

# Conducting a **\*Stellar\*** job search

## Five things to start doing now to spark career momentum

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### 1. Find your **\*Bright Spots\***

Think about the things that make you light up. People whose work you emulate, organizations you admire, times when you have felt really fulfilled and as though you were truly.

Lists are a great place to begin. Do some free-writing and listing of all of the jobs (projects, tasks, responsibilities research projects) you have had or ever been interested in, places you have been, people you have worked with. Let yourself free-associate and chase ideas down rabbit holes – get off track!!! The process always generates lots of ideas things that you hadn't remembered or thought about in a while. Free associate and then free associate on associations. Build out by identifying what led to an interest, or considering what it might lead to – other people and other organizations and maybe even specific jobs or tasks.

LinkedIn is another invaluable resource –it is, after all, the world's largest repository of information about work. Start with anything that you might be curious about whether it is something that has always interested you, or something you heard about yesterday and want to learn more about. Be a linguist for yourself by looking at how people describe their work on LinkedIn and pay attention to how the organizations you are drawn to talk about the work that they do. Note down key words and phrases, knowledge skills and abilities that seem to be valued, ways of framing problems, ways of describing expertise, what values and cherished ideals seem to be being held up. All of this information becomes part of an ongoing process of discernment (whether as part of a job search, or as part of job crafting – shaping the job you have).

### 2. Strike up conversations about them

Find people to talk with about their work. Seek out information through conversation the way you have been trained as an academic researcher to go to articles and books as Maggie Debelius and Susan Bassala's advise in their excellent book, *So What Are You Going to Do With That?* (SWAYGTDWT?) This activity (which some call informational interviews or simply networking conversations) is the real power source of your search.

Bring a few bright spots - things that are currently sparking your own curiosity to share and ask thoughtful questions: a great place to start might be asking about the details of this person's day-to-day. Respond by sharing your ideas and approach to tackling similar challenges and asking for feedback on how your ways of thinking are likely to be perceived and received. In these conversations you start to figure out where you fit, and assess degree of fit. Crucially,

these conversations are NOT about asking for a job. People can be generous, relaxed, and open precisely because this is an information-seeking frame.

If you are looking to have a new job in 6 months, aim for 2 networking conversations per week. Many sources including *Designing Your Life* and *What Color is Your Parachute?* suggest that once you have had about 50 such conversations you will have not only done much of your needed discernment, you will also have built connections to learn about enough opportunities to be at the stage of having had multiple job interviews and ideally, are choosing among offers.

Finally, if you're looking for ideas for who to reach out to, Jen Polk has amassed a [quantity of career conversations on From PhD to Life](#) and I feature stories of linguists' careers as part of my [Career Paths of Linguists blog](#) series and also on the Career Linguist YouTube channel.

### **3. Find stories that illuminate them.**

Over the course of your conversations, you will be doing lots of storytelling. This is great practice for the materials you will be creating and (as you will see in the next section), but it is also a great time to practice story listening. You will make better connections and you will learn more when you listen carefully to the stories that you hear in these conversations.

But also notice how others are hearing you. When do you leave your listeners confused? When do they get energized? You're looking for evidence about which stories best demonstrate what you have to offer, so why not [arrive to conversations with your pocket full](#), of little stories that exemplify how you work, how you think, and what you are passionate about. You definitely want one about a current project, a quality of yours that you would like to highlight, maybe an example of how linguistics might be important in the world of work that you are exploring.

### **4. Create resumes and cover letters around STARs.**

Resumes and Cover letters are best when they are built from stories, and ideally [Directly in Response](#) to a job advertisement. In the ad, you have information about which stories to tell, and the order in which to tell them, and the STAR formula is a good guide for remembering what they need to do: **Situation:** Briefly provide context **Task:** Explain a problem or challenge you faced, highlighting specific tasks you accomplished using your unique skills. **Action:** Describe the actions you took, explain your process. (in detail) **Result:** Explain how solving the problem or reaching the goal made a meaningful impact. Summarize lessons learned or skills you gained from this experience.

### **5. Look for ways to build your constellations.**

Consider how you might give back. Look for ways that you can make and strengthen connections and generate opportunity. What actions can you take to support and strengthen community?