**NETWORKING**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Why network** |

During your candidature, you should develop your social networks. In essence, networking is establishing friendships and acquaintances—but also reflecting upon how you can benefit mutually from these social ties. The individuals in your network could

* Examine your thesis
* Impart advice about your research
* Collaborate on future projects
* Implement your ideas
* Employ or fund you in the future: Some researchers estimate that about 60% of jobs are not advertised but secured from networks.

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| **Resources to help you network** |

Many research candidates feel reluctant to meet people at workshops, conferences, and other academic settings—even if they are confident in other circumstances. Yet, if candidates have prepared the right answers or resources, they are more likely to feel at ease during these interactions. This table specifies some answers or resources you could prepare.

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| What to prepare | Example |
| A description of who you are—such as your field—to help other individuals appreciate your significance to them | I was teacher, but then became interested in how to utilize technology to improve creativity |
| A tangible depiction of your methods or activities | I have been developing apps that activate a diversity of thoughts—and then testing whether these apps generate vital insights |
| A unique or distinct feature of your work, such as a novel perspective or important finding | We found that some apps operate why people sleep |
| Some comments about your needs | I am still trying to locate a website to promote these apps.  I also need someone to help store all the data we collect  I am unsure of how to utilize a particular statistical technique. |
| Some item that differentiates you, such as an unusual pen, notebook, phone cover, and so forth |  |

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| **Meeting the contacts of contacts** |

To extend your networks, you should meet the contacts of your contacts—such as contacts of your supervisors. To achieve this goal

* First, ask your supervisors whether they know anyone they feel you should meet, either in person or videoconference, who could be helpful to your research or career.
* For example, they might not know someone who works in the industries that could benefit from your research or someone who has developed expertise in a particular technique
* Second, email and then meet, these individuals. A typical email appears below

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| Contents of email | Example |
|  | Dear Dr Smith |
| Describe who you are | I was a teacher, but then became interested in how to utilize technology to improve creativity |
| Allude to your supervisor—or the person who referred you to this contact | My supervisor, Professor Jones, suggested I contact you |
| Describe your methods or activities as well as one or more distinct features | I have been developing apps that activate a diversity of thoughts—and then testing whether these apps generate vital insights. We found that some apps operate why people sleep |
| Specify why you would like to meet—such as to discuss a topic or to explore possible opportunities to collaborate | If at all possible, I would like to meet at some time, because Professor Jones felt your insights could be helpful and that you might be interested in this work. |
| Specify your availability | I am available on any Monday or Tuesday afternoon over the next month |
|  | Kind regards  John Brown |

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| **Meeting people at workshops or conferences** |

To extend your networks, you should approach people at conferences or similar events. If possible, attend both academic conferences but also industry conferences—especially for industries that your research could benefit. This table presents some insights on how to develop networks at conferences.

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| Activity | Example |
| If name badges are distributed, wear your badge on the right. People are more likely to notice and remember names that appear on their right. |  |
| Before the conference or event, set a goal on the number of people you want to meet or who you want to meet | I plan to meet between 2 and 4 researchers in my field as well as 1 or 2 potential employers |
| Before the conference or event, identify a few people you might want to meet if possible. Perhaps arrange to meet these individuals at the conference |  |
| During a conference, maintain a record of everyone you met—including the field, research, interests, and contact details of each person |  |
| Whenever possible, approach someone you watched speak. To begin the conversation   * You might compliment specific features of their speech * Introduce yourself and your research, at some time during the conversation * Ask a question, such as their attitudes towards some technique | * I really liked your analysis of social media apps. * I was a teacher, but then became interested in how to utilize technology to improve creativity. I have been developing apps that activate a diversity of thoughts—and then testing whether these apps generate vital insights. * What are your thoughts on deep learning? |
| If possible, during breaks, approach people who are standing alone or in pairs—especially if they are not standing too close to each other. Then   * After greeting them, ask them a simple question, like whether they enjoyed the presentation * If necessary, follow up with questions about their work or why they decided to attend this conference |  |
| After the conference, email the people you would like to contact again. In particular   * Reintroduce yourself * If you can, email something helpful. You might send an article you feel might interest them or suggest someone you know they might want to meet * End with a question that invites further conversation | Dear Frank  Nice to meet you at the conference last week. I thought you might be interested in the articles I attached. These articles discuss some recent advances in apps that enhance creativity.  Also, I know someone who is conducting research in your field: Tina White. Let me know if you would like me to introduce you to her  Kind regards  Betty |

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| **Gleaning information at career fairs** |

Many people underestimate the benefits of career expos. They presume that events in which employers attempt to promote their organizations, such as conferences, are pointless. They believe the information is obvious or can be accessed from other sources, such as websites, friends, lectures, or counsellors. But, for several reasons, these expos might be more useful than you assume. Specifically, at these events,

* the staff of these organizations are often more inclined to divulge information they would usually conceal
* these staff might disclose information about opportunities at the organization, trends in the industry, advances in technology, or other topics that could be relevant to your future
* they might be more willing to arrange a meeting later than if they had not met you
* you are more likely to remember the information you learned; that is, people can more readily memorize information they derived from several distinct locations, such as the various booths

Yet, many people are not quite sure how they should utilise these experiences. They are not sure of which questions they should ask, which goals they should pursue, or how they should behave, for example. The first column of the following table offers some insights guidelines you could follow; the second column presents some examples.

