

Informational Interviewing

What are Informational Interviews?

Informational Interviews are an opportunity to gain information about jobs/careers that you are interested in from professionals who are actively working in those jobs/industries/fields/companies. You do this by asking a professional for anywhere from 10-30 minutes of their time to connect in person (or via phone/Skype) to learn about *what they do, how they got to where they are, additional professional experiences, and any advice that they may have for you.*

The goal of an Informational Interview is gathering **INFORMATION** to help you make informed career decisions, not to get a job/internship offer. Offers/opportunities often result from building a professional relationship beyond the informational interview.

How do they help?

Conducting Informational Interviews is one of the **BEST** ways to gain insight into job responsibilities, career paths, companies, and opportunities within your field(s) of interest. Additionally, through conducting these interviews you can build strong relationships within your career interest areas and expand your professional network.

Where to identify contacts?

- **Your Network-** Who do you already know? Your network includes anyone from professors to classmates to family to alumni to friends to coworkers and beyond, as well as who *they* know.
- **Career Center Events-** The Career Center frequently host employers willing to work with students. Be sure to join the Career Center newsletter, email blasts and listservs for updates.
- **LinkedIn-** This social media and networking site allows you to connect with industry professionals around the world, as well as alumni.

How to make contact?

- **Make a phone call-** Catch them live or leave a voice message introducing yourself, why you are reaching out, and ask for their time. *Sample below.*
- **Send an email-** Send a brief and grateful email highlighting who you are, why you are interested in connecting, ask for their time (make it convenient for them- go to them), how they can reach you, and thank them for the opportunity. *Sample below.*
- **Use LinkedIn-** Send a message, similar to the voice message or email sample above, via LinkedIn.
- **Be introduced-** Ask a mutual contact to make the introduction and the opportunity to follow-up to set a time for an informational interview.

Sample Phone Message:

“Good afternoon, my name is Sam Smith and I am a junior at XYZ University, majoring in Finance. I am specifically interested in learning more about the investment banking field and, as a XYZ alumni, I am hoping to see if you would be willing to set-up a time to connect for 15-20 minutes so that I can learn more about the work that you do and how you got to where you are.”

Sample Email:

Subject Line: Investment Banking: Student Looking to Connect (be direct, specific, polite)

Good Afternoon, John,

By way of introduction, my name is Sam Smith and I am a junior in the College of Business at XYZ University, focusing on Finance. I am specifically interested in learning more about the investment banking field, job responsibilities, and potential career paths. I was directed to you by Professor Bank as a great contact to gain further insight into the field. Would you be willing to take 15-20 minutes in person (or via phone) for an informational interview where I can learn more about the work that you do, how you got to where you are, and any advice that you might have for me in my career development.

Your time and insights are very much appreciated. Please let me know if you have time available next Thursday or Friday afternoon and what time might work best for you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind Regards,

Sam Smith

What to ask?

Remember, the questions you develop should reflect the information you are looking to gain and your interest areas. Here are a few sample questions to get you started...

- What career steps led you to this position?
- What do you like about your position? What do you find most challenging?
- Can you share what typical career paths might look like in this field?
- What emerging trends do you see in the field/industry within the next 5 years?
- What advice do you have for me as I take the next steps in my career development?
- Are there 3 other professionals that you would be willing to connect me with?

When and how to follow-up?

Remember, the follow-up process is about thanking them for their time and building a mutually beneficial relationship beyond the interview that could turn into future career opportunities. **ALWAYS** follow-up within 24 hours with a hand-written thank you note or email thanking them for their time, noting specifically what you are taking away, and asking for follow-up/indicate that you look forward to staying in-touch.

Then, within an appropriate timeframe (possibly a month or so), send an article/current event within the field, take them to coffee to connect, ask for the opportunity to job shadow, offer to volunteer to help with a project, **OR** inquire about potential job/internship opportunities. Informational Interviews are about gaining information **AND** building strong professional relationships.

Staying organized and intentional:

Think Long-term! The greater purpose of informational interviewing is to begin to build long-term relationships that can lead to future opportunities. Develop a system and strategy that keeps you organized- an Excel spreadsheet, Word document, notebook- that helps you to capture your contacts, key words from your conversations, follow-up steps with timeframes, potential career opportunities. As you conduct numerous informational interviews and build an extensive professional network, it is critical to keep on top of follow-up and building your relationships.

