

Networking and Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are a form of networking where you connect with professionals in fields of interest regarding career and professional development topics. Informational interviews are a great way to learn about career paths, educational backgrounds, industries, jobs, graduate school, and more. Follow these steps to conduct an informational interview.

How to Prepare

- Have your resume and cover letter documents reviewed and make sure you are confident with how they look
- Know yourself including your personal brand, interests, and passions, and how to introduce yourself
 - Think about if the executive of your dream company/job was in an elevator with you – what would you want them to know before the door opens?
 - Introduce yourself with an elevator speech/commercial (about 30 seconds) stating your name, background (student, institution, degree in X), etc. and then state why you're interested in speaking with them
- Search for professionals in your fields of interest and compile a list of people you want to network with and what you plan to learn/talk about with them

Arranging the Informational Interviews

- Initiate contact by sending a message introducing yourself and stating what your interest is in speaking with them
- A sample of a message is below:
 - “My name is Zoe Garcia, and I am a sophomore at the University at Albany studying English. I am interested in learning more about your career in the publishing field. Would you be willing to speak with me on the phone for 15-20 minutes? I can work around the availability/a time that is most convenient for you. I have also attached my resume for you to get a better sense of who I am.”
- While arranging the interview, be sure you have a prepared list of questions you plan to ask them

Conducting the Informational Interview

- Call from a quiet place where you know you won't be interrupted, and you have good cell reception
- Reintroduce yourself and explain why you are reaching out to them
- Begin by asking the questions you prepared but be flexible if the conversation takes a different path
- Keep track of time, let your contact know when the allotted time is almost up, offer to end the conversation, and follow the contact's lead on ending or continuing the conversation
- Be sincere, show interest, and thank your contacts for volunteering their time (during the interview and after with a note)
- Ask contacts if they would provide you with other professionals that can offer additional career information
- If the connection is genuine, ask if you can stay in touch, but be sure that you do!

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Position

- What are the main duties of your job?
- What are the loves and challenges of your job?
- What do people need to have in order to succeed in this position?

Career Path

- What was your career path to get where you are now?
- How did you decide to pursue the career you're in?
- What was your major and how do you use your academic experiences in your job?

Educational Background

- What did you study in college?
- How have you applied your degree to your role?
- How did your studies prepare you?

Industry

- How would you describe the work environment?
- What trends in the industry affect your company?
- What is the state of the industry looking ahead?

Job Search

- What resources did you use?
- What strategies were effective?

Graduate School

- Is a graduate degree necessary/respected?
- What was unique about your graduate program?
- Did you go to graduate school right after undergrad?

Closing Questions

- What professional journals and organizations would you recommend I read or join?
- What advice do you have for individuals who are preparing to enter your field?
- Who else in the field do you think I should talk to?
- What other means of gaining experience (besides internships) before graduation would you recommend?