Group & McGill Alumni group (once you have graduated)
- Follow people and companies in areas of interest in line with your job search
- Use the LinkedIn for Higher Education page to track alumni
- Use the LinkedIn Company Directory to learn about local employers in your field
- Search for companies of interest and see if any of your existing contacts (or their contacts) have a connection with the organization

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

General Tips

Be polite and professional but persistent. DO NOT give up after sending one email. One email is just that. One. Email. The recipient could have been busy, or forgotten or been out of the office or sick or...anything. It is completely ok to follow up with a second email, and/or a phone call, as long as you are courteous.

Remember that employers are busy and that hiring and interviewing time frames are often longer than you might hope or expect. Even when organizations are actively hiring, your application is one of many priorities they are juggling. Show respect for their time.

Be clear about your objective. Why you are calling/emailing the company and this person in particular? In general, most people are willing and happy to help, if they are clear on how they can do so.

You can contact an employer by email, by phone, or in person. Which option you choose depends on the information you have and on what is practically feasible, but if in doubt, the more active and direct the method, the better.

Writing Effective and Professional Emails

- Always include a salutation (i.e. "Dear...")
- If you have never met the recipient, or don't know them well, use "Ms X" or "Mr X", NOT their first name
- Ensure your format and font are professional, and easy to read/scan
- Always double-check your spelling and punctuation before sending
- Put yourself in the shoes of your recipient. It is safe to assume that they are busy and receive a lot of

email. They will be scanning quickly to find out what you need from them. Make things easy by getting to the point quickly and clearly.

- Keep things short. Introduce who you are, provide any necessary context, and outline why you are emailing.
- Avoid asking multiple questions and favours in one email (limit yourself to one or two)
- Aim for a factual, concise and professional tone.

Practice Good Telephone Etiquette

- Be prepared before making a call. Be sure to verify the name of the person you wish to speak with and ensure that any relevant documents (i.e. CV, recent correspondence) are organized and close at hand.
- Stand up to make the call and smile before you start speaking to project confidence and positivity in your tone
- Greet the person by name and address them professionally (i.e. Mr., Ms., Dr., Professor)
- Identify/introduce yourself, BEFORE you launch into the call! If you have met them before, provide a little context to jog their memory (Do not ask “Do you remember me?”)
- Ask “Is this is a good time?”
- Get to the point quickly and clearly state your objective
- Always thank people for their time and assistance

In Person: How to talk to Strangers

- A smile, firm handshake, eye contact and a warm, friendly manner go a long way
- Be curious and genuinely interested in the person
- Ask for advice, ideas and information
- Have something to say
- Be open and offer help when you can

EXAMPLES OF COMMON NETWORKING SITUATIONS

INQUIRING ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES

Why? To learn more about an organization you are interested in and to find out if they are currently hiring or anticipate hiring in the near future.

When? When you are job searching.

How? Calling or in person is most effective.

Who? Try Human Resources (HR) or the head of the relevant department/unit you would like to work for.

What do I say?

Intro + brief overview of your background

- *My name is...I am a McGill graduate in...with experience in...and an interest in...*

How you found out about them

- *I came across your organization while researching...*
- *I was referred to company X by...*
- *I spoke with X at a recent presentation at McGill...*

What you want

- *I am very interested in learning more about potential opportunities...*
- *I would like to contribute my extensive research and technical skills to company X. Do you anticipate any hiring in the next few months?*

FOLLOWING UP ON SUBMITTED APPLICATIONS

Why? To ensure they received it, to reiterate your interest in the position/company, and to find out more about the time frame for the hiring process.

When? Within a week of the application deadline.

How? Calling is most efficient.

Who? Ideally, get in touch with the person to whom you submitted the application. If it was online with no contact name, try HR or the head of the relevant department/unit.

What do I say?

Intro + why you are calling

- *My name is...I am calling to follow up on my application for position X*

Reiterate your interest

- *I am very interested in the position...*

What you want

- *Are you able to tell me anything about the time frame for the hiring process?*

FOLLOWING UP ON AN INTERVIEW

Why? To reiterate your interest in the position/company, and to find out more about the time frame for the hiring decision. Especially important if you have received an offer at another organization and are trying to make a decision. Also, if you are not hired, you can follow up to ask for feedback on your application/interview and to express your interest in future opportunities.

When? Within a week of the interview or once the time frame you were given in the interview has passed

How? Calling is most efficient.

Who? The interviewer(s). If not possible, try HR.

What do I say?

Intro + why you are calling

- *My name is...I am calling to follow up on my interview of X date...*

Reiterate your interest

- *I very much enjoyed meeting...and learning...and remain very interested in the XYZ position...*

What you want

- *I'd appreciate it if you could give me a sense of the time frame for the hiring decision?*

CAREER FAIRS

Career Fairs are great opportunities to meet employers, develop contacts, and find out more about jobs and opportunities within a field and/or company. Most Fairs are organized by industry or field (i.e. Education, Social Work, Technology, Management...) and include a wide range of employers within that sector. They may also be specific to a particular geographic location.

