

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

What it is, how to ask, and how to make the most of a valuable conversation.



OVERVIEW

What is an informational interview?

It is an semi-informal conversation, usually lasting 20–45 minutes with a person working in a career field or occupation that interests you. The purpose of an informational interview depends on your curiosities – most times it’s to gather information based on first hand experience regarding career paths, information about the industry, and/or specific company. These are not to actively “get a job” but rather as career research.

Benefits of Informational Interviews

- Gather firsthand, relevant information about the realities of working in a specific position, field, industry, or company.
- Discover and learn more about viable career paths to help you reach your career goals.
- Get insider advice about how to prepare for a particular position or to land a job within a specific industry or company.
- Initiate a professional relationship and expand your network; meet people who could be potential mentors, leads for future jobs, etc.

BEFORE

Who to Ask

The focal point of who to ask should be that they have a career path, current career, or industry knowledge that you’d like to learn from. Some examples of who might contain type of experience and knowledge include:

- Professors, especially those who worked in the field
- Alumni of your school or any programs you’ve participated in
- Mentors + contacts of mentors
- Older peers

How to Ask

- Reach out in-person, via email, or phone to arrange informational interview.
- Your initial outreach should contain the following:
 - How you found them / know them
 - A short intro about you (school, area of study, expected graduation, current career status)
 - What you’re asking them for / goal or intention of the conversation
 - How you would like to interact (in-person, via phone, virtually, etc.)
 - [Optional] Share an agenda

Example Agenda

Though an agenda isn’t required, it could help with the flow and intentionality of the conversation.

Example:

- Intros: 5 mins
- Questions for professional: 20 mins
- Your career goals, passions, interests: 10 mins
- Additional questions



RESOURCE ALERT: For examples and templates of what to say when you ask someone for an informational interview, [click here](#).

DURING

The Basics

1. Thank your contact for meeting with you
2. Share a brief introduction with your contact
3. Reiterate why you wanted to meet / what your specific goals and intentions are for your conversation.
4. Ask your prepared questions.
5. Ask your contact if there's anything you can do for them.
6. Thank them again for their time.

Reminders

- Remember to respect the timeframe you agreed upon for the meeting.
- Prioritize your most important questions and strong curiosities first.
- Let the conversation flow.
- Ask your contact if they might have any recommendations of other individuals with whom to speak with.

AFTER

Follow up

- Send a "networking" thank you note within 24 hours of having the conversation.
- Connect with them on LinkedIn if you haven't already.
- Try to maintain the relationship by initiating contact every couple of months to report on progress, or check-in.

To write a "networking" thank you, use the checklist below:

- Message is concise, and to the point
- Is personalized, addressing the specific person and referencing something from the conversation you found interesting or helpful.
- Expresses gratitude for the time / advice.
- Sent within 24 hours after the conversation
- Outlines next steps if applicable
- Check for grammar, spelling, and typos
- Avoids informal language

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

Remember, it's important to ask questions specific to you and your curiosities and the person you're interviewing!

Tasks & Responsibilities

- Could you provide more details about what your typical day/week looks like?
- Which hard and soft skills do you think are most important for a job like yours? Which skills do you use most?
- What do you find most challenging and rewarding about your job?
- Can you describe the typical work/life balance in this field?

Career Path

- Could you walk me through your career path? What do you think were the most impactful experiences to your career journey thus far?
- Was your undergraduate major relevant to your current position?
- Why did you decide to work in this industry/company?
- Is there anything you wished you knew before entering this field?
- What do you think are the most vital steps someone should take to prepare for a role like yours?
- What else do you think I should know to make an informed decision about choose a career in this field?

Industry Knowledge & Preparation

- What are some common titles or entry level roles that you recommend?
- Are there any resources (publications, professional associations, etc.) that you recommend I utilize?
- What do you think is the best way to earn an internship/job in this industry? Are there any internship experiences you might recommend?
- What do you think is the best academic preparation for this profession? (specific courses, certificates, etc.)
- Do you think there are affiliated industries or skillsets that could help someone excel in a position like yours?

Company Specific

- Can you describe your company culture?
- How does leadership support and reflect diversity and inclusion for the company?
- How does the company make an effort to ensure employees feel that they belong?
- What are the growth opportunities like at the company and what infrastructure is in place to support employee growth?
- What do you enjoy most and least about working at the company?
- How does the company view and support work-life balance?