

# COMMUNITY BUILDING

## Making Genuine Connections

“It has been nice to transition from ‘student’ to ‘peer’ with curators, historians, and writers who I have long admired.”

[Marissa Neave - Alumni Story Participant](#)



### YOUR COMMUNITIES

Finding community is an important part of professional development. Seek out opportunities to get to know your peers every chance you get. They will become your first connections to a larger professional community that you will come to value.

Practicing this skill now (and it does take practice) will pay off in the future, as others can provide tips, leads, and suggestions. Simple gestures and mutual exchange of information will help you form meaningful personal and professional relationships.

It starts with a conversation, and sometimes that's all it takes to begin forming a genuine connection.

#### YOUR OCAD COMMUNITY:

- Your peers are following a similar journey, with similar interests and dealing with similar challenges.
- Faculty can help champion your successes.
- The CEAD can provide you with resources, and exposure to other creative professionals.

#### FIND COMMUNITY BEYOND OUR WALLS:

Conducting Informational Interviews with recent alumni will help you become comfortable talking to creative professionals who are further along in their careers.



### MAKING INTRODUCTIONS

Building connections can be a daunting process. How do you approach an industry professional you don't know? What do you say? Remember, they were in your position once, and many are generous with their advice. Here are a few tips for initiating contact:

- Keep your email or DM **short and simple**.
- Provide **1-2 lines about yourself** and your practice.
- **Explain how you came to contact them.** Was it through their LinkedIn profile, social media, mutual contact, an article they wrote or event they spoke at?
- **Explain why you want to meet.** Do you want feedback on your work or an informational interview to learn more about their career path?
- Be clear about **how much of their time** you it will take (15 to 30-minute conversation).
- Make the time, location or virtual platform **convenient for them**.
- Be clear that you are seeking **information only**--not a job.

#### Tip:

**Connect with a Mentor:** A mentor is someone you can turn to for guidance and feedback. They challenge and support you in ways that a friend or relative might not be able. Their professional journey could be a model you aspire to, or they are connected to communities you want to be involved with.



### IN PRACTICE

#### Five Person Support Model

It takes more than one person to support your creative and professional development. Make a list of people you know and can reach out to for advice for advice and support. You may have more than one person fulfilling a role; some roles may take longer to develop. Your support relationships can change or even overlap; for example, someone who challenges you can also be a mentor.



\*Adapted from a tool visualized from the YouthREX Webinar on 'Youth and Substance Use: Engaging and Supporting Through Reflective Practice' by ReDesign Group



### FURTHER RESOURCES

- The **OCAD U Creative Professionals-In-Residence** program is a mentorship initiative. Visiting creative professionals provide one-on-one advice to current OCAD U students and recent alumni: <https://www.ocadu.ca/services/centre-for-emerging-artists-and-designers/career-development/creative-professionals-in-residence>
- **Ten Thousand Coffees** is an online mentoring and networking platform. Join the OCAD U Hub on Ten Thousand Coffees to meet fellow students, recent graduates and experienced alumni who are now professionals in their field: <http://ocado.tenthousandcoffees.com>
- External links to **professional communities and associations** in a variety of creative fields: <https://cead.format.com/1504203-communities-networking-associations>

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## Developing Dialogue

### INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

#### Gaining insights for informed career decisions

Informational interviews are a common practice and can be useful to you throughout your career. They are about information gathering, professional networking and demystifying your desired career path. By engaging in a

focused conversation with someone who works in your field of interest, you can gain first-hand insights and advice that will enable you to make more informed decisions when it comes to your job hunt.

#### ASK ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, BROADLY

- What are the entry-level positions in the industry?
- What experience is required for a particular role?
- What are some recent developments in the industry that have made an important impact?
- What are some of the industry challenges that seem to have always existed?
- From your experience in your industry, are people looking to hire specialists or generalists? What does a 'unicorn' look like in your field?

#### ASK ABOUT THEIR ROLE AND WORKPLACE, SPECIFICALLY

- What is a typical day like?
- How did you gain additional experience and skills after completing university? What extra courses did you take?
- What do you find the most fulfilling part of your job?
- What surprises you the most about your job?
- If you could restructure your role to be a dream job in your field, how would that look?

#### PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

- What did you need to know in order to get your foot in the door? How do you continue to 'sharpen the saw' - improve your skill set?
- What's your advice for making an impression - how can you ensure that your creative work 'stands out'?
- Do you have advice about professional communication - such as with your colleagues and clients?

#### CAREER TRAJECTORY

- How do I position or market myself when actively searching for a particular role?
- How did you find yourself at this company/organization in the first place?
- How do you find what role you're best suited to within the industry or a particular organization?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?

#### KEY TOPICS & SAMPLE QUESTIONS

### REMOTE INTERVIEWS

Circumstances may require a phone or video call instead of a face-to-face meeting. Much of what you need to prepare is similar to an in-person encounter:

- Ensure you are in a quiet area and where you won't be interrupted during the interview
- Make sure you have a stable and reliable internet connection. Use a land-line for phone interviews.
- Test your connection and software with a friend prior to the interview.
- Position yourself near a flattering light source and maintain a professional appearance.
- Use gestures as you would in a normal

conversation to help you be more lively, and sit or stand up straight to help project your voice.

- Be extra careful about interrupting or talking over someone else. Video calls may have some delay, which makes it harder to assess when someone else wants to speak or is finished speaking.
- Use notes during the meeting

#### Tip:

Prepare questions that lead to concrete, practical answers and open-ended, personal experiences, not just "yes" or "no" answers.

### MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

Positive impressions start when you first reach out to a contact. Under ideal conditions, this turns into an engaging back-and-forth dialogue where you are able to form an effortless connection.

Take the time to listen to someone else's story as much as you tell them about your own. This is how you can find and create value with the connections you make. With enough preparation and practice, you should be able to hone your communication skills and increase your confidence.

#### UNSPOKEN

How do you carry yourself?  
Confident handshake, posture, body language, eye contact, smile, and appropriate attire

#### ACTIVE LISTENING

Direct your attention to listening and responding with considered answers or follow up questions to show your interest and appreciation

### MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

#### SUBTEXT

How are you using language/vocabulary and tone? What do your statements say about your work ethic and your character?

#### CONNECT THE DOTS

Indicate how all your experiences connect and contribute to your 'bigger picture' and your narrative

### TELLING YOUR STORY

The age old request "Tell me about yourself" gives the chance to share your narrative as an emerging creative professional. It can be a challenge to find the right language to represent yourself and your creative practice. Use the prompts below to craft a memorable introduction:

- Reflect on your core message: your ideas, why, and how you create?
- In 3-5 words, what are you most passionate about?
- What do you value the most in your work?
- Identify what you have to offer: "I have..." statements.
- List your skills, values, experience, and qualifications
- What topics / areas of study do you excel in?

Make connections that illustrate how your experiences contribute to the 'bigger picture' of your professional narrative. People remember stories more than they remember facts. Framing your story in a narrative arc of past, present, future will help others understand your creative trajectory.

- **Past:** your background education and prior work
- **Present:** what value you have to offer, what drives your practice
- **Future:** what you want to contribute to the field, and how you will do so

#### Tip:

#### INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Script a brief description of yourself that describes your interests, strengths and ambitions in 30 seconds or less. Practice with friends and family, possibly unfamiliar with the nuances of art or design.