# The 9 Most Common Questions About Networking at a Professional Mixer as a Medical Student

**1. What is Networking?**
Networking is just another name for the **conversations** you have, and **relationships** you build, **with people** you meet in your professional community...**while you're pursuing your professional goals.**

**2. What is the Value of Networking as a Student?**
Every student faces several challenges throughout their time in medical school. Responding to those challenges and achieving your goals using a "Going it Alone'" strategy can work, but it can also be time consuming, feel isolating, and be a missed opportunity, considering the collective wisdom and support in your professional community. Part of succeeding as a medical student is both recognizing that there is support available <u>and</u> knowing how to access it when needed. Connecting with people in your community to help you navigate the unique experiences of medical school - and using that support and knowledge to help both yourself, and your fellow students - is always part of a successful strategy towards creating a rewarding career.

**3. What 2 Things Should You do to Prepare For a Networking Opportunity?**
1. Think about 1-2 current personal or professional challenges or goals. (As in, challenges or goals you have now, or will face over the next 6 months)
2. Pick 1-2 conversation openers and start a conversation about that challenge or goal with someone in your personal or professional community, to seek advice, perspective, and support.

**4. What are Possible Personal or Professional Challenges/Goals You Might Face & What are Appropriate Conversation Openers?**

| A. Topic | B. Example Current Challenge or Goal | C. Conversation Openers About That Challenge or Goal |
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| **Balancing School & Family** | I'm the oldest and emotionally support my family, but since school started, I am not as available to them now as I'd like to be. How to balance taking care of them and myself? | • What advice might your give someone about balancing family responsibilities and school? <br> • Recently my family has been facing some personal challenges, and I find myself wondering about the best way to support them but also manage my schoolwork. What on campus resources or people should I be reaching out to for support? |
| **Feeling Isolated** | I had many friends in undergrad, but here, it feels harder to connect. Am I the only feeling like this? | • How did you adjust to the pace, culture, and experience of being in medical school? <br> • What do you think student don't realize about the differences between the undergraduate and medical school experience. <br> • I wonder, what is one piece of advice you would give to a student who is feeling isolated? |
| **Studying Effectively** | I study all the time, and feel like I have no time to do anything but classes. Meanwhile, all my fellow students seem to studying much less than I. Is this normal, because I feel like I'm doing something wrong? | • What are some of the best strategies you know to effectively memorize the large amount of information required as a student, particularly when I don't feel I can associate the information to anything tangible yet? <br> • I frequently feel overwhelmed by the amount of information in Anatomy (or Pathology, etc.). What are resources or tips you'd give a student to manage the volume of information we need to know? <br> • What are your thoughts about the different ways to tackle studying? Did you study in groups, entirely on your own, or with a classmate? |

