

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING: THE BEST WAY TO GET FIRST-HAND ADVICE

**High Point University
Career & Professional Development
Cottrell Hall, Suite 103**

Updated 09/2020

What is an Informational Interview?



An informational interview is a pre-planned, one-on-one conversation with someone who has a job you might like, works within an industry you might want to enter, or is employed by a specific company that interests you. These interviews are opportunities to learn things like the inside scoop on a particular company, what salaries are like, what a typical career path in the industry might look like, and so forth.

Why is an informational interview useful?

- Gain real world information and advice regarding specific career fields
- Help clarify your goals and develop effective strategies for reaching them
- Build confidence in your ability to discuss your career interests and goals, which will come in handy for future job interviews
- Expand your network of career-related contacts
- Find leads for conducting additional informational interviews
- Learn more about specific work settings
- Access updated career information
- Get advice about career search strategies
- Discover “hidden” jobs and internships

Important Note: Don't Ask for a Job!

Only ask for an informational interview if you are genuinely seeking to expand your understanding of a field.



Sometimes, students have the misconception that doing an informational interview is a way to get strangers interested in hiring you or giving you job leads. As a result, some people ask for informational interviews when what they're really looking for is a job, but remember: **the purpose of an informational interview is to gain information.** When

professionals agree to spend time answering your questions, they generally won't be thrilled to realize that you weren't up front about your intentions, and instead you're asking for information but actually expecting a job lead.

That doesn't mean informational interviews never lead to jobs. Sometimes they do! Occasionally, someone who gets to know you in the process of answering your questions about their field may share that they have a job opening up soon that they'd like to get your resume for, or that they have contacts who sometimes hire people with your education and background. But if you go in expecting that to happen, you could end up disappointed, and it's likely to be obvious to your interviewee.

Instead, you should only ask for an informational interview if you are genuinely seeking to expand your understanding of a field, and if you have questions that can only be answered by someone already working in the field. That last part is important — you don't want to take up someone's time with questions that you could have answered with a moderately thorough Google search. Informational interviews are for the inside scoop, the stuff that you can't find out by reading company brochures.

[Read the full article on this topic from The Cut here.](#)

Where Do You Start an Informational Interview?

Take stock of your personal network:

Open your contact list in your mobile phone and on your LinkedIn profile. Write down names of people you know who would be a good resource (relatives, high school and college friends and their parents, your parents' friends, co-workers, neighbors, people in your faith community, people you know through athletics, work supervisors, coaches, professors, Career & Professional Development staff, etc.). **Now ask everyone on your list to recommend people who are employed in the career field in which you are interested. You will be surprised who your contacts know!**

Having a mutual contact connect you will often increase your chances of people agreeing to talk to you. But you can also go through your alumni network or even reach out to strangers on LinkedIn. To increase your chances of a positive response, be sure to explain why you're contacting that person in particular. You might explain that it's because their career path is similar to the one you hope to have, or you might appeal to commonalities, like that you went to the same school or grew up in the same area.

Sample email asking your connections for potential informational interview

Dear Contact Name:

Explain to the reader your name, your major, and where you go to school. Share your career and industry interests. Tell the contact why you are asking them (as opposed to someone else) for their advice. Mention their expertise, company knowledge, or who referred you to speak with them.

Ask the contact if he or she would be able to meet with you briefly to discuss their career path. Share days and times that you might be available to meet either in person or speak over the phone.

Thank the contact for reading this email.

Sincerely,

Your Name

During the Interview

Develop rapport by discussing the interviewee's personal career path & what he/she believes to be the positives and negatives of their field.

Explain why you think you are interested in this field.

Move into specific questions as the conversation develops.

If you feel that a positive rapport has been established and you feel comfortable doing so, ask for feedback/advice about your resume, qualifications, and research strategies.

As you near the end of the interview, ask for referrals to others in the field.

Even though you may have a lot of questions, you should be listening more than talking; you might discover more information about other areas.

REMEMBER

NEVER OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME

Remember, their time is valuable. After 30-45 minutes, thank them and wrap up your conversation.

DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB

They agreed to speak with you to give advice & information. They may feel put-off if you ask if they have a job for you. *If they bring up the possibility of a job, of course attentively and politely get as much information as you can & follow-up if you are genuinely interested.*

Top 10 Informational Interview Questions to Ask:

- 1 Can you tell me about a typical day on the job?
- 2 How did you get started doing this type of work?
- 3 What is your favorite part about your job?
- 4 What is the most challenging part of your job?
- 5 What surprised you most when you started working in this field?
- 6 What educational preparation (degree, certifications, licenses) would I need to enter the field?
- 7 How do you see this industry developing in the future?
How is this industry changing?
- 8 What advice would you give someone who wants to get started in this field?
- 9 What are employers typically looking for when hiring someone in this line of work?
- 10 Is there anyone else you would suggest I talk to about the field?

Sample Questions to Ask

Career Preparation

How did you prepare for your career?

What opened the door for your first job right out of college?

What are the most important qualifications/characteristics to be successful in this field (education, skills and personality)?

What educational preparation (degree) do I need to obtain?

Personal Experiences

What do you like most/least about your work?