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| Guidelines | Examples |
| **Your story**: Roughly memorize a brief description about yourself that can be articulated within about a minute or so. This summary should include three features: the discipline in which you study, your most distinctive feature—such as your past experience or relevant hobby—and your main aspiration | * Nice to meet you Donna * I’m Helen. I’m studying environmental science * I used to work as a teacher, but I actually more enjoy fixing broken electronics * I’m interested in learning more about roles that combine science and computers |
| **Conduct research**. Search the website about the scheduled organizations. For each organization that could be relevant to your future career   * identify one or more features of the organization you like—such as their values, projects, or other initiatives * determine which of these organizations arrange internships, vacation employment, or similar opportunities   Many large organizations employ applicants from most disciplines and, therefore, could be relevant to you even regardless of the sector in which they operate. | * Some of the products of your organization, especially the G34, seem really pioneering |
| **Prepare questions.** Prepare some questions that could help you uncover insights that you had not expected | Some possible questions could include   * why did you join this organization? * how does this organization differentiate itself from competitors? * what are some changes the organization is planning to introduce? * what are the qualities of applicants the organization is seeking; and which qualities do they shun? * which roles do you think might be most relevant to someone in my discipline? * am I able to meet someone in the future to discuss possible career prospects at this organization? * which roles do you feel might be most relevant in the future?   However, do not ask one person more than three or four questions |
| **A sense of fun**. Initiate your conversation with a sense of fun rather than gravity. A sense of fun—or even a genuine smile—tends to diminish your own anxiety and enhance rapport. | You might introduce yourself with a whimsical comment. For example   * you could express a self-deprecating joke as long as you also seem confident, such as “Do you like stupid questions, because I could ask plenty if you like” * you could exaggerate something, such as “The queue was so long I thought I might have to wait until next year before I speak to you” * you could refer to the surroundings, such as “I wanted to visit this booth and not just because of the big fan here” * or you could merely smile warmly or playfully. |
| **Some confidence.** Demonstrate a moderate level of confidence even if you feel unconfident. Behaviours that epitomise confidence tend to diminish anxiety and improve the conversation | You could, for eaxmple   * speak a bit louder than usual * shake hands with the other person slightly more firmly than usual * walk with an upright posture. |
| **Show humility**. Although you could exhibit some confidence, you also need to demonstrate humility. Acknowledge one or two specific faults, but with an air of confidence in your tone. Humility both establishes trust but also, surprisingly, tends to boost your own confidence | * My knowledge of engineering firms is actually quite limited |
| **Record notes systematically**. Organizations are more likely to be impressed if you record some notes about the conversation in a systematic fasion—perhaps as a mindmap or in a table. | * However, to maintain the momentum in these interactions, do not record too many notes during the conversation |

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| **Online academic forums** |

A vital source of networks today are academic online forums. If you ask or answer questions on relevant academic forums, you are likey to meet relevant individuals. Here are some examples

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| Forum | Description |
| <https://www.academia.edu> | A social networking website for academics—to share papers and follow the research in specific fields. Helps academics increase the impact of their papers. |
| <https://www.reddit.com>. | To locate relevant communities, in the search box, enter your discipline and the word “Academic” or “Research”. A suitable group of users should appear under the heading “Communities and Users”  You could also consider more general communities such as  <https://www.reddit.com/r/AskAcademia/> |
| Stack exchange | A set of expert communities. You merely need to locate the community that matches your field. Press “All sites” and then search for your field. |
| <https://thesiswhisperer.com> | A forum about research theses |
| <https://forum.thegradcafe.com> | A forum for postgraduate candidates |

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| **Potential examiners** |

During your candidature, the most important decision revolves around who should examine your thesis. The examiners cannot be friends, family, or colleagues. But they be people you have met briefly, either in person or online. So, to locate suitable examiners, one strategy send a couple of emails, with relevant questions, to academics in your field. Academics who respond eagerly and swiftly might be suitable examiners. Examples of questions you might ask are

* I am planning to use the method you utilized in one of your papers. Did you experience any complications with this method?
* I am planning to conduct research that is similar to your work on… Are you aware of anyone else who is exploring similar questions?
* I thought I would email you to let you know I am attempting to extend some of your work on… Let me know if you might be interested in the results.

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| **Interesting discoveries about social skills** |

This table presents some interesting and validated insights about social skills. Some of these insights could also help you network more effectively.

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| Interesting insights |
| Conversations between two people—especially two people who do not know themselves well—are better whenever one person assumes the more dominant role and the other person assumes the more submissive role. |
| When attempting to convince or persuade someone, do not gaze into the eyes of this person. Instead, perhaps shift your gaze, as if staring into the air to help you concentrate. When people feel that someone is staring their eyes, they experience a state called reactance, in which they feel the need to be defiant to reassert their independence. |
| People are more likely to be trusted if they demonstrate their attempt to adopt the perspective of someone else--with words like “I imagined what it would be like to be in your position for a while…" |
| To enhance confidence, imagine yourself with people with whom you are most confident. Often, this person is quite humble or reserved rather than domineering. |
| Ensure the handshake is relatively, but not unreasonably, firm, vigorous, and protracted—and direct your gaze to the eyes of the person whose hand you are shaking. This behavior tends to enhance trust |