

Informational Interviewing

How can an informational interview help me?

Informational interviews give you an opportunity to gather first-hand information about career fields you are considering and to expand your network of professional contacts. Informational interviews are helpful at several stages:

- If you're researching careers, you'll learn a lot from a professional. Our Career Resource Library provides extensive background information on careers; in an informational interview, you will get frank advice about a profession or industry and subtle signals about work environments that you will never read in a book.
- If you're searching for a job, talking to professionals will help you expand your network. You can investigate an organization, get valuable advice about entering and advancing in a field, and get ideas for locating contacts and job leads within the profession.

Where can I find someone to interview?

Search for an interview candidate in LinkedIn. To get started you will need to create a professional profile. After doing this, you can search by employer, university and name. You can also locate someone to interview through family and friends, professors and academic advisors, professional organizations, or even the Yellow Pages. Interviews are easy to arrange; most people enjoy talking about themselves and their jobs.

How do I initiate contact?

Sending an email is preferred, but you can also call. Introduce yourself as a college student, explain how you got the person's name, express your interest in his or her career field, and ask if you can meet for 30 minutes. For example:

Dear Mr. Chase,

My name is Shani Lameck. I'm an Economics major at IU researching a possible career in finance. I found your name using LinkedIn. If you have the time, I would like to meet with you for 30 minutes to discuss your field. If you're unable to meet, perhaps you could suggest a co-worker or someone you know I could contact. I appreciate your time.

Thank you,
Shani

Most interviews are 20-30 minute workday meetings; you should rearrange your schedule to accommodate your interviewee. Although you can also request a phone interview (if the person does not live nearby), meeting in person best prepares you for future professional interactions, lets you see their workplace, makes a more significant impression on the professional than the telephone, and opens the door to a longer observational visit (job shadowing).

How do I prepare?

Informational interviewing should not be a starting point for your career research. It should supplement what you have already learned. Consult websites, such as www.onetonline.org and www.bls.gov/ooh/, to research the nature of the career, the required education and training, and other basic facts.

What questions should I ask?

In preparation for your meeting, develop a list of topics to discuss. Informational interview questions typically fall into several different categories, which are listed on the reverse side.

What should I do during the interview?

Be sure to dress appropriately; if you have questions about the standard dress for the occupation, feel free to ask when you arrange the interview. Arrive early and don't forget your list of questions. During the interview, listen carefully; the interviewee may answer one of the questions you had planned to ask later on. Observe the work environment, the people who work there, and their daily routine. Feel free to take notes and ask for a business card before you leave.

What happens after the interview?

Always send a thank you letter within a few days of the interview. Thank you letters are more than polite protocol. They are essential for maintaining contact with people who have assisted you. Gently remind interviewees who you are and when you met. Thank them for their time and mention aspects of the interview that were particularly helpful. Remember, they can continue to serve as resources throughout your career. Be sure to show them the respect they deserve. If you don't already own professional-looking stationery, now is the perfect time to buy some. Many students find it helpful to keep a system (e.g., an Excel file) to track their contacts, follow-ups, and thank you letters.

Sample questions for information interviewing

Occupational requirements and experience

- How did you get started in this field? Is that typical of most people?
- Describe a typical week. Would these duties be the same for anyone with your job title?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important for success in this job?

Occupational environment

- How would you describe the professional climate in your office? In your industry?
- What portions of your job involve interaction with coworkers, clients, or vendors?
- How much evening, weekend or overtime work is required? What about traveling?

Benefits and challenges

- What are the greatest rewards of your work?
- What are the greatest frustrations? How do you deal with them?
- On what basis are professionals in your field evaluated? How is success measured?
- What is the starting salary range for new professionals in this field? (do not ask for their salary)

Occupational outlook

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?
- How is this field likely to be affected by changes in technology?

Advice

- What kinds of education or specialized training would best prepare me to do this kind of work?
- What classes can I take or projects can I complete that will also be helpful?
- Are there any professional organizations that would help me to build my network in this field?
- How do people find out about job openings in your line of work?
- Where do people in this field typically look for internship and job opportunities?
- Can you recommend other people for me to talk to?
- Who makes the decision to hire someone for this kind of job?