What areIn what ways has technology influenced your specific job and your industry?

How does your work effect your personal time – your work/life balance?

How did you find your current job?

Advice

Can I tell you a little bit about my background so far and see if you have any suggestions for skills I should focus on developing?

Would you mind critiquing my resume/portfolio?

What professional organizations would you recommend joining?

What are the best things for me to read to stay current in the field?

What advice would you give to someone starting out in the field?

Can you tell me about the growth potential in this field?

Can you suggest other people/resources that can provide additional information?

Career Information

What types of people do you think really thrive in this field?

What is a typical work week like? Is there generally flexibility in your day/week or is your schedule predictable?

How much autonomy do employees typically have (dress, hours, time off)?

How often do people in this field change jobs?

What is a typical salary range for positions in this field?

What are some of the challenges, pressures and major issues that impact your field?

What's your sense of the pros and cons of working at a big company like X versus a smaller company like Y?

I have heard not-so great things about (the hours/the culture/the emphasis on X over Y/anything else you want to ask about). What has your

Job Hunting

Who are some key employers and work environments I should consider? Are there any employers or types of work environments you would caution me to stay away from?

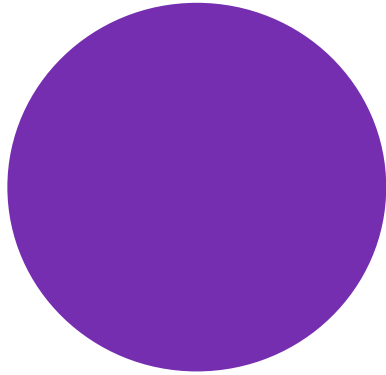
What job titles should I look for?

What is the best way to locate jobs in this field?

How long do most employees stay in one position? Do you generally need to go to another company to move up, or is it common to get promoted from within?

What opportunities for growth exist within the field?

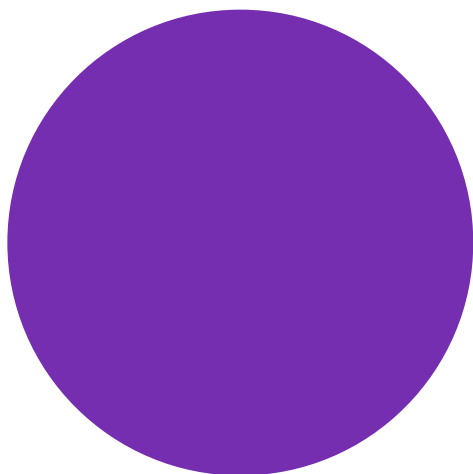
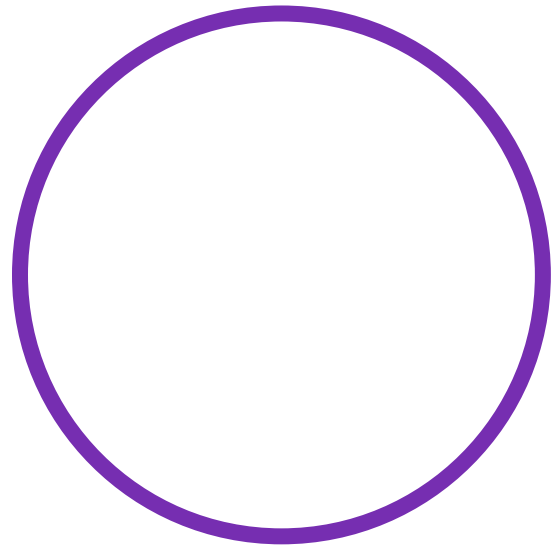
After the Informational Interview



Follow-up immediately with an email or hand written thank-you note thanking the interviewee for his/her time and the helpful information shared; create a positive impression by being prompt, personal, and sincere. Include a detail from the conversation which you found especially interesting and useful.

Where do I go from here after I have conducted the informational interview?

Use information you have gathered in your informational interview to develop and refine your career interests and objectives. Maintain contact with your connection. Connect with them on LinkedIn and email them any relevant updates. Follow-up with the referrals he or she shared with you. You never know where the relationships may lead!



How may I “pay it forward?” Keep track of your contacts. You may want to re-connect with one of them later, and it is a good idea to let them know when you find an internship and/or full-time job. Remember that networking is a two-way street—your contacts may want to ask you for help in the future. Have a “pay it forward” mentality and help people who have helped you!

Conducting Informational Interviews During the Pandemic

COVID-19 has impacted the working world, from the job market itself to job searching, to communicating with employers. Whether you are exploring careers in a more stable industry that allows for remote work or taking on the challenge of finding work in a hard-hit area, COVID-era career exploration will look quite different.

Be prepared to adapt.

Your first steps into the recruitment funnel will need to be online.

- Prepare for socially distanced networking opportunities.
- Set up informational interviews via phone or video.
- Professionals are open to meeting virtually if calendars align and there is a mutual interest. The key is to find the right people and conduct the meeting effectively.
- Prepare and dress for your virtual informational interview just as you would for an in-person interview.
- Ask your informational interviewee how both their industry as a whole and their specific employer has been impacted by COVID-19.

Read the full article on the COVID-era job search on [The Washington Post](#).