COVID-19 Networking Scripts for Job Seekers: How to connect in a time of crisis

Top Tips:

- Prioritize and create warm connections. You may already be connected by a mutual contact, school, degree, or area of expertise. A warm connection will give people a reason to want to talk to you.
- In cases where there are none of these links, use your interests, values, and good energy to create a warm connection.
- Figure out what you can reasonably expect from any interaction. Someone new is unlikely to offer you a job right off the bat.
- Get to the point with your request – keep things short and concise.
- Focus on offering your new connection a way to feel helpful: ask for stories, insight, information, and referrals to others - not for a job.
- Prepare relevant questions for an informational interview that allow your new connection to be and feel as helpful as possible.
- Follow up with sincere thanks and give your connection some space.

1. Reaching out to connect (on LinkedIn)

Keep your request brief and to the point: introduce yourself, establish the warm connection, and let them know you are happy to become part of their network.

Examples

For an alum:
Hello x, I see you graduated from McGill! I am a x major exploring career paths. I’m excited to join your network and to connect. Thanks for adding me!

For someone in a field of interest or working at a company you are interested in:
Hello x, I’m finishing up my y degree at McGill and am interested in career paths in z. I’d love to connect with you!

Dear x, I’m also interested in (field), and I am enjoying your posts. I thought your post yesterday on (topic) was interesting. I’d love to keep in touch!

2. Asking for an informational interview

Keep things brief, but give them a bit more: establish the connection and bring up one specific question you might have:

- How did you use your degree?
- What skills are important to your employer?
- What does your job look like these days?
- How do pathways in this career/sector look, more generally?
Important:

- Be genuine and authentic
- Be specific about the time you are asking of them: 15 minutes is a reasonable ask
- Be compassionate: offer them an ‘out’, flexibility
- Be grateful: point out that they’d be a great help to you, and explain why

Examples

Dear Anne, Thanks for connecting! My name is Bill and I am finishing up my BA in Political Science at McGill, and I am exploring possible career paths. I’ve been interested in careers in public policy, particularly in think tanks and policy analysis, and I am curious to hear more about how you got into this field after you finished your degree in Political Science. I can imagine things are extremely busy on your end these days, but if you have a free 15 minutes in the next week or two, I’d really appreciate an opportunity set up a zoom meeting or coffee with you to ask you a few questions about your experience in policy work. If you’d prefer to talk at a later date, please let me know, I’d be happy to connect, regardless. Thanks in advance and be well.

Hi Mary, thank you for accepting my connection. My name is John and I’m doing a B.Sc. at McGill University in Computer Science. I hope this message finds you and your family in good health during this challenging time. I’m trying to decide what to do next, and your career path seems to have been really interesting. I’m curious about your work for IBM—especially the research on the future of skills. Would you be willing to grab a virtual coffee and tell me a bit about the work you’re doing? I would appreciate any time you could give me in the coming weeks. I look forward to connecting with you! Take care and stay healthy.

Hi Jared, thank you for accepting my connection. My name is Samantha, and I’m a graduate student at McGill University. We’ve never met, but I see that we have some mutual connections. First of all, I hope you and your loved ones are in good health and spirits during this uncertain time. If you are willing, I’d really love to hear about the work you’re doing in immigrant settlement for the government. I would be grateful if you could spare any free time for a brief conversation in the coming weeks. I look forward to hearing from you.

Dear Sebastian, thank you for accepting my invitation to connect. I am a recent McGill graduate in Biology and have been doing some career exploration. I’m considering applying to do a master’s degree, which I see you have done. I am enjoying your LinkedIn posts on biostatistics and found your recent post on data science in health care fascinating, and I’m reaching out to ask if you think it might be possible to hop onto a Zoom meeting for a quick chat about your experience working in the field. If you’d have any free time at all, I can make myself flexible to your busy schedule. Really looking forward to connecting.
3. Appropriate questions for informational interviews during the Pandemic

- Experience, insight, and advice!
- Ask questions about the day-to-day responsibilities of their role, and bigger picture questions about the state of the field
- Ask for transition stories: how they may have moved between companies or fields, how they got to where they are now
- Ask for advice they might have for someone starting out in the field, or exploring their options
- Open-ended questions (rather than yes/no) work best and will help you get great stories and engage in fun conversation with your new connection

For a good list of ideas, check out: How to conduct informational interviews (pdf)

You might also ask questions like:

- How has the pandemic impacted your industry / field?
- Have your work responsibilities changed in any way since COVID-19?
- What kind of challenges do you think the company / organization / field will face in the upcoming months?
- What has been the hardest part about adapting to remote work?
- What are team projects looking like in a remote work environment?
- Are you learning anything new about your role / the field / work in general during these months?

4. Following up

- Thank them for their time and advice
- Mention something you found interesting about what they shared, or something new you learned from them
- Ask if you can follow up at some point in the future
- Wish them well and thank them (again)

Examples

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I learned a lot from our chat, especially about how important soft skills and communication skills are to the job. It was great to meet you and to hear more about your story.

I know things continue to be busy for you, but I’d love to stay in touch. I look forward to reading more of your posts on LinkedIn!

If they’ve mentioned a contact:
I also wanted to follow up with you as I’d love to connect with Steve, who you mentioned worked on the development team. How would you suggest I get in touch?

If they haven’t mentioned anyone in particular:
If you have a moment, I wonder if you might be able to think of someone else that I might benefit from talking to as I continue to explore the field.