

What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is a way to gain first-hand information about a career or a particular organization. Most importantly it is a networking strategy. One of the best resources are the PEOPLE you meet.

Informational interviews can help you:

- Practice your speaking and interview skills
- Learn about an industry or profession
- Understand how you might fit in
- Make connections
- Increase your confidence: "Practice Makes Perfect"

There are many professionals who were in your position at one point in time and have progressed through various paths to make their dreams happen. An informational interview will give you a chance to have a frank and open discussion about the field, the challenges associated with a particular discipline, networking secrets, and other topics that you have always wanted to know first-hand.

Who Should I Ask to Interview?

You should complete informational interviews with people who are in jobs or industry professions you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in teaching at the college level, you could talk to one of your professors or a recent graduate who is now teaching.

The Process

Arrange Meetings

- Always be professional and polite in your interview requests.
- Interviews should be conducted in person, over the phone, or via Video chat. Simply emailing questions to someone is not an effective strategy.
- People are busy, so it is appropriate to request a 30 minute meeting. The time will go very quickly, so be prepared with your questions.

Be Professional

- Be prepared! Make sure to bring a copy of your resume and a notepad or laptop for taking notes.
- Your style of dress can be more casual than a real interview, but you should still look professional.

How to Begin

- Start by introducing yourself and why you set up the interview.
- Mention that you have some questions you would like to ask. The questions will dictate the flow of conversation.

Follow Through

- At the end of the conversation, make sure to ask if there are any other people and/or organizations they recommend for future informational interviews. If so, ask for their contact information and if you may use their name to connect with them.
- Exhibit professional etiquette: Follow-up by sending a thank you letter or email (the same day if possible).

Questions to Consider

Choose some questions from the following sections to learn about careers, opportunities, and people. Organize your questions in PRIORITY ORDER. Ask more sensitive questions after you have established rapport and built trust.

Information About the Company and the Person

- What are your responsibilities as _____ ?
- How did you get started and develop your career?
- What do you hope to accomplish in your position?
- Is there a management style within your field that you prefer or use often?
- Who are your customers? (Who do you do business with?) (What companies do you service?)
- How is your staff organized?
- What is exciting about your position?
- What new products are on the drawing board?
- Are there any new materials that you are using?
- What kind of projects are you currently working on?
- How long have you been with the company?
- How did you become interested in your field?
- What do you like best about your work?
- How long have you been in this position?
- What kind of equipment, (software, machinery, etc.) do you have/use?
- How do you promote your product or service?

Information About Current Progress and Events

- In what areas do you see expansion?
- What types of companies have been successful in _____ ?
- What are they doing right?
- What has made them successful?
- What is happening in your industry?
- Where do you see it heading?
- What is going on in the field of _____ ?
- What types of companies are involved in international projects?
- What has been the role of your department in relation to _____ departments?
- What types of industries appear to be growth-oriented?
- Where do you see corporate financial prospects heading?
- What have been the contributing factors that have enabled your company to have a strong financial position?
- What other companies have a strong financial organization?
- What makes a successful company in your industry?
- What are the key marketing principles that make a successful company?

Questions to Consider

Information on Present/Future Problems, Trends, Implications

- What changes do you foresee in this industry?
- What solutions have been presented to these problems?
- What trends do you see emerging?
- What kinds of problems have you seen other companies face in _____?
- What problems do you see the _____ field/profession encountering in the future?
- What are the problems facing your industry/business today?
- What are the roles that (government, associations, etc.) play in dealing with these problems?
- What are the trends emerging in _____?
- What kinds of actions have been taken/proposed to solve these problems?

Advice Questions

- With my skill and background, how would I fit into the _____ industry?
- What salary range could I expect? Where would that position lead in 5 years?
- What obstacles might I anticipate and how could I overcome them?
- At what type of companies should I be looking? What are the names of some of those companies?
- Would you suggest any courses or programs that would further help me develop my career?

Fitting In

- Considering my interests, skills, background, where would I fit in with this company and/or profession?
- What would be the proper entry point? (Intern, Apprentice, Title, etc.)
- How does your company compare with others we've discussed?
- Would the work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business entertaining?
- Considering all the people you've met in your line of work, what personal attributes are essential for success?
- Taking into account my skills, education and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?
- In your field, what are the qualities that make people successful?

Extending Your Network: Ask these questions

- What other organizations or companies do you see as your peers?
- Do you know anyone at ABC or XYZ companies? I am interested in working for a company like this.
- What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
- Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I call, may I use your name?

Don't forget to send a thank you!