

Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing is a low-pressure way to gather career information from people who are already working in occupations, organizations, or geographic locations of interest to you. Both the content of the information, and the process of gathering it will help you to refine your career goals and possibly discover new ones.

1. Identify Professionals to Interview

Start by asking people you already know.

- Family, friends, neighbors, professors, or past coworkers may work in the career you want to explore.
- The MIT Alumni Directory, Advisor's Hub, LinkedIn, and professional associations are other places to find people who are working in your field of interest.

2. Connect with Contacts

You can request to set up meetings by email, in person, via social networking sites like LinkedIn, or on the phone.

- Introduce yourself and explain how you got their name.
- Tell them you are researching the _____ field and seeking advice (Remember, the purpose of informational interviewing is not to ask for a job or internship).
- Request a 20-30 minute meeting at their worksite if possible. Meeting at a local coffee shop, or via phone or skype are good alternatives.
- Be clear, concise, and courteous in your communication. (See example email to request an informational interview on page 49).

3. Prepare for Your Meeting

Now it's time to prepare for your meeting just as you would for an actual job interview.

- Conduct preliminary research on the organization. Knowing some specifics about the occupation and the company will help you to create targeted questions, and show your enthusiasm and professionalism.
- Develop and bring a list of open-ended questions that will help you evaluate if the career is a fit for you.
- It's important to clarify your objectives before the meeting to determine what information you are seeking. Your goals will change along a continuum from general career research to specific job research advice.

4. Conduct the Interview

Informational Interviews are more casual than job interviews, but you should still make a positive professional impression. On the day of the interview:

- Arrive early, especially if you are meeting in a public place such as a coffee shop. This will ensure you are able to find a place to sit.
- You are leading the interview. Start by thanking the individual for his or her time.
- Monitor the time and end the interview within the specified time.
- Show gratitude after the interview by sending a thank-you email or note within 24 hours.

5. Evaluate the Information Gathered

Take a moment to reflect on the following:

- What did you like? What positive impressions do you now have about this area of work?
- Did you discover any new concerns about or advantages of the occupation?
- How does this information help you to clarify your own career objectives? Did you discover another occupation you might want to learn about?
- What are your next steps? With whom else do you plan to talk? (Beware of relying too heavily on the views or advice of only one or two people).

Ongoing

Keep a document with a record of the people with whom you have interviewed, the dates of the meeting, what was discussed, and names of additional contacts. The people you meet are potential members of your professional network.

Informational Interviews— Suggested Questions

Job Description

- What are your major job responsibilities? If possible, describe a typical work day or work week.
- What aspects of your job do you enjoy most/least?
- How is your time divided between working with people, data, and things?

Career Path

- How did you get into this field? Could you describe your career path?
- What are the typical entry-level jobs in this field? What are some possible career paths?
- How do most people enter this field?

Work Environment

- How would you describe your work environment?
- How much flexibility are you permitted in your job? How much autonomy do you have?
- How much work do you take home? How many hours do you work each week?
- Would a geographic move affect your career? If so, how and why?
- What are your biggest challenges or problems you have encountered?

Industry

- What are the challenges facing this industry today?
- Who do you consider to be the leaders in this industry? How do you view the current state of the industry?
- What changes do you see occurring in this field? Will the type and number of jobs change significantly over the next 10 years? What, if any, will be the effect of changing technology on the field?

Preparation

- What do you wish you had known before you entered this field? What is the best advice you were given when entering the field?
- What are the minimum qualifications a person needs to enter this field?
- Are there any professional groups in the field that you recommend I join or conferences that you recommend I attend?
- Where might I find job descriptions and other specifications for some of the positions in this field? Do you have any suggestions on my job search strategy?

Organization/Company

- What is the size and structure of your organization? What geographic locations have offices?
- How does the work of your group/division/office fit into the work of the overall organization? What is the average length of time employees stay with the organization?
- What type of formal on-the-job training is provided?

General

- Are there any questions I should have asked but did not?
- Do you mind if I stay in touch with you regarding my career search?
- Is there anyone else in the field with whom you would suggest I speak?