

# Informational Interviews

## *How to set it up and what to ask*

### **Purpose of an informational interview**

Informational Interviews serve several purposes in a person's academic and/or professional development. It allows people to:

1. Explore career paths
2. Distinguish successful and unsuccessful strategies for specific careers
3. Get feedback on resumes
4. Identify skills to develop
5. Learn how to network
6. Decide if additional certifications or schooling are needed
7. Find mentors
8. Get resumes seen without going through traditional pathways

### **How to find someone to interview**

1. Look at who your internship site, current company, or previous companies interacts with regularly – clients, contractors, vendors.
2. Ask your supervisor, coworkers, or previous coworkers who they can recommend for an interview.
3. Find alumni on LinkedIn by looking up your university, clicking on the "alumni" tab on the left side, and then search by industry or company, location, and more. Alumni are always more likely to want to chat!
4. Look up companies of interest on LinkedIn and positions - see what people work at those companies or work in those roles.
5. Contact your home university's alumni office about alumni in your city working in your field of interest.
6. Research professional organizations in your area - most have membership lists. They may also have an educational branch or select members who like mentoring students. (For example, if someone is pursuing a career in records management, they might check out [www.arma.org](http://www.arma.org)).
7. Use LinkedIn as a tool to identify companies that hire their major; contact the company's human resources department; and research individuals who work in the same field.
8. Ask family or friends who they can recommend for an interview.

## Steps involved in setting up the interview

Now that you have selected some potential people to interview, here are the steps to set up a good informational interview.

1. Connect with the person via phone or email to set up an interview. If you choose to send an email, here is an example:

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*I hope this email finds you well! Our mutual friend X recommended that I connect with you due to our shared interest in X. I have a background in X, where I have worked for X years doing X, X, and X. I am hoping to move into X industry/career, and am in the job search process as we speak. I've attached my resume as well for your reference and here is my LinkedIn URL so you can get a better idea of my background.*

*Mutual Friend mentioned that you have experience doing X, and I took a look at your LinkedIn profile. I am so impressed with your experience doing X, X and X! If you are free sometime this week for a quick coffee zoom meeting, I would absolutely love to pick your brain and learn from your experience doing X. Let me know what your availability looks like! I look forward to chatting with you.*

*Thanks in advance for your guidance.*

*Sincerely,*

*Kate Smith*

*Email address*

*Cell phone number*

*LinkedIn URL*

2. Connect with the person via LinkedIn to set up a conversation. If you choose to send a connection request, here is an example of how you can write the message:

*Hello X,*

*I came across your profile after noticing that you are a fellow COLLEGE alumni and work in the X sector. I am so intrigued by your experience doing THIS kind of work. Would you be free for a chat to discuss your work in the next couple weeks? I'd love to pick your brain!*

*\*this is exactly 300 characters, you can take out the "Hello X" part and just leave the message. Can also use the acronym for your college*

3. If you do not hear back from your contact after a week, follow up with another email or phone call. On LinkedIn, just sit it out and wait if you have no other contact information for them.
4. Once the person has confirmed, send them a calendar invite to add it to their schedule.
  - a. Set the meeting to be around 30 minutes.
  - b. Make sure to include the meeting location (zoom or phone call); time; your cell phone number; email address; your LinkedIn address; the questions you are planning to ask; and a copy of your resume for the person to review.
5. Two days before the interview, send a reminder email about the interview. Make sure to thank the person in advance for taking time out of their schedule to meet with you. Attach the questions you plan to ask in case they'd like to look it over before your conversation.
6. The day of/during the interview, here is what you need to do:
  - a. Dress in business casual attire.
  - b. Make sure your phone/computer is charged and that you have the person's cell phone number saved if you are chatting via phone.
  - c. Have your resume file easily accessible to send to them.
  - d. Print out all the background research you have done on the person you are interviewing or have it all ready on your computer to reference.
7. During the interview:
  - a. Take notes in a notebook or word document during the interview - try to still make eye contact as much as possible.
  - b. Use your best judgement about what questions to get to if you're running low on time (and be conscious of the time!!)
  - c. Show your enthusiasm and attention through nodding, smiling, and asking follow up questions related to their answers - active listening.
  - d. Thank them for their time at the end of the conversation.
  - e. Spaghetti connections - ALWAYS ask this question, "Based on my interest in X, is there anyone in your network or at your organization that you would recommend I talk to?"
8. After the interview is complete, thank the person for taking time to meet with you with an email mentioning what you learned about during the interview. Here is an example:

*Dear David,*

*I wanted to thank you for taking the time out of your schedule for me to learn more about your career path and giving me feedback on my resume. Before meeting with you I always believed I would need to have a law degree in order to be a lobbyist or advocate for disability inclusion policy. Now I know a law*

*degree is not needed, but I do plan to pursue a certification in public policy to gain a better sense of how policy is created with an international lens*

*I always thought of disability inclusion policy on a domestic level before our conversation. Now I am eager to make a difference more on the global level by advocating for the ratifications of the International Disabilities Treaty.*

*Thanks again,  
Kate Smith  
Email address  
Cell phone number*

9. If you think the conversation went well, you can follow up your thank you note with a LinkedIn connection request if you're not already connected.

## **Question Ideas**

### **Education:**

- What was your major in college? Do you find that you use any of those courses or information in your work?
- What kind of education/training do you have?
- Are there any additional certifications or schooling that you would recommend for this line of work?

### **Career Path:**

- What has your career path been like to date? Is it representative of most people in this kind of position?
- What was something you did not expect about your current career?
- What is the work culture like in your office? Has there been a similar work culture at your previous companies?
- What is next for you in your career?
- What are related jobs and industries which I might explore? If you made a career change, what other fields would you consider?
- How has work affected your lifestyle?
- How did you find your current job?
- Are there any specific job search sites or listservs that you recommend?

### **Industry Specific:**

- What keeps you working at your current company?
- How did you get into this field?
- Where do you see your company/this field going in the next 5-10 years?
- What does an average day look like for you at work?
- Discuss a current industry trend or something your company is working on.
- What is your favorite and least favorite part about working at your company or in this industry?

- What skills have you found essential for success in this occupation?
- How would you recommend I “try out” this line of work (i.e. through an internship, volunteering, shadowing, etc.)?
- What separates your business/company/organization from the competition?
- What would make someone the ideal employee for your company or organization?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this organization or in this field?
- What technologies/software do you and your team use in your day to day tasks?
- What are some projects that you and your team wish they could get to but can’t find time/bandwidth for?
- Which seasons of the year are the toughest in your job?
- What is the background of most senior-level executives in this industry?

### **Small Talk:**

- What has been your favorite part of working from home?
- What was the new hobby you developed during the pandemic?
- What is your favorite restaurant in your town?
- What was the strangest or funniest incident you’ve experienced in your business?
- What is on your reading list? (professional or personal)

### **Professional Development:**

- Do you have any advice for a new professional entering this field?
- Are there any media sources that you use to keep up with industry related topics?
- If you could go back and give professional advice to your younger self, what would it be?
- Are you a part of any professional associations?
- Is there anyone you would recommend that I talk to about this industry? May I mention that you referred me?
- What recommendations do you have for me regarding a job search strategy?
- What could I do to significantly make an impact in the first 90 days?
- Where else do you normally network?

### **Resources for additional informational interview questions**

The first step is to read over the person’s LinkedIn, resume and any other documents gathered through a Google search. Then, write down any questions you think of after reading all those sources. Here are links to some resources:

- University of Buffalo <http://mgt.buffalo.edu/career/students/networking/mentor/questions>
- Quint Careers [http://www.quintcareers.com/informational\\_interview\\_questions.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interview_questions.html)
- University of California – Berkeley <https://career.berkeley.edu/Info/InfoQuestions.stm>
- BestCareerMatch.com <http://bestcareermatch.com/interview-questions>