

Coffee Chat Guide



Green Career Centre

Introduction

A coffee chat is an informal meeting, usually between an upcoming professional and a more experienced professional. Coffee chats provide the opportunity to have a conversation with an employee of a company you are interested in. Coffee chats are not only for job searching, but also for networking and mentorship to express genuine interest in someone else's career path.



Coffee chats allow professionals to expand their professional network, improve their networking skills, ask questions about the career paths of industry professionals, and receive honest insights about industry trends. This guide will delve into how emerging professionals can spur their career development by securing coffee chats.

Questions to Ask



If you are not sure what to ask during a coffee chat, here are some questions that you can use or draw inspiration from to personalize your coffee chat.

Questions About the Occupation

1. What do you enjoy most about your current role?
2. What does a typical day at your company look like for you?
3. What are you currently working on in your career?
4. What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned in your career?

Questions About the Organization/Company

1. What is the workplace culture like of your organization/company?
2. Does your company or organization offer professional development opportunities? If so, what are they?
3. How does your organization support its employees' work-life balance?
4. What are some skills/qualities that your organization values in its employees?

Questions to Ask



Questions About the Individual

1. How did you get started in your career?
2. What are your career goals and interests?
3. What are the biggest challenges and opportunities in the environmental sector?
4. What are your interests and hobbies?
5. What are some resources or tools you use to stay informed and up-to-date in the environmental sector?
6. What advice would you give to an entry-level worker starting in the environmental sector?
7. What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned in your career?

How To Prepare For a Coffee Chat

1. Research the person you're meeting with. Look at their company website and their LinkedIn profile to learn about their career path and work experience.

- Their LinkedIn profile can provide a wealth of information that includes their achievements, work experience, publications, and professional affiliations. This person may have mutual connections on LinkedIn that you know. You can leverage these mutual connections as an icebreaker or to build rapport.
- While researching their company website, find any specific projects that they are working on.
- Something you may also have in common with them is that you attended the same university as them.
- By researching the person, you gain insights into their professional goals and projects they are working on.



2. Prepare questions in advance. Think about what you want to learn from the person and what questions you can ask to start a conversation.

- Prepare questions that allow you to gain insights into the person's career journey and perspective on industry trends.
- Ensure that your questions are open-ended so the coffee chat is more conversational. Open-ended questions encourage more detailed responses and promote meaningful conversations.
- Use any common experiences, connections, or interests with the person as a basis for questions to build rapport and foster an engaging conversation.
- Although preparing questions in advance is valuable, be flexible during the conversation. Listen actively to the person's responses and allow the discussion to flow naturally. Use follow-up questions to delve deeper into interesting points they raise or to seek clarification.
- As a general rule, aim to ask 5-7 questions during a coffee chat. This rule can help avoid an overwhelming conversation.



3. Practice your elevator pitch. Be ready to talk about yourself and your experience clearly and concisely.

- The goal of an elevator pitch is to provide a concise summary of your background and interests while starting a conversation.
- Your elevator pitch should be a summary of your educational attainment, your passions and interests, work experiences, and future goals. You should also end with a call to action such as an engaging question (Ex. How did you get involved in this field?) or an inquisitive comment (Ex. Moreover, it should be about 30-60 seconds).
- Your elevator pitch may vary depending on the person/group you are speaking to and the type of situation you are in (e.g., job interview, career fair, coffee chat). Remember to tailor your elevator pitch based on the situation and the person/group you are speaking to.



- Remember to practice your elevator pitch so that you can memorize an outline of your pitch. Your elevator pitch should be expressed conversationally and confidently. Remember to smile and use a strong speaking voice when delivering an elevator pitch.

- Here is the template for an elevator pitch

Template: "Hello, my name is [insert name]. I am an [insert educational attainment/occupation] at [insert educational institution/company/organization]. I am passionate about [insert interest/passion] and have been involved in [insert work experiences/extracurricular activities]. I am seeking opportunities to gain experience in [insert field] and am wondering if you could inform me about how you got into that industry

- Here is an example of how to use this template.
- Example: "Hello, my name is Maria. I am an Environmental Sciences major studying at Simon Fraser University (SFU). Currently, I am the President of the Environmental Science Students Association, where I host workshops on sustainability and organize campaigns to bring awareness to environmental issues on campus. I am also the Co-Lead of the Waste Management Collective, where I work on projects that upcycle textile waste into renewable energy. As someone passionate about environmental protection and scientific analysis, I plan to become an environmental scientist after I graduate. I'm interested in the sustainable work that your company is working on and I am wondering about the type of projects that you are working on."

4. Dress professionally and arrive on time. Show that you respect the person's time and take the meeting seriously.

- Search the company where the person works and look at the attire that they usually wear on their company website.
- Business casual is usually the way to go for dressing professionally.
- Business casual attire for men usually includes wearing tops such as polo shirts, button-up dress shirts, and quarter zip-up sweaters.



- Men should also wear khakis, chinos, or dress pants for bottoms. For men's footwear, it is recommended to wear dress shoes such as loafers, Chelsea boots, or oxfords. A belt is also recommended. Wearing a blazer/sport coat or a tie is optional for business casual but encouraged if you have the attire.
- Business casual attire for women usually includes wearing tops such as tailored button-up shirts, silk or chiffon blouses, turtlenecks, lightweight sweaters, and cardigans.

- Wearing dresses is also common business casual attire for women.
- For bottoms, it is recommended to wear khakis, trousers, slacks, and knee-length skirts.
- Dresses, blazers, and accessories (Ex. necklaces, earrings, watches) are also part of business casual attire for women.
- Gender-neutral business casual attire can incorporate any elements of business casual attire meant for men or women.



5. Be polite, friendly, and confident. Remember that the goal of the coffee chat is to build a relationship. Be the best version of yourself and show genuine interest in the person.

- Start the coffee chat with a polite greeting and express your gratitude for having the opportunity to connect with and learn from the person.
- Remember to use good manners, such as saying “please” and “thank you.” Show respect for the other person’s time and opinions. Avoid interrupting or talking over the other person.
- Smile, make eye contact, and use open, welcoming, nonverbal communication. Ensure that your tone is warm, inviting, and friendly.
- Speak with a strong voice and use a firm handshake. Avoid fidgeting or slouching.
- Find a balance between questions, statements, and taking turns speaking. While you are there to ask the person questions, they may ask you questions about yourself.



6. Follow up with a thank-you note. After the coffee chat, send a brief email or message thanking the person for their time and reiterating your interest in staying in touch.

- Sending a thank-you note shows appreciation for the person's time and insights. Moreover, it helps build a relationship with the person you met, which is beneficial for future networking opportunities.
- Sending a thank-you note after a coffee chat leaves a positive impression on the person you met, which helps you stand out from other professionals and be remembered by the person you met.
- When writing a thank-you note after a coffee chat, keep it professional, brief, and personalized to the conversation you had.
- You can personalize the coffee chat by mentioning specific instances of the coffee chat.



- This is a template for a thank-you note.

It was nice meeting you today! Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and answer my questions about your career journey and lived experiences. Your comment(s) about [something you found interesting in the coffee chat] was very interesting and is something that I will think about for my career development journey. I look forward to staying in touch with you and plan on using your advice to define my career path.”



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