

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

What Is an Informational Interview?

Informational interviews are a great tool to build your network and learn about general opportunities in an organization or profession. You can explore a specific industry, organization, or position while assessing whether it's a good fit for your skills, personality, and career goals. During an informational interview, you will have the chance to interact individually with professionals, and inquire about their daily work environment and career path. Here are some reasons why you should consider informational interviewing as a networking and professional development tool:

- If you already know the field or organization is a good fit for you, do an informational interview to network and gather more specific information about the industry or company.
- Observe a position or company to get a feel for different work environments that may fit your strengths and career goals.
- Connect with professionals and build relationships now as they may have tips about future job or internship opportunities.
- Develop the social skills you will need in professional interactions and build confidence for future job interviews.
- Gain insight about the hidden job market as networking often leads you to hear about opportunities that are not traditionally advertised.
- Access the most up-to-date career information from current professionals.

Who Can I Approach for an Informational Interview?

People are usually very willing to talk to you. The easiest way to begin this process is to start with someone you know, or someone a friend, relative, or professor knows. Below are other people or resources to use for finding informational interview contacts:

- Friends/family/neighbors
- Professors/advisors
- Current/former bosses
- Conferences/workshops
- LinkedIn (direct connections and groups)
- Company websites
- Student clubs
- Professional journals
- Professional associations
- Industry directories
- Service organizations
- Alumni groups
- CareerShift (log in to UCR Handshake)

How Do I Arrange an Informational Interview?

After you have found someone you want to talk to, contact that person to request a brief interview. You can call or send an email. Usually, you'll ask to meet for 30 minutes to an hour. Include the information below in your initial contact:

- Your first and last name
- How you got their name
- A brief (two to three sentences) summary about yourself
- The fact that you're contacting the person for an informational interview
- Your phone number and email address (If you leave a message, say your name and number slowly.)

How Do I Prepare for an Informational Interview?

Think about the kind of information that will be helpful to you and what you hope to learn from this particular individual. Do as much background research as possible so you can ask insightful questions that will get you useful information. Prepare questions in advance. Dress respectfully.

What Should I Do After the Informational Interview?

Evaluate your experience. How did you manage scheduling and conducting the informational interview? How well did you prepare? Did you get the information you sought? What information do you still lack? Do you need to interview more people in order to get more than one viewpoint or additional information? What do you need to do next? Follow up with a thank-you note or email expressing your appreciation to your contact for their time and interest. You may also want to include your conclusions/decision resulting from the interview. Record the information you obtained (names, comments, and new referrals) for future reference. Make appointments to interview the referrals.

CONTINUED ON THE BACK 

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Words of Advice and Caution

- Send a thank-you note or email.
- Informational interviews are a career management tool, not a job search tool. Avoid turning an informational interview into something it's NOT, such as a sales pitch, recruiting interview, date, therapy session, invitation to be best friends, or a sneaky way of getting your foot in the door.
- Avoid thinking that you have to be indirect ("I'd just like to hear your, uh, perspective on, um, the industry") in order to avoid being too direct ("I'd really like a job at your firm"). Find a happy medium.
- Have a clear purpose to the meeting. They cannot help you if you do not know why you set up the meeting. Be able to answer: "What do you want to do?" and "What can I do for you?"
- Never overstay your welcome. Whether it's lingering too long in person or on the phone or engaging in too much follow-up, it's important to read signals and respond accordingly. Always think of how to give back to those who give you time. It may take years to do it, but if you keep it on your mind, one day you'll figure out how.

Informational Interview Questions

The information you're seeking in an informational interview shouldn't be readily available on a website, in an annual report, or in a book. Avoid questions that consist of facts you can easily find in a 5-second search or "questions" that are really attempts to brag about yourself.

Questions to Avoid:

- Are you hiring?
- How much money do you make?
- What are the different investment banking companies?
- By the way, I have a 4.0 GPA in my finance classes — do you think I should mention that on my resume?

Suggested Informational Interview Questions

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NATURE OF THE WORK QUESTIONS

1. What are the specific duties and responsibilities?
2. What does a typical work day or week look like for you?
3. What are the toughest problems you face?
4. What part of this work do you find most rewarding?

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WORK QUALIFICATION QUESTIONS

1. What skills or talents do you consider most essential to be successful in this career?
2. What personal qualities are important?
3. What kind of prior experience is absolutely essential?
4. What are other job titles for people who do similar work?

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WORKING CONDITION QUESTIONS

1. What type of setting, hours, atmosphere, etc. can be expected?
2. What obligations does this type of work place on you outside of the ordinary work week?
3. How much flexibility do you have in terms of work hours, dress, vacation, etc.?

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INTERNSHIP/WORK ENTRY QUESTIONS

1. What types of internships/part-time jobs would you suggest before entering this field?
2. What type of educational preparation is best for this field?
3. What types of employers hire people in this field? Where are they located?

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WORK ADVANCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. What additional training or qualifications are necessary for advancement?
2. What are some of the job possibilities for experienced workers in this field?

3. Is turnover high in this field?

4. Do people normally move to another company/organization or do they move up in the company/organization?

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EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK QUESTIONS

1. How rapidly is the present career field growing?
2. If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel you could do?
3. How would you describe or estimate future prospects?

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SALARY QUESTIONS — DO NOT ASK FOR THEIR SALARY

1. What is the average starting salary?
2. What are the salaries for experienced workers?
3. How much do salaries in the career vary according to the employer, region, or industry?

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REFERRAL QUESTIONS — ALWAYS ASK THESE

1. Based on our conversation today, is there anyone else with whom I should connect?
2. Can you name a few people who might be willing to meet with me? May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?
3. In which professional associations related to this field do you participate?

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PERSONAL ADVICE QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the best decisions you've made in your career? How did you do it?
2. What would you do differently if you had to do college all over again? What would you do the same?
3. Is there anything I should be asking that I'm overlooking?