

Informational interviewing

What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is an informal meeting with a person who works in a career or industry that you're interested in. The purpose of these conversations is to learn more, they should not be used to ask for a job. The contacts you meet through informational interviewing may become helpful in your future job search, but the goal of the conversation is to gain advice and research options. Your intentions should be made clear when requesting the meeting.

Reasons to conduct informational interviews:

- To investigate and gain insight into a specific career field or organization.
- To learn the lingo and important issues in the field.
- To gain a good sense of the workplace environment.
- To gain information in the interview that can form the basis for making a career decision.
- To receive candid information that may be difficult to otherwise obtain.
- To learn from knowledgeable people about how to best prepare for particular careers.
- To develop a new professional contact to add to your network.
- To get tips about shared personal experiences like changing career paths, handling workplace conflict, or navigating family-work-life balance.

Preparation:

- Determine how you would like to interview someone: in person, phone, virtually, etc.
- Learn as much as you can about the organization through research - such as Glassdoor, LinkedIn or the organization's website.
- Have your questions written down.
- Learn about the career in general - look at salary, working conditions, promotional possibilities.
- Be prepared to discuss your interests and qualifications if asked. Identify and be able to articulate your skills. Understand the complexity of your skillset and know your capabilities in great detail. Consider where and how you would most like to use them.

Find someone to interview:

Think of all your contacts, then expand your list by speaking to and researching:

Friends and family members
Contacts made through friends
and family
Alumni
LinkedIn alumni tool
College instructors

Previous employers
Co-workers
Conferences
Career Events
Speakers you have heard
Religious affiliations

Chamber of commerce
Trade or professional journals
Office of unions and professional
organizations
Community service agencies



Typical questions to ask during an informational interview:

The applicability of these questions may vary from one occupation to another. Choose and ask that questions will be most helpful for you in your career planning.

- What are the major satisfactions the individual derives from working in this field?
- What advice would the individual offer someone planning on entering this career?
- To what extent does the individual feel their experiences are typical of others?
- If they were starting out again, what might the individual do differently?
- How long has the individual been employed by the organization and for what length of time have they held their current position?
- What was the career path of the individual from entry level to present?
- What are the major responsibilities of the position? What are the specific duties performed? How do they spend 80% of their work day?
- What do they look for in hiring an individual (i.e. what skills, values, etc.)? Does the company have a “profile” of the ideal employee?
- What skills are most important for this kind of work? Are there other fields in which the same types of skills are used? What might be some related occupations?
- Could they recommend sources for additional information, such as special books, trade publications and professional journals?
- Could they give you names of other people who might be able to provide additional information? May you use their name as a referral?

Plan out your informational interview:

Who will you interview? _____

What do you want to find out from this individual? _____

What three questions will help you steer the conversation to get the information you need?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____