



**The KatieCareer
Guide to**

Career Chats

(a.k.a. “Informational Interviewing”)



Introduction- the basics

What is a career chat?

A **career chat** is a way to get an insider view into a job/industry you're interested in by hearing about it from a current professional working in the field. You can learn things like:

- What people actually do at work
- What people like and dislike about their job
- How people get started in the field
- Current trends in the job market

Why don't you call it informational interviewing?

We prefer the term “career chat” instead of “informational interview” because it implies a more casual, approachable tone. Career chats don't have to be scary—they are just a way to connect with others in a way that allows you to learn more information about the world of work.

Who should you ask for a career chat?

You can ask anyone for a career chat, including friends, family members, colleagues, classmates, professors, and other professionals in the field you're interested in.



Asking for a career chat

First, it's important to note that *career chats are not for you to ask for a job!* The purpose of the meeting should be to *gather information and advice.*

When reaching out to someone, you should include the following information:

- Introduce yourself
- Indicate how you obtained their contact information
- State why you are requesting the interview—**