

## Informational Interviews

The informational interview is a conversation you initiate with a professional in a field that interest you to learn more about career possibilities. Informational interviews are a way to network, learn about an industry. The best time to conduct an informational interview is prior to the time you want to land an internship or job.

### Why do an informational interview?

The informational interview has the potential to:

- Increase your knowledge about your interests related to your career interests.
- Help you clarify your career goals.
- Allow potential employers to know you in a comfortable, low-stress atmosphere.
- Establish a network of contacts that could lead to future employment.
- Help you learn about future career opportunities.

### What are the first steps for conducting an informational interview?

1. Analyze your skills and interests and clarify your professional goals.
2. Research occupations and careers that fit your career interests.
3. Identify individuals who are knowledgeable about your targeted field, career or organization. Develop a list of specific people you can contact for informational interviews. Use professional social networking sites such as [LinkedIn](#) to expand your list of connections.
4. Ask permission to use the names of the people who refer you when contacting others. Use the name only if you receive permission to do so.

### Arrange the Interview

1. Connect with your contact people by telephone or email. Tell them you are interested in their careers and would like to set up an appointment to talk with them for 15-20 minutes.

If any of your contacts cannot see you, ask for names of other people you might contact within the same field or organization and then politely end the conversation.

### Prepare for the Interview

1. Thorough preparation is the key to a successful informational interview. Do your homework.
2. Thoroughly research the organization by studying websites, annual reports, brochures and other materials.
3. Find people who are acquainted with the organization and talk with them.
4. Prepare and rehearse a list of questions to ask the person you will interview. During the interview you may adapt your questions based on the conversation.
5. Dress appropriately for the interview. At a minimum, business casual is expected.
6. Arrive early for the interview.

### Conduct the Interview

1. Remember, this is not a job interview! Your purpose is to acquire information. You are the person in control of the interview, so be prepared.

2. Respect the fact that the interviewee has taken time from a busy schedule to see you.
3. Do not ask questions that you could have researched.
4. Learn as much as you can about the career field and the organization.
5. Try to create a favorable impression.
6. Limit your conversation to the pre-arranged time limit, usually no more than 20 minutes, unless the interviewer indicates a willingness to talk longer.

### **Possible questions to ask (select 5-10):**

- What is your education and experience?
- How did your education and experience prepare you for your position?
- How did you get started in this field?
- What do you like most (and least) about your work?
- What personal qualities does one need to succeed in this field?
- What do you do during a typical work day?
- What is a typical day like for someone starting in this field at my level in your position/organization/profession?
- What skills are most valuable for someone just beginning in the field?
- What future do you see for the field or organization?
- Are there any specific courses or experiences you might suggest to prepare for the role?
- What suggestions do you have for someone wanting to enter your field or organization?
- How long have you been with the organization?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What are some related occupations?
- What needs to be included for a strong resume and cover letter for this kind of position?
- What media outlets (magazines, blogs, newspapers, [Twitter](#) feeds) should one read or watch to be up-to-date in the industry?
- What organizations and online groups do you recommend joining?
- May I connect with you on [LinkedIn](#)?
- Is there anyone else you suggest I talk with? By asking the person you are interviewing for the names of anyone else with whom you could talk, you establish a referral list and build an internship and job search network. (Always ask this questions)

Although your primary purpose in interviewing is to obtain information, you can (at appropriate times) indicate your strengths and interests. It is important, however, to be sensitive to the interviewee's time constraints.

### **After the Interview**

Thank the interviewee in person and follow up with a brief [thank you note or email](#).

### **Final Tips**

1. Keep accurate and detailed records of each interview, including the name and title of the person you interview (spelled correctly), contact information, date of interview and your notes.
2. Continue to contact people on your referral list and interview them.
3. Don't make career decisions based on one or two interviews. Talk with enough people to collect a range of perspectives on the field.