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| **Step Prep** | I don't think I'm the strongest standardized test taker, but I intend to perform well on Step 1 (or 2).  What should my strategy be? | • What are good ways to balance classwork and Step 1 prep? Whenever I focus on class, I feel behind in my board studies, and vice versa. How have you seen students successfully balance the two?<br>• What advice would you give someone to prepare for Step 1 (or 2) who finds standardized tests challenging? Do you have recommendation on effective study support or test preparation resources? |
| **Research Opportunities** | I really want to get some clinical research experience. How do I do that?  When is the best time to do that? | I am interested in pursuing clinical research opportunities……<br><br>• how would you recommend approaching someone you would like to work with? Is it best to express that interest in person, or via email? How would one express interest? What should a student do to demonstrate that they are prepared?<br>• when do you think is the best time to take a research year?<br>• would you suggest a student pursue research over their 2nd year, or focus their time an energy studying for Step 1? |
| **Interest Groups** | I've never attended an interest group. What is the value of doing so? | • What do you think is most valuable for students thinking of attending an interest group?<br>• If a student is interested in several specialties, do you recommend them involving themselves in multiple interest groups? |
| **Exploring Career Options** | I know I'm interested in infectious diseases and want to explore both clinical and non-clinical options. How do I do that? | • I'm at the stage of exploring career options, and know I want to use my quantitative skills in my career. I've been asking people for advice about career paths in the field of medicine, and Dr. X mentioned epidemiology and the CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service. Are there other organizations or positions you might recommend for medical students interested in both clinical and non-clinical professional opportunities? |
| **Learning More About Clinical Issues** | I'm interested in apnea in adolescent populations. How can I learn more about this topic? | • One of my areas of interest is sleep apnea in adolescent populations. What is the best way to research/meet individuals with similar areas of interest to learn more about the field? |
| **Succeeding on Rotations** | I felt somewhat unprepared for my last rotation. How do I prepare well for my next rotation? | • What is a typical day for a medical student on an OB/GYN rotation? What did you like/dislike?<br>• What was your experience like on your surgery rotation?<br>• What are the five most common clinical issues one might see in a neurology rotation, and where should I focus my studies if I want to prepare?<br>• Even as a fourth year, I feel like I am making 'stupid' mistakes on my rotations. What are some good strategies to not let those feelings spiral – and stay focused on my work?<br>• I've just started my rotations, and I realize I am more comfortable with outpatient, primary care settings than working with acute care patients facing chronic or critical health issues. What advice do you give students about dealing with the emotional labor that is involved for caring for acute patients?<br>• What advice do you have for students when they don't 'click' with a particular resident, attending or clerkship director on a rotation that they would like to be their specialty choice? |

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| **Clinical Presentations** | I'm freezing up when I present, and have been told that I need to 'project more confidence'. How do I do this, because I'm not sure what this means. | • How can a student best prepare to present when on a new rotation?<br>• What are strategies to understand the appropriate presentation format on each rotation, since it seems to be a slightly different format and focus every time?<br>• What is the clinical presentation format on this rotation? How is it different from other rotations?<br>• What advice would you give to someone who has been told to present 'more confidently'?<br>• What is the best way to approach the chief resident/a resident if I want feedback on how to present more effectively? |
| **Choosing a Specialty** | For three years, I thought I wanted family medicine, but after I completed the rotation, I'm no longer sure.  Now what? How do I begin to rethink and consider another specialty? | • How did you select your specialty?<br>• What one piece of advice would you give to someone selecting a specialty?<br>• What are common mistakes you see in students selecting a specialty?<br>• What criteria do you think it is important to consider when selecting a specialty?<br>• I enjoyed both Anesthesiology and Pathology and cannot decide between the two. How do you recommend students decide when two options are equally appealing? |
| **Application Materials**<br><br>**& Letters of** Recommendation | I know I want to prepare strong materials and have references from individuals who will speak effectively on my behalf. What do I need to know, and need to do to achieve this? | • When you've seen a well-written personal statement – what was your sense of why it was an effective statement?<br>• How do you recommend students decide who to ask to write their letter or recommendation? Do I select someone well known in their field, or someone who knows me well?<br>• What is the best way to ask someone if they would write a letter of recommendation for you, and is there any way to assess if they will write a strong letter on your behalf?<br>• How do suggest students follow up with letter writers who still haven't submitted your recommendation letter, in a way that professional, rather than nagging? |
| **Choosing a Residency Program** | What questions should I ask residency programs to see if it's a good fit for me? | • What 2-3 questions do you think every student should ask a residency program?<br>• What criteria do you think are important to consider when selecting a residency program?<br>• What are factors that you think students should consider in selecting a residency program, but often overlook?<br>• What is the best way to express an interest in a particular residency program if a student has a chance to meet someone from that program? |

**5. What are five phrases to help end a conversation?**
   At some point, every conversation winds down. Try a variation of one of these 5 graceful exits when you are going to end your conversation.
   1. It was a pleasure speaking with you. I hope you have an enjoyable evening.
   2. It was good talking with you – it was very helpful hearing about your residency interview experience, particularly the unexpected questions.  Thank you.
   3. Well, thank you. It was great to speak with you and I enjoyed our conversation. I hope we'll run into each other again.
   4. Well, it was great to meet you. Thanks so much for your advice. I really appreciate it.
   5. Thank you for your suggestions, and your willingness to forward my name to Professor X. I'll follow up with you by email before next week.

