

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

What is an informational interview?

Informational interviews provide important contacts that can be helpful in the future. Informational interviewing offers you the opportunity to meet with potential employers in a stress-free, non-threatening situation. You will not be asking for a job, you will be seeking information. Whenever possible, conduct your informational interviews at the workplace, and dress accordingly.

What will I learn from an informational interview?

Participating actively in informational interviewing will allow you to gain a wealth of information about organizations, their environments, and various career opportunities within these organizations. You will gather up-to-date, firsthand information on the following:

- What is done on a day-to-day basis on the job
- How people feel about their work
- Organizational settings and work environments

How do I set up an informational interview?

1. Assess your network: Who do you know who already works in a field of interest? If you don't know anyone in your field already, consider asking:

- Friends
- Family
- Neighbors
- Classmates
- Faculty or Staff
- High school or college alumni

2. Ask for an introduction. It could be over the phone, by email, or LinkedIn message. Having a mutual connection can break the ice and lead someone to be more open to talking with you.

3. Ask for a meeting. Ideally, you could invite the person for a cup of coffee or arrange an in-person meeting. You may also choose to conduct the informational interview over Skype, email, LinkedIn, or phone. Ask for 30 minutes to an hour; if they're very busy, you may need to lower your request to 15 minutes.

4. Be prepared to listen 90% of the time and talk 10%. This professional is taking time out of his/her busy schedule to meet with you, so be sure to look and act professionally. Listen intently and have your questions prepared ahead of time.

5. Confirm a time, date, and location. It's best to also secure contact information and check with the professional 24 hours in advance to make sure they're still available to meet with you.

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What should I ask?

- How do you spend your time at work? Can you describe a “typical” day or week?
- What do you like best about your work and/or your field? Least?
- How did you learn how to do your work? On the job? At a previous job? Formal training? If you were starting out in your field now, would you train in the same way?
- What makes someone successful in your work?
- As you look back on your experiences, is there anything you wish you’d known? Anything you would do differently?
- Do people in your field belong to professional associations or organizations? Is there a local chapter? Do you think it would make sense for me to attend a meeting?
- How do you keep up on your field? What should I be reading?
- Can you suggest two or three other people I might talk with? May I mention your name when I contact them?

At the end of the informational interview:

- Don’t forget the person for meeting with you.
- Restate 1 or 2 main points you’re taking away from the meeting.
- Offer a call to action for the person.
For example: “After talking with you today, I’m really interested in learning more about what an event planner does. Do you know of any internship opportunities available?”

After your informational interview, ask yourself:

- “How do I feel about what I saw and heard?” and then, “Why?”
- “Can I imagine myself working in that setting and/or doing those tasks?”

Be sure to send a brief “thank you” note by regular mail or e-mail.

Be sure to always follow your informational interview with a thank you letter or e-mail. Remember, your interviewee is doing you a favor by giving their time to help you with your career planning. They also may be helpful to your job search so be sure to show the proper etiquette and thank them.