

Conducting Informational Interviews

CAREER RESOURCES



Informational interviewing involves speaking to people who work in the field that you want to learn more about. To be clear, you are not interviewing for a job, you are interviewing an employer as a way to gather more insight about the field you are interested in. This will allow you to make more informed career choices, gather the information necessary to write more effective cover letters and resumes, and be better prepared for future job interviews.

Informational interviews can also be a great way to make valuable industry contacts, and many people in the workforce are open to sharing information about their careers – especially if it can help someone else map out their own career path. If you leave a good impression, your name may later be passed along to someone else who is in a position to interview you; however, don't go in expecting this to happen. In order to leave the best impression possible, you must be prepared to act professionally.

Here are some steps to consider before, during and after your informational interview:

Before the interview

- Conduct research on different companies or individuals and identify who you would like to interview
- Request an informational interview and explain how you obtained their information
- Call or send them an email, explaining why you are interested in setting up the interview and what you hope to gain from it – be clear about what you're requesting, such as more information about a job or profession
- Begin with a professional salutation, "Dear Ms. Grayson."
- Briefly introduce yourself, your program or credentials, career interests and goals
- If you want to meet them in person or speak by phone, tell them how much time you'll need, for example, 15 to 20 minutes
- Confirm the time and location
- Ask them to recommend other people or sources of information if they can't speak with you directly

During the interview

- Similar to an actual interview, arrive early and dress in professional attire
- Be clear that you only want information; you can discuss your skills and experience, but do not fish for opportunities – let the employer initiate the conversation regarding available opportunities
- Come prepared by doing some background research on the person you're interviewing, the organization they work for, and the work they do. Use your list of questions to guide your conversation
- Have your resume on hand in case your contact wants to see it
- Manage your time and respect their time; only take as much time as you've scheduled

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After the interview

- Send a thank you letter right away
- Move forward with two ideas from your interview; for example, people to talk to, volunteer opportunities to look into, or websites to visit
- Identify what worked well and what you will change for next time
- Connect on LinkedIn and reach out to your contact and let them know how they assisted you

Possible informational interview questions

Here is a list of potential questions that you can ask the person that you will be meeting with. Questions can vary in topic from advice, to information on qualifications, job duties, organizational structure, industry trends and work culture. Since your meeting is intended to be brief, select around five questions in advance that reflect the information you are most interested in gaining. Keep track of the time in your meeting and use your discretion on how many questions you ask.

- What suggestions do you have for someone trying to get a job in this field?
- What are the personal qualities of people who are successful in this field?
- What are the core skills you look for on a resume?
- What education and training is needed? What kinds of backgrounds do people in this organization have?
- How would you describe a typical week in terms of percentages spent on different duties?
- What do you enjoy most about this position or organization?
- What are some tasks or projects that you are currently working on?
- What skills can I focus on to help me prepare or excel for work in this field/industry/job?
- What would entry-level work in this field involve?
- How does one advance in this field? What might a typical career path look like?
- What advice would you give to someone with my educational/professional background?
- What is the work culture like in your organization/industry?
- Are there any resources, such as websites, industry associations, or organizations that I should use?
- What is the most effective way to stay connected to current events and industry news?
- What kinds of experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend for someone pursuing a career in this field?
- Can you suggest any other ways to obtain relevant experience?
- Given my background, is there anyone else or any other organizations that you would recommend that I talk to?

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Information Interview Sample:

Example 1:

Dear Ms. Grayson,

Hello, my name is Gary Patterson and I am conducting informal interviews with employers in my field to gain information on the industry. We met briefly at the Career Networking Fair, hosted by Algonquin College, and you provided me with your business card.

I recently graduated from the Office Administration program at Algonquin College and I feel that your organization would be a good fit with my career interests.

I was wondering if there would be a convenient time to meet with you for 15-20 minutes, either in person or over the phone, to discuss a few questions I have.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

*Sincerely,
Gary Patterson*

Example 2:

Dear Mr. Rodriguez,

My name is Chen Lee. A mutual acquaintance of ours, Phyllis Parker, has recommended that I call you to speak with you about your position as a Developmental Service Worker with Partners in Parenting.

I am currently studying to become a Development Service Worker at Algonquin College. Recently, I have been researching your organization, as I am very interested in working with at-risk youth in the foster care system, but there is only so much you can learn without talking to someone who is actually doing the job.

I'd really appreciate it if you could answer some questions I have about what it is really like to do this job on a day-to-day basis. Would you have 15-20 minutes to speak over the phone or meet in person?

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

*Sincerely,
Chen Lee*