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**6. But Isn't Networking Just About Using People? Why Would Anyone Want to Talk With me About my Challenges or Goals?**

Networking is not predatory; it is not about using other people solely for their skills, knowledge or contacts to forward your own goals. It is relational, and is based on a collegial interaction, where you show respect, curiosity and recognition. "Respect" in this case means doing the work to self identify your challenge/goal, concisely articulating it to the person whose advice or help you are seeking, specifically asking for that help and advice, and thanking them for their time and effort. Your approach should also be based on reciprocal curiosity, and you should be on the lookout to understand what is motivating the person to help you. Perhaps they faced similar experiences and believe they have advice to share, or benefited from the support of a professional contact or mentor in their own life. Perhaps they appreciate your drive, or what you intend to accomplish, or feel connected to you in some way via a personal community, social activity or professional group.

But even if you never discover their motivation, recognition is important. Always, always initially thank the person for their time and effort, regardless of how useful you ultimately find that information to be. Also, follow up with them whenever you use/benefit from their advice, to let them know how their investment of time and energy in your wellbeing benefited you. Even an email 6 months later (or a year!), reminding them that you spoke, they gave you advice, and how it all turned out can feel rewarding to a professional contact. Finally, always offer to return the favor, though both of you recognize that in that moment you may not know how. For all you know, years from now, the person may ask you to give advice to someone they mentor! In sum, network with the goal of being an excellent professional colleague yourself.

**7. So, What Are The 5 Most Common Mistakes Students Make When Networking?**

1. **Thinking they have to speak with 'everyone' or 'the most important person in the room'.** Everyone could have valuable advice and support, so be open to speaking with everyone, but pace yourself. You might only speak with 1-3 people at a networking opportunity, and that is okay too.
2. **Making your interaction a counseling appointment rather than a conversation.** Often students will want to share their entire story to a listening ear, and have the other person ask them questions. But networking is often more targeted and concise when meeting someone for the first time. Synthesize your key 1-3 questions before you speak, and start the conversation with those questions, not the background of your situation. And remember, it is your goal, but their story. Ask people for their advice, and about their experience, and use their answers to inform and develop your own strategy.
3. **Rushing the relationship:** If you've just met someone for the first time, be cautious about speaking about yourself for over 20 minutes. The first time, even if you find the person helpful, limit yourself to 5-20 minutes, and then follow up!
4. **Forgetting to express gratitude.** Always say thank you to the person for their time, and tell the person specifically why you find their advice was helpful.
5. **Not letting people follow your adventure:** If you ask for advice about how to find a research opportunity, or how to present more effectively (because that was your current goal/challenge), then contact people in the future to let them know how everything turned out! Even if you get busy and forget, 3 or 6 months later, send them an email, and let them know how you used their advice, express gratitude once again, and offer to return the favor whenever you can.

**8. How Does a Networking Contact Turn Into a Mentorship Relationship?**

A professional relationship, whether you formally call it a mentorship relationship, begins with the smallest of exchanges. You, as a student, identify a current challenge or goal, succinctly ask someone in your community for advice or help. Next, you thank them for that advice/help and follow it. Then follow up within a week to 6 months by letting them know how you took their advice and how it helped you address your current challenge or goal, and what other progress you have made. Then ask for another piece of advice. By proving that their initial investment in you (of their time, advice, contacts or access) paid off, they will invest in you again. Over time, as your professional colleague grows to know more about you, your relationship will develop into a deeper, more acknowledged mentorship relationship.

**9. Want More Help?**

Want to learn more about networking as a student, including developing professional goals, the language to start and end conversations, how to use LinkedIn or other social media/online professional tools to explore career options or find professional opportunities, or how to follow up or stay in touch with someone you've just met? The OCPD can help! Check out our website for resources and information at career.ucsf.edu, or come in and brainstorm ideas with a career counselor by scheduling an appointment at 476.4986. The OCPD is located at 513 Parnassus Avenue, in the Medical Sciences Building, Room S-140.