

Quick Guide - Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are:

- a particular form of networking that involves consulting with professionals to learn more about their career fields
- an informal conversation with someone working in an area that interests you who will give you information and advice
- NOT a job interview and the objective is not to find job openings
- You may hesitate making arrangements to talk with people you don't know about their work. However, most people actually enjoy taking a few moments out of their day to reflect on their professional life and to give advice to someone with an interest in their field

Benefits of informational interviews

- Get firsthand, relevant information - this kind of information is not always available online or in print
- Find out about career paths you didn't know existed
- Get tips about how to prepare for and enter a given career
- Learn what it's like to work at a specific organisation
- Gain knowledge and techniques that can help you in writing your resume and interviewing
- Initiate a professional relationship and expand your network of contacts in a specific career field; meet people who may forward job leads to you in the future

Six Steps for informational interviewing

1. Identify target roles/companies

Do some initial research on the career field or employer using internet and print resources.

2. Identify people to interview

Consider own contacts (family, friends, professors, etc.); Identify alumni; call organisations directly; review directories; contact professional or trade associations.

3. Prepare for the interview

Prepare a short (15-30 second) overview of yourself to introduce yourself and define the context of the call. Also plan questions to ask (see appendix1).

4. Initiate contact

- Contact the person by phone
- Mention how you got his or her name
- Ask whether it's a good time to talk for a few minutes
- Emphasise that you are looking for information, not a job
- Ask for a convenient time to have a 20-30 minute appointment
- Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for him/her and that s/he won't be readily available otherwise

5. Conduct the informational interview

- Restate that your objective is to get information and advice
- Give a brief overview of yourself (education and/or work experience)

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- Be prepared to direct the interview, but also let the conversation flow naturally, and encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking
- Listen well and show genuine interest in what the person has to say
- Respect the person's time - keep the meeting length within the agreed-upon timeframe
- Ask the person if you may contact them again in the future with other questions
- Ask for names of other people to meet so as to gain different perspectives

Note: You can bring a resume, but don't take it out right away - your interviewee may think you are actually fishing for a job. You may ask for input about it at some point in the interview, but first make sure you've established a comfortable rapport with the person

6. Follow up

- After the interview write down what you learned, what more you'd like to know
- Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given - this may be a brief handwritten note, an email, or a business letter
- Keep in touch with the person, especially if you had a particularly good interaction; let them know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result. This relationship could become an important part of your network.
- Add the person to your LinkedIn contacts (if you haven't done so already)

Samples

- Sample telephone script:

Hello. My name is John Wilson and I'm a PhD at TU Delft. Is this a good time for you to talk briefly?

I heard you speak at the Engineering conference last month. I'm an engineer at TU Delft nearing the completion of a PhD specialising in X. Although I am not currently looking for a job, I have become very interested in research in the x sector and I'd like to find out as much as I can about the field.

Would it be possible to schedule 20 to 30 minutes with you at your convenience to ask you a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field?

- Sample thank you letter

Dear Tina, thank you for taking the time to meet with me last Thursday. Your insights into was very helpful. I will keep you posted with my endeavours.

Kind regards

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Appendix 1: Questions To Ask During An Informational Interview

Select questions that are appropriate for your target career field and stage of decision-making. You can ask about such topics as the nature of a person's work, how to get started in the field, or effective approaches for the job search. Use some of the following questions or make up your own.

- What are your main responsibilities as a...?
- What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What do you like least about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- How does your position fit within the organization/career field/industry?
- How does your job affect your general lifestyle?
- What current issues and trends in the field should I know about/be aware of?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
- What related fields do you think I should consider looking into?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- How did you begin your career?
- How do most people get into this field? What are common entry-level jobs?
- What steps would you recommend I take to prepare to enter this field?
- How relevant to your work is your undergraduate major?
- What kind of education, training, or background does your job require?
- What skills, abilities, and personal attributes are essential to success in your job/this field?
- What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?
- Can you recommend trade journals, magazines or professional associations which would be helpful for my professional development?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?
- What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?