

Options and Opportunities – Tool #4: Networking

Having great credentials and experiences are important when you begin a job search, but networking—making professional contacts—is often just as important. Personal contacts can provide guidance and expand your access to opportunities, particularly those that may not be widely advertised.

General networking tips

Prepare an elevator speech

An elevator speech is a 30 second introduction of yourself and is so named because it should span the time you would have to introduce yourself to someone in an elevator as you ride to the top floor. In it, you should briefly mention who you are, what you're passionate about, and what you want to do next. Make this speech personal and memorable. If the other person were to only remember one thing about you, what do you want it to be? Once you have your speech outlined, use it! See page 25 for more information.

Note to self:
Conducting an informational interview is the ultimate networking technique.

Network everywhere

Whether you are at a career fair, physics meeting, department colloquium, or a science outreach event, always look for new people to meet. Think of every event as a potential networking event. You never know when or where you are going to encounter your next colleague. Do not be afraid to tell people that you are looking for a job; most people are eager to help students if they can.

Help others

Networking is about connecting with people—not just furthering your career. When you meet

people, think about what you can offer them.

- Can you introduce them to potential collaborators, mentors, or colleagues?
- Provide them with resources or leads that might further their research?
- Offer restaurant recommendations for when they are visiting your area?

This approach makes networking much less intimidating and can help you form meaningful and lasting connections.

The people you meet today can be the link to your future career. Never underestimate a networking opportunity.

Attend regional and national physics meetings

Nearly all of the 18 SPS geographic zones host meetings each year. These are a great way to meet peers and faculty members from surrounding schools who might have insight into and connections with the local job market. Many scientific societies, such as the American Physical Society (APS) and American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT), have regional meetings that are also excellent ways to meet scientists and potential employers in your local area.

Most scientific societies host national or international meetings that vary in location annually. When a national meeting is located in close proximity to your school, make an effort to attend. For example, the APS, the AAPT, the American Astronomical Association (AAS), and the Optical Society (OSA) all host meetings with strong undergraduate components, and all have opportunities to meet potential employers. These meetings have opportunities for undergraduates to present work, hear invited speakers, and attend workshops and receptions—all of these are great networking venues. Travel funds are available for you to report on a meeting or to present your own research: www.spsnational.org/meetings/sps-professional-meetings.

SPS National sponsors undergraduate sessions at many AIP member society meetings!

Other affinity groups also organize national or regional meetings. Be on the lookout for conferences sponsored by the National Society of Black Physicists (NSBP) or the National Society of Hispanic Physicists (NSHP) as well as Conferences for Undergraduate Women in Physics (CUWiP).

Get involved!

Attend your department, college, or university professional events. Many colleges and universities host guest speakers and invite scientists to campus events. *Make every effort to attend these events and hear the speakers.* Ask questions and introduce yourself after the event. Use these opportunities to **practice your elevator speech**. This gives you a perfect chance to follow up and connect with speakers and other professionals that you meet on LinkedIn or via email.

Ask questions!

One of the simplest ways to start a conversation is by asking, “So, what do you do?” After this, the conversation should progress fluidly if you show interest in what the person is telling you. Other questions you might ask new connections include:

- How has your physics background helped you in your career?
- What advice would you give a physics major who wants to go into your field?
- What opportunities does your company have for physics students?
- What do you like most about your career (or company)?

Listen carefully, make appropriate comments, and ask thoughtful questions. People love to share their stories, so let them and wait for an invitation to relate to your experiences. They will often ask about you in return.

Exchange contact information

If you would like to maintain a new connection, don't be afraid to ask someone if you can follow up later by email or phone.

Business cards are an easy way to give a new connection your contact information, leave a good impression, and look professional—even if they only say “Physics Student.” When you receive a card from someone else, write a brief description of how you met the person and what you discussed on the back. For example: *aapt Summer Meeting 2017, email re: summer research opportunities.*

Network online

Stay in contact with new connections through online networking sites such as **LinkedIn**. Use key word searches on these sites to find people with your dream job or company and ask your connections to introduce you. Also ask your professors or career services office if they can connect you with **alumni** in your desired profession via email. Don't forget about former class/lab mates!

Cultivate relationships

A person you talk to only once will not be a strong part of your network. Send updates to your connections to let them know how school is going, where you are in your search, or to pass along information of interest. Ask them about the project or life event they mentioned the last time you spoke. The idea here is to have a strong foundation with each person, not just a transactional relationship that you call on when you need something.

