

Demystifying Interviewing and Networking: Strategies for International Students

Led by Amanda Weppler, EAP Fellow aweppler@nd.edu

with the assistance of Larry Westfall, Director of Graduate Career Services

While Networking and Interviewing are in some ways very different, they have the shared foundation of strong communication and conversation skills. These are skills that you already possess and use each day—but you can also attain greater communication mastery through intentional practice.

An interview situation often resembles a more specific and in-depth version of a networking conversation.

In essence, **Networking is about Building Relationships**. People meet with one another to exchange Ideas, Information, and Contacts, whether for the purposes of business or friendship. Networking opportunities can arise anywhere, in formal and informal settings, and in planned and unplanned situations. The actual conversation topic is often less important than the process of building trust and rapport with one another.

With each person you add to your network, you actually add an exponentially greater number, because you are now potentially in contact with every one in your new acquaintance's network.

Since Networking is about building relationships, networking should NOT be a lopsided conversation, in which you do all the asking, and your partner all the giving. Offer to repay advice and assistance if they ever need it. In the future, you may have a lot to offer these contacts, so it is good for both of you to keep in touch.

Networking is important for job-seekers because studies have found that in up to 70% of all jobs, networking played a role. Career counselors estimate that about 50% of jobs are never advertised. Current employees can share job openings with their networking associates, and advise them through the interview stage. A referral generates about 80% more results than a cold call.

Networking is useful for:

- Researching companies and industries
- Preparing for job interviews
- Gaining an inside knowledge of possible openings at a company
- Making friends

You can find opportunities for networking at:

- School-Sponsored Events
- Social events, Receptions, Dinners
- “Meet Employer” events

Guest Lectures
Conferences/conventions
Non-profit and Charitable Events
Online! with networking sites and databases
myNotreDame Alumni networking system
LinkedIn

Your **introduction** is the foundation for good communication

Develop a 10-second introduction to use when meeting new people. Include:

Personal information: name, nationality, etc.
Academic/professional information: status, affiliation, field of study, etc.
Interests (personal or academic/professional): research interests, entertainment, activities, etc.

Start Positive!

Begin with a positive claim about the event, person, or organization
Compliment the speech or presentation
Praise the individual's accomplishments, organization's achievements, or the success of the event
Be specific, if possible

Find common ground between yourself and the person/event

Relate the person's/company's/event's interests, research, and goals to your own interests, skills, and goals
Ask questions to find common experiences—areas of study, educational path, professional aspirations
Determine if you have any shared connections

Since Networking is about relationship-building, try to remember what you learn from people, so that you can refer to it in a later conversation. It gives you a natural in for conversation to ask about something mentioned last time.

How to "Work a Room": Dos

Have a purpose:

Who do you want to talk to? (generally and specifically)

What do you want to know?

Play detective:

Ask questions and listen, but also share information about yourself

Use business cards to share contact information efficiently

Communicate what sort of opportunity you are seeking:

What sort of job are you looking for? Where are you looking to go with your research?

Plan an exit strategy

In Networking, DON'T:

Monopolize a person's time

Just stand in the corner, talking to your friends
Be afraid to read name tags
Speak negatively about yourself, your work, or your colleagues
Give a speech—Make sure the person has time to respond!

“Safe” Conversation Topics:

Work/Career Questions
Questions about the organization/event/lecture
Yourself—What will make people remember you?
 What made you choose Notre Dame?
 Your intended career pursuits
 Hobbies/personal interests

Topics to Avoid:

Politics
Religion
Health Issues or Illnesses
Money and what things cost

If you feel overwhelmed because everyone around you is talking to someone already, don't despair! Either wait for your intended person to finish an ongoing conversation, OR join the group, listen for a few minutes, and join in. Add something to the conversation, and introduce yourself. But be careful not to hijack the conversation, or ignore everybody except the main person you want to talk to. Keep it a group conversation.

It is also important to pay attention to your body language.

 Give a firm handshake that lasts 2-3 seconds
 Maintain good posture—stand up straight, face forward
 Observe others' personal space—keep at a distance of 2-3 feet
 Maintain eye contact while speaking and listening—this demonstrates that you are interested and paying attention

Tips for Exiting a Conversation:

 Be polite—don't tell them you want another drink, or need to use the bathroom, or want to meet someone else
 Let them know if you want to meet or speak again in the future—if possible, set up a meeting or plan a phone call
 Exchange contact information, ideally through business cards
 Thanks them!
 Shake hands again

You will be an especially effective networker if you prepare yourself for such conversations. Research enough to be able to ask specific questions—this will impress your conversation partner, and help you carry on the conversation

 Familiarize yourself with the company/university and their own work or research

Ask for advice (but make the request somewhat specific—e.g., “What would you recommend on work on this summer to improve my resume?” “What skills would it help me to develop for this job?” rather than “Do you have any advice for me?”

Ask if they can recommend any other people for you to speak with.

Also be prepared to talk about yourself. You should be ready to answer these (and similar) questions:

At what stage are you in your studies/career?

What are your research interests?

What are you currently working on?

What is important about your work? Why should people care?

Do you have plans for future research?

What are your future goals?

What skills and qualities (academic/professional/personal) do you have that contribute to your work/career?

What unique skills or perspective can you contribute as an international student?

Take it to the next level: These contacts can lead to a job, if you maintain the relationship.

Communication:

Write personal thank you notes, by hand if possible

Email your contacts once or twice a year to keep them updated on your activities and progress

Be organized:

Keep track of your contacts

Document contacts and conversations

Schedule meetings when you can

Keep an open mind about potential opportunities

Ask questions and act interested

Share information about your interests, pursuits, and strengths

The Good News is that these same skills used in Networking will also help you be an effective Interviewee. Interviewing is often like a more focused and intense bout of networking—you will be answering and asking the same questions, but while providing more specific details, and conversing with more particular aims

An interviewer assess both your qualifications and your personal qualities in an interview.

Your qualifications include your specialized knowledge and experience, your analytical skills, and your language proficiency. These will be assessed through talking about what is on your resume/CV, and providing more concrete examples. Your personal qualities include your appearance and the first impression you make, your attitude and enthusiasm, communication and interpersonal skills, leadership and teamwork capabilities, integrity, flexibility, and how you seem to “fit” with the

company. The interviewer will gauge these qualities based on *how* you act and talk about yourself and your experiences.

You can make the best impression by preparing yourself for the interview. Be ready to discuss yourself and your experiences—think of specific anecdotes to illustrate your skills and experiences.

Be familiar with the company or school. Consider how you might target your answers to that particular audience. Come up with questions you want to ask them—this will signal your level of interest to the interviewer, and will also help you decide if you would WANT to work there.

Practice interviewing!

Ways to Practice Interviewing

Mock interviews, through Graduate Career Services; your department/professors; EAP tutoring; your friends

Gather lists of questions you might be asked, and practice formulating your answers out loud as much as possible

Watch yourself in a mirror as you speak—check for eye contact; identify nervous habits; pay attention to how you breathe, and your speed of speech

Visualize what a successful interview would look like, and be affirming to yourself about to ability to succeed

Potential Cultural Differences

An American interviewer will expect certain things: direct eye contact, even to a superior; draw attention to your achievements and abilities, even if that feels uncomfortable.

If issues with communication arise, think about how to resolve them. If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to clarify, rephrase, or repeat it. Be sure to speak very clearly, which may mean speaking slightly slower or louder than usual.

Questions to Expect in an Interview, and Strategies for Answering:

“Tell me about yourself”

Answer with academics/ qualification and personal qualities, but you can also say a bit about your hobbies and personal background, if you wish.

“What are your strengths? Weaknesses?”

Stay relevant to the job, but try not to merely rehash your CV. Be honest, but positive, about steps you are taking to improve your weaknesses. Also, make sure you select “weaknesses” that would not overly worry someone looking to hire you.

“Tell me about a time you...” (showed leadership, worked in a team, had to overcome a challenge, etc.)

Try to think of good, detailed examples ahead of time. Focus on specific skills you want to highlight, that lead to anecdotes of your using those skills.

For Tougher Questions:

“How would your supervisor describe you?”

Focus on your strengths and unique qualities

“Where do you want to be in five years?”

This question gauges your ambition and work ethic, but also whether you might stay with the company that long. Consider your career goals, but don't imply that you intend to leave this company soon.

“What is your expected salary?”

This is a question you can avoid answering directly, unless pressed. Good phrases to remember are “competitive within the industry” and “commensurate with my contributions”