Depending on their size, organizations are usually represented by 1-3 employees; often an HR representative or department head, along with one or two professionals in the field.

The great thing about a Career Fair from a job search perspective is that a lot of the work has been done for you. Employers have already been identified and contacted and are keen to meet potential employees. At

Fairs on University campuses, they are also usually aware that many students will be attending to explore options and find out more about what the company does.

Below are some tips to help you make the most of a Career Fair:

Preparation

- Prior to the Fair, research the organizations that will be attending, to get an overall sense of what they do, their size and scope, types of positions etc.
- Brainstorm questions you would like to ask them.
- Think about what you would like to share with them, i.e. a brief description of your background, skills and interests, and why you are interested in their company.
- Put together your CV and have it professionally reviewed.
- Dress appropriately! While some career fairs can be relatively casual, others have strict dress codes. In general, it is recommended that you dress as if you are going to a job interview.

What to Bring

- Copies of your CV, as many employers will be accepting CVs directly at the Fair.
- Business/Contact cards.
- A positive, open-minded attitude.

* It is not necessary to bring Cover Letters for each employer at a Career Fair.

At the Fair

- Especially at large events, or if you are attending your first career fair, it can help to take a brief walk around the room(s) first to see the layout and plan your approach, get a sense of the atmosphere, and give yourself a chance to breathe!
- When you greet an employer, smile, shake hands, make eye contact and introduce yourself.
- Be curious. Ask about the industry, the organization, the types of positions they hire for, and what they look for. Show that you have done some research!
- Share information about your background and interest in the company.
- Listen attentively to their answers!
- Keep an open mind. If you have time, talk to some of the employers you know very little about to see what you can learn.
- Ask for a business card or contact information for future follow up.

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

What are they? An information interview involves contacting and talking with someone in your field and/or company of interest to increase your knowledge of the sector and receive advice and information from someone with concrete experience in the area.

Who can I talk to? You can interview anyone who knows about the work you would like to do, ideally someone employed in your field of interest or in an organization or sector where you would like to work.

- Start with people you already know
- Ask if they know of anyone in your field or company of interest and can introduce you
- Research organizations of interest; use the ideas in this guide to find current employees in relevant positions to contact
- Approach new contacts (i.e. people you meet at career fairs or speakers from on-campus career panels and events)
- Find current employees using the tips on page 2

Why would I do this? Information interviews can help you fine tune your career objectives, to discover additional possibilities or areas of interest, and to develop contacts and potential mentors in your field.

How should I contact them? Start with an email. Follow up with a call. Arrange a meeting.

What to write in the email:

Intro + what you want (ask for advice)

- *I am a researcher in...I would like to get your advice on...*

Why you chose them:

- *I am interested in you/your organization because...*

Who you are:

- *I have a background in...and would like to use my experience in...to make a transition to...*

How you will follow up:

- *I would like to follow up with you on...to see if we could arrange a meeting...*

*There is generally no need to attach your CV at this stage.

At an information interview

Your enthusiasm, preparation and ability to communicate clearly are key. Prior to the meeting, think about the type of information that would be helpful to you, and come up with some questions that will help you determine if the company/position is a good fit with your interests and values.

The following list is meant to help you get started at an information interview. Other questions will naturally flow from your conversation once you get going. Focus on the areas and concerns of most relevance to you and respect anything your interviewee does not want to or is not able to talk about. Always remember to thank them for their time and ask if there is anyone else they would recommend you speak with.

Questions to ask at an information interview

Questions about their career path/training:

- How did you get into this field?
- What has your career path been like to date? Is it representative of most people in this kind of position?
- What education/training do you have?
- Are you a member of any professional orders or associations? Which ones do you feel are the most important to belong to?
- What are the future prospects in this field? What trends do you see developing over the next few years?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself and why?

Questions about their current position and responsibilities:

- What does a typical day/week in your job look like?
- What do you enjoy the most about your job? The least?
- What skills have you found essential for success in this occupation?
- Could you tell me about one of the main challenges you face in this position?

Questions about working conditions:

- How many hours do you work in a typical week?
- How much autonomy do you have in terms of what you focus on at work?
- What kind of supervision did you have when you were starting out? Now?
- How is your performance evaluated?
- What kind of professional development opportunities are available?

Additional questions:

- What advice would have helped you when you were starting out?
- How would you recommend I “try out” this line of work (i.e. through a summer job, internship, volunteering, shadowing...)?
- What other fields or jobs would you suggest I research?
- Is there anyone you would recommend I talk to next? When I call them, may I mention that you referred me?

Take notes only sparingly so that you can listen attentively. You can review and expand your points following the interview.

*Following the interview, send a thank-you note or email within 24 hours of the interview.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Like any relationship, your connections with employers need maintenance.

- Keep track of who you want to follow up with.
- Send a thank-you note or email within 24 hours of an information interview or Career Fair or to anyone who has been helpful to you.
- Get in touch again with follow up questions, to share a resource, or to update a contact on your situation.
- Let people know if you took their advice, read a book or article they recommended, or spoke to someone they referred you to.
- Ask if they would be willing to let you know if they hear of any opportunities in your field

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