

Professional Networking Conversations

What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is when you talk to or email with people who are doing the type of work or working for an employer that you are interested in. It is a good way to learn if a career field, employer, graduate program, or other opportunity is right for you. It is also an effective way to make connections that have the potential to help you throughout your career.

Step 1: Find Connections

Find DU alumni or professionals in your target career field or organization by using your existing networks (family/friends, professors, advisors, colleagues, supervisors) or through online networks.

- **LinkedIn:** You can find alumni on LinkedIn by visiting the DU page and clicking “See Alumni,” or search for professionals by company, region, and more.
- **Pioneer Connect:** This tool is a way to connect to current DU students, alumni, faculty, and friends of the university who volunteer to help with your career goals. Sign up at pioneerconnect.du.edu.
- **Other online networks:** Some professional associations (formal organizations for professionals like the American Psychological Association or the Society for Human Resource Management) have directories or social media groups that you can utilize. Employer websites may also have contact information.

Step 2: Send a Request

Send an email or a message through LinkedIn or Pioneer Connect. A common request is to schedule a short phone call (20-30 minutes) or to set up a meeting for coffee.

Hello Mr. Rodriguez,

I was referred to you by Dr. Cortez, my Ecology professor, because I am very interested in exploring jobs in the environmental industry.

I am a senior at the University of Denver majoring in Biology and would like the opportunity to speak with you about your career path and your work at the Wild Cactus Corporation. Would you be available to meet in the next couple of weeks? I am typically available on Tuesdays and Thursdays after 1:00pm.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to meeting with you.

Regards,
Dee Yew

As you coordinate your plan, offer to send your contact a calendar invite to ensure you are on the same page when your call or meeting will take place, especially if you are setting a call with a contact in another time zone.

Step 3: Research

Before meeting with your contact, research the career field, the organization, their department, their work history, and other pertinent information by using LinkedIn, organization/company websites, and other online sources. Take notes and keep track of what you learn from this research and from your informational interviews.



Step 4: Prepare Questions

When preparing questions to ask, you can broadly think of four different levels to ask about:

1. Their individual career path
2. Their team or department
3. Their company or organization as a whole
4. Their career field and industry trends

You can write down questions ahead of time and take them with you, in a folder with a notepad, padfolio, or electronic device.

Sample Questions:

- What do you think is important to know for someone interested in entering this industry/organization?
- How did you become interested in your area of work?
- What aspects of the job are most challenging for you?
- What do you find rewarding about your work?
- Do you see enough growth in this field/business that you would advise me to pursue it?
- What changes/trends have you seen in recent years, and where is the industry going?
- What personal attributes do you think are essential to success in this field?
- Are there websites/blogs/books on your industry that you would suggest?
- Which professional journals and organizations should I know about?
- What skills are required of a (position of interest) on a day-to-day basis?
- What experiences have you had that have been invaluable to your learning the business?
- Which courses/degrees would you recommend I pursue before I go any further?
- How did you get your job?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why or why not? What would you change?
- From your perspective, what are the challenges working for this field/type of employer?
- Would you describe a typical work day? Work week?
- What motivates you to stay in this line of work?
- What is the reason most people give when they leave this field?
- What would you say are the life-style considerations in your area?
- Regarding promotions, what steps have most people taken?
- Are there other organizations/people that you would suggest that I contact? May I use your name? (Important to ask so that your network continues to grow.)

Step 5: Send a Thank You

As with a job interview, it is considered respectful to send a thank you note to your contact within 24 hours.

Dear Mr. Rodriguez,

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to discuss your career. It was so helpful to learn firsthand what it takes to work in your industry. It was especially interesting to learn what type of internship that you thought I should do this summer to prepare for a job when I graduate.

As a result of our conversation I am more certain that a job in this industry is right for me!

Regards,
Dee Yew

