Asking effective questions can mean the difference between getting an interview or not. Panels, networking events, or any minute you spend with someone in a position to hire you is vital. Take advantage of those precious moments, and stand out by asking effective questions.

1) Asking versus Telling
You want to ask an effective question to solicit information, not to tell an executive what you know about a company or industry. There are three main benefits to asking instead of telling:

- **Establishing rapport:** Don’t try to impress people with your ideas; rather, establish rapport and trust by eliciting ideas from them.
- **Encouraging the direction of conversation:** Frequently, while you are talking, the other person is not listening but thinking about what he or she is going to say next. When you ask questions, he or she will think in the direction you propose.
- **Giving ownership to the other person:** The right answer will not be imposed by you; it will be developed by the other individual, who will be flattered and excited to help in your career exploration.

2) Effective and Ineffective Questions
Effective questions come in all shapes and sizes. Below is a description of three potentially effective question types:

- **Open-Ended Question:** Question does not invite any particular answer, but opens up discussion or elicits a wide range of answers.
- **Fact-Finding Question:** Question is aimed at getting information on a particular subject.
- **Follow-Up Question:** Question is intended to get more information or to elicit an opinion.

On the other hand, some questions can be ineffective. Typically, a closed question is less effective than the questions described above. A closed question is generally specific and can be answered with a yes or no. Closed questions don’t result in much information being transferred, help to develop a rapport, or create much room for elaboration.

3) Effective Networking During Panels and Lunch
The executives understand that you are students interested in learning about the industry and company. They do not expect you to know everything. Be comfortable customizing your questions to fit your personality, interests, values, career goals and other criteria that are important to you. Potential areas for questions include:

- **What the job is like** - The challenges, frustrations, rewards encountered; kinds of decisions required; problems solved; how time is spent on the job.
- **Motivation and interest** - What attracted the professional to this career? What advice do they have for students considering this occupation?
- **Essential skills and abilities** - Necessary and desirable skills, education and experience required, or training opportunities.
- **Professional development** - Career paths and advancement.
- **Lifestyle implications of the work** - Travel, pressure, flexibility, security.
- **Work environment** - Physical setting, people (colleagues and clients), organizational structure and culture.
- **Current issues in the industry** – Personal perspective that goes beyond what you have read.
- **Ways to get more information** - Professional journals, professional organizations, or other contacts.

Sources:  
http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/communication_questions.html  
http://www.career.unm.edu/forms/informational_interviewing.pdf

The Consultants in the Kenan-Flagler Business Communication Center proudly bring these tips to you. From resumes and cover letters to presentations and PowerPoint slide design, the Center can help you with all your communication needs. Stop by and visit us in McColl 2125, or visit our website for more information.