

What is Informational Interviewing?

One of the best ways to gain knowledge about an area of work is to talk to people doing that work. Informational interviewing is one of the most valuable techniques for gathering this information. Broadly defined, interviewing for information is a low-stress conversation with another person for the sole purpose of collecting information about a specific job and/or a career path.



What's in it for me?

Informational interviewing offers the following benefits:

- ✓ A perspective of work that goes beyond written job descriptions—the information is current and first-hand while providing insight into the pros and cons of a given position as well as an introduction to the culture of an organization.
- ✓ Provides information that is useful for career planning.
- ✓ You are only asking for information so you are in control of the interview—you decide the questions to ask.
- ✓ Because informational interviewing is comparatively low stress, you gain self-confidence talking with people while learning what you want to know.
- ✓ An opportunity to develop a network of contacts who may be helpful in the future.

How Do I find People to Talk To?

There are many ways to identify individuals to interview for information. When interviewing to learn about a job or career path, ask family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, fellow students, and college professors if they know anyone in the occupation who you can contact and interview.

While on an internship, you might choose to interview your supervisor, a co-worker, or someone in another part of the organization. You can also ask any of these individuals if they know someone in another business to gain a different perspective of your field.

If you are a student member of a professional association in your area of study, you can connect with professionals in your field through the organization.

You can also do what is known as a “cold call.” This is when you contact a company without being referred by anyone.

* Adapted from *The Quick Job-Hunting Map* by Richard N Bolles, Ten Speed Press.

How Do I Arrange an Informational Interview?



These are the three most common ways to set up an informational interview:

Telephone the person directly

When you call, explain what it is you are seeking. Example: “Hello, my name is _____ and I am a student at Bellevue College. I am interested in learning more about _____ (the work this person does) and wonder if you have 20 minutes in the near future to ask you a few questions. I want to assure you I am not asking for a job, I am only seeking information.” You can leave this as a message if the person doesn’t answer the phone and then call back at another time.

Write a letter or email and follow up with a phone call

The message in your letter or email should be similar to what you say over the phone. Indicate at the end of your email or letter that you will call within a few days to set up a mutually convenient time to meet. Then follow up with a call.

Drop in

Tell the person who greets you the same message used in your phone call. Ask if the person might be available without an appointment.

Choose the approach with which you are comfortable.

What Do I Ask During an Informational Interview?

There are six basic questions to ask. You can add one or two more questions however you must do your best to keep to your promise of a 20-minute interview. If you come to the 20 time and have one or two more questions, say “I promised 20 minutes so we can conclude the interview at this point. I only have one (or two) more question(s). Would you like to stop now or may I continue?” This is your way to demonstrate professionalism from your first interaction and shows respect for the value of their time.



Ask these questions:

- 1) Please describe a typical day.
- 2) What do you like best about this work?
- 3) What do like least about this work? OR
What would you most like to change about your position?
- 4) What suggestions or recommendations do you have for a person like myself who is entering this field? OR
Do you have any suggestions for a person seeking an entry level position in this field?
- 5) How did you get your job? (This question is very important...if gives you insight into looking for work in your field.)
- 6) Is there anyone else you suggest I talk to?

End by asking for their business card. (This is important. You must send a thank you note.)

Always take notes during the interview. Have the questions printed out on a sheet of paper with space to record notes. When interviewing, ask your questions but don’t totally control the interview. Let the person talk—it may lead to productive and unanticipated information.

Important note: **Never** ask for a job during an informational interview. You set up the interview specifically asking for information. If you ask for a job, you not only appear untrustworthy, but you may ruin someone else’s chance to gain information from this process.

Follow up

Always send a thank you note. It can be sent via email, regular mail, or dropped off. Thank you notes don't need to be fancy or long—just a few lines to express your appreciation for their time. When possible, mention something you learned in the note. It shows you paid attention.

A thank you note is a basic courtesy and is so important. You will be a memorable individual because so few people send them. When emailing, use the words "Thank you for interview" in the subject line to lessen the chance your email will be deleted without being read. An issue with email is that it can get caught in spam filters when from an unknown sender and the recipient won't receive it.