Project a positive attitude

Go into networking events with a positive outlook and be confident in your ability to have a meaningful conversation. When speaking, recognize that you are addressing a colleague: avoid negatives or self-depreciation (e.g., “I could never do that” or “You know so much more than me”). Think through your approach and prepare for networking opportunities before they arise. Being prepared will help you be more relaxed when you meet new people. Enjoy the opportunity to talk to new people; you never know when you will meet someone that can connect you to your next job. Have a good sense of humor and an enthusiastic attitude. Get out there, have fun, meet people, and make new connections!

More about the elevator speech**What is an “elevator speech”?***The basics*

- An elevator speech is a 30-second snapshot of who you are, what you've accomplished, and where you hope to go in the future. This short speech is your time to highlight your relevant skills, education, and experiences.
- The idea of the elevator speech stems from the length of time you might spend on an elevator with a potential networking contact.
- You should practice your elevator speech several times so that you can easily recall the highlights when an opportunity arises; however, you do not want to sound too rehearsed.

- Think of the elevator speech as a short conversation with a purpose.
- Only use terms you think the other person is comfortable with. Avoid jargon and acronyms.

What is the point?

Let’s say that you are on an elevator or standing in line for coffee at a meeting, and you notice that Nobel laureate John Mather is standing next to you. Maybe his nametag tips you off, or maybe you recognize him from a talk he gave...What do you do?

You could:

A. Get out your cell phone and post on your favorite social media channel that you are standing next to a Nobel laureate.

OR

B. Create an opportunity for yourself that could influence your future.

Since you are a resourceful person, A is out of the question. You choose B (or “C. Both A and B”). So, how do you do this?

Give Your Elevator Speech. The elevator speech is a professional way of introducing yourself. *The trick is that you’ve previously rehearsed what you want to say.* The goal of the elevator speech is to quickly demonstrate your interest and professionalism in the hopes of engaging the other person in conversation.

Hi, Dr. Mather! My name is Phyllis Physics and I am at Einstein University studying Physics. I’m in my junior year and I’m very interested in working in science policy when I graduate. Currently, I am serving as outreach coordinator for our SPS chapter. We just hosted an amazing event for 500 local middle school students. I am actively seeking summer internship opportunities and heard about the SPS Summer Internship program in Washington, DC. Could you tell me more about it?

Note: You need to develop several elevator speeches, each needs to be aimed at a different audience. For example, if you are undecided between attending graduate school and starting your career now, have an elevator speech related to both options. You can decide which one to present based on the person standing in front of you. If you plan to present your elevator pitch to someone from a specific organization or company (like a representative at a job fair), be sure to consider what they are seeking in an employee and what you can contribute when you draft that version. Most professionals have several elevator speeches prepared that begin with something like, “Hello, my name is ____ and I am from ____ (company/school).”

Another reason to have several speeches prepared is that not everyone has the same background information and vocabulary. For example, imagine if instead of Nobel prize-winner John Mather, you meet the U.S. Secretary of Energy or the head of a national lab. Each would have very different educational backgrounds and it’s important you explain yourself in a way that delivers your main message: **What are you passionate about and where do you want to go next?**

Even though you have only a short time span, the elevator speech is an ideal time to share any relevant research and internship or work experience, in addition to any interesting skills or knowledge you have. Think of your elevator speech as a conversation opener that invites the other person to ask for more.

<p>Your elevator speech must explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who you are • What you’ve accomplished • Where you hope to go • What you are passionate about 	<p>And, if that wasn’t enough, you need to highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Skills • Education • Experiences
<p>What to consider when giving your elevator speech:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account who your audience is • Give an explanation using only words they already understand • Relate what you do to something they know • Highlight your accomplishments 	<p>And you need several different versions for different audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a technical audience – a scientist in your field • a generic scientist not in your field • someone with no science background • a potential job lead

Exercise - Tool #4: Networking Skills – Constructing Your Elevator Speech

⇒ Write down short answers to the following questions. Remember, you want to answer these questions in a coherent way that highlights your potential *in 30 seconds*. Stick to the basics. Avoid elaborate embellishments. You can always fill in details if the conversation continues.

Informational facts about you
Who am I? (Include your name, major, and where you go to school.)
What are two relevant or interesting things that I have done recently?
What am I passionate about? What do I want to accomplish in 15 years?

⇒ Use this data to present yourself. Try arranging the facts in a few different ways until you find one that feels natural and engaging. Write the outline below. Then repeat this process for a more specific type of audience (potential employer, informational interviewee, or advisor).

General audience elevator speech (1):

Specific audience elevator speech (2):

⇒ Practice verbalizing your speech, but don't memorize it word-for-word. You want to be comfortable with the main points but flexible enough to engage in a natural conversation and adapt to the interests or background of the person with whom you are interacting. Being sincere is important.

The most important points are to transmit your passion and to make a lasting connection.