

Guide to Informational Interviews

What are they?

An informational interview is a conversation between you and a professional in a career or position you're interested in exploring. During this interview, you're encouraged to ask questions and learn about their experiences, career insights, organization, field of study/research, and the path to their current employment/employer. Unlike a job interview, the goal isn't to seek employment, but to gather valuable information, expand your network, and gain a deeper understanding of potential career opportunities.

Benefits?

Informational interviews offer a unique opportunity to gather valuable insights that can guide your career planning. By speaking with professionals in your field of interest, you gain a clearer understanding of the realities of the job, industry expectations, and the day-to-day experiences of those in the role. These conversations also provide helpful advice on how to gain relevant experience and develop the necessary skills to succeed. Beyond the knowledge you gain, informational interviews can also serve as a powerful networking tool. They allow you to build meaningful connections with professionals who offer guidance, mentorship, or even referrals to others in the field. Expanding your network in this way can open doors to opportunities that may not be publicly advertised, giving you a competitive edge in your job search.

How to ask for an Informational Interview

Informational interviews are typically arranged through referrals from friends, family, colleagues, faculty or staff members, and peers. You can also request one by reaching out via email, phone, or a written message to the professional with whom you'd like to connect. When making your request, be sure to introduce yourself, mention how you were connected, and provide a brief background on your interests and career goals. Clearly explain why you're seeking the interview and how their insights would be valuable to you. These conversations usually take place in person, over Zoom, or by phone and typically last about 20–30 minutes. Some of the best resources for finding professionals to interview include your university's alumni association and LinkedIn alumni groups, as alumni are often open to supporting students and early-career professionals in their career exploration.

How To Prepare

Before your informational interview, take the time to research your contact, their field, and their employer. Having an understanding of their background will help you ask thoughtful questions and make the most of your conversation. Prepare a list of topics or specific questions that align with your interests and career goals. Be ready to respond to common questions that often come up in both informational and traditional interviews, such as "Tell me about yourself" or "What interests you about this industry?" Reflect on your own skills, values, and career aspirations so you can engage in a meaningful discussion. Dress appropriately for the meeting, whether it's in person or virtual. Business casual/professional attire is recommended to ensure you present yourself in a polished and professional manner.

During The Interview

It's helpful to remember that you can guide the flow of the conversation. Arriving early allows you to get comfortable with your surroundings and prepare for a smooth discussion. Be mindful of the interviewee's time and aim to keep the conversation between 20-30 minutes. Starting with small talk can help both you and the interviewee ease into the conversation naturally. The majority of the talking should come from the interviewee, as your goal is to listen and learn from their insights. It's a good idea to take notes during the interview; this is your opportunity to absorb valuable information that can benefit your future career decisions. At the end of the interview, be sure to express your gratitude for their time and ask if it would be possible to reach out again in the future with any additional questions.

Post Interview

Look to follow up within a few days of the interview to maintain a good relationship with the interviewee. Express your appreciation for the person's time and the information shared with you. This helps develop your networking skills for the future, which can open doors to future career opportunities.

Informational Interview Questions:

- ☐ What is your career story?
- ☐ How and why did you choose this profession?
- ☐ What kinds of skills do I need to succeed in the field?
- ☐ What is the interview process like?
- ☐ What activities outside of the industry help you on the job?
- ☐ What have you learned from this role?
- ☐ What parts of your occupation are the most rewarding?
- ☐ What made you choose the specific company you're working for?
- ☐ What types of training or professional development opportunities are you currently undertaking or considering?
- ☐ Would you go back and take the same route you took now with all the current knowledge you have about your occupation currently?
- ☐ What are the steps someone should take to prepare for a role like yours?
- ☐ Did you have any professional experiences unrelated to this industry that allowed you to excel in your current position?
- ☐ Have you worked as an intern? Does your company value internship experience?
- ☐ Can you tell me what it's like to work for your company?
- ☐ What kinds of decisions do you make in your role?
- ☐ What is your favorite part of your job?
- ☐ What is your least favorite part of your job?
- ☐ What kind of projects are you currently working on?
- ☐ What advice do you have for a professional like me starting out?
- ☐ Did/do you have a mentor? If so, how have they helped you in your career?
- ☐ What does work/life balance look like in your field?
- ☐ What are the greatest rewards you have experienced in your industry or company?
- ☐ What do you wish you had known before you started in this industry?
- ☐ What does your typical workday look like?
- ☐ What impact does your role have on the company's mission?
- ☐ Why did you choose this career path over other options? Which other paths did you consider before moving in this direction?
- ☐ Can we stay connected via LinkedIn and email?