Starting networking conversations and, especially, informational interviews can be difficult for both introverts and extroverts. But job-hunting research repeatedly assures us that reaching out to other professionals is THE number one way to discover and secure the best possible job for yourself (with a success rate of up to 86% compared to a success rate of 7% for simply answering advertisements). Avoiding networking reduces your chances and greatly prolongs your job search. Why? Because people prefer to hire people they know. You have to become a known quantity, and networking is how you do that.

Networking is a learned skill: you just have to approach the task in a way that works for you.

- **Remember that people enjoy talking about themselves and their careers**
  People are often honored to be asked for an informational interview and will gladly share their time and expertise. They may also find your ideas and experience interesting. If people refuse to talk with you, 99% of the time the reason is their busy schedule and has nothing to do with you.

- **Pace yourself.**
  Schedule informational interviews or other networking activities at a level that you can sustain and even enjoy. For some, that may be 4 or 5 meetings a week, for others 2 or 3. Find your best pace and plan accordingly. Introverts, especially, need time between interviews to re-energize.

- **Position yourself so career contacts happen while you’re doing something else**
  Use hobbies, volunteer activities, and conferences or other events to meet people in a more casual way and develop contacts that may lead to career opportunities. Keep your career radar operating even when you are doing something that seems unrelated.

- **Think of this as a research project for yourself**
  You have developed strong research skills in graduate school. Use them to find resources, investigate possibilities. Frame the job hunt as a research project and approach it analytically. This can help reduce some of the personal feelings that might get in your way.

- **Fit your personal research within a larger project**
  Would your master’s paper be strengthened by interviews with relevant professionals? As part of these interviews, find out more about the organizations, too. This can serve as a basis for a later networking contact. Or offer to do organizational research for your career services office, contacting the types of organizations that you find interesting. The general information can help other students and give you a strong start for your own networking. And it is sometimes easier to introduce yourself as a representative of an organization rather than as an individual job-hunter.
**Career Outreach for the Reluctant, continued**

- **Make contacts in the style that works for you**
  Experiment with approaches to find the one that works best for you. You might be comfortable making direct calls as your first contact with a professional, or you may prefer to write or email to introduce yourself first and then follow up with a call. The level of formality is also affected by how close this contact is to you and how much introduction is required.

- **Find the common thread**
  One key to an effective contact is finding a common thread that helps you connect with another person. That common thread may be your education if your contact is an alumnus/alumna, or a referral by a mutual acquaintance, or a common interest in a policy area.

- **Do your homework and prepare questions in advance**
  Before you meet with someone, research their organization so you know the basic mission and structure. This will give you material for good questions and show that you know how to locate information. Have a clear goal for each informational interview and prepare your major questions in advance. You may want to write out the questions – or you may just want to make yourself a list of points to be covered. Experiment and find out which method feels most natural to you.

- **Do the less important informational interviews first**
  Interviews become easier with practice, so it makes sense to do lower priority meetings first. Become comfortable with the process, develop your own style and build your confidence before you set up the interview with the organization you’ve always wanted to work for.

- **Find ways to organize the information that work for you**
  You want to keep track of people you’ve talked to and what they told you. Find a way to keep the information together in a form that is easy to locate and easy to maintain. For some job seekers, that may mean recording interviews in a database; for others, it means keeping interview and contact records on paper and organizing an easy filing system.