



Connecting with Alumnae

1) Preparing for the Connection

Know yourself

You should have a clear sense of why you are contacting the people you have chosen and what you are hoping they can share with you: specific job or career field information, location insights, advice, or even general help. Conduct preliminary research about their fields and/or companies. You are asking the alumnae to share their time with you; be sure you have given some of your time to them by preparing. Tell them what your needs are; don't assume they already know based on their experience. The more you know about your areas of interests, what you can offer, and what questions you need answered, the more beneficial the interaction will be for both of you.

Set the tone

How you present yourself is how you will be received, so tone of voice, energy level, eye contact, choice of words (depending on method of contact) all set the tone for your interaction with them. If you are excited about the opportunity to connect with alumnae, they will more likely be excited about connecting with you.

2) Making the Initial Contact

Depending on your level of comfort, initial contact may be made by writing an introductory letter, sending an email, or calling. It is possible that you may not get a response to the initial contact; the onus is on you to follow-up. It is perfectly acceptable to contact them again in case the first message was lost.

Introduce Yourself

"Hi, my name is _____, I am a Wellesley student/alumna in/from the class of _____."

Establish point of connection

Start right off with how you found the alumna's name and why you are contacting her.

"I found your name on the Wellesley Network, and I am interested in finding out more about _____."

"Your name was given to my by _____ who said you would be a good resource to find out more about _____."

"I met you at _____ and I am calling to follow- up on our conversation about _____."

Describe what you want

Provide background information on yourself and how you hope the alumna will be able to help you. Be clear in letting her know you are interested in advice and information, not a job. Suggest the period of time you are hoping to connect with the alumna (should not be more than 20-30 min.), and ask what time would be convenient for her.

"I have been researching _____, and was hoping you might have 20 minutes available to share with me what it's really like to be a _____. Would there be a good time for us to talk next week?"

"I am moving with my family to _____, and I was hoping you might be willing to spare a few minutes to share your experiences about what life there is really like."

3) During the Connection

Email should only be used for the initial contact. Never send a list of questions to be answered; no one has the time for that type of exchange. To make the strongest impression, you want the highest level of interpersonal contact for the actual conversation, a face-to-face meeting if possible, but at least by phone.

A list of potential topics includes the following:

- further information about the field: what does she do, what is an average day like?
- current direction of the field: where is it going, potential upsides or downsides?
- how to get into the field: what was her career path, background/training needed, experiences/skills/language/course work to emphasize?
- geographical information (about either the field or other industries): what is hot where? or about living in that area/relocating: what areas/neighborhoods are close to good schools?

For sample questions, see our Web site, www.wellesley.edu/CWS, under *Networking*, “*Establishing and Mobilizing Your Network*.”

4) Closing the Connection

Expand your network

Ask for other contacts/directions. Always ask for permission to use the alumna’s name.

“I have really enjoyed our conversation about _____. Can you think of someone with whom I might speak to learn more about ____? May I say you gave me his/her name?”

“Your career as a _____ sounds really interesting, but I am not sure I could deal with the (traveling). Can you think of other ways someone with my skill set could still be involved in _____ while traveling less?”

Agree on next steps

Remember you must follow-up to maintain your level of credibility.

“I really appreciated speaking with you about ____, and I look forward to continuing our conversation over coffee next _____. My treat.”

“I will email you a copy of my resume as soon as we end our call.”

“Thank you for giving me _____’s name. I will be sure to call her by _____.”

5) Maintaining the Connection

Effusive thank you’s

Within 24 hours, send a note of appreciation to the alumna for her time and information. Email is becoming more acceptable, but a handwritten note is always preferable. The note should be short, grateful, and underscore key points you would like the alumna to remember.

“Thank you for meeting with me. I appreciated your sharing your insights into the world of _____, and your reassurance that even a _____major could be productive and successful in that field...”

Periodic follow-up

Always try to leave the door open to call again. Touch base periodically to remind the alumna of your connection and further the relationship through email or calls. Try to think of things you might be able to offer her.

“Hi _____. Thank you again for taking the time last week/month/year to talk to me about _____. In continuing my exploration, I had one more question about _____.”

“I found a great article on _____, which reminded me of our conversation about _____. I have attached a copy, thinking that you might find it interesting.”

Keep records

Develop a system to keep track of your contacts, your discussions, what you learned, follow-up, and other notes. If you handled the relationship well from the start, you should have the opportunity to contact an alumna at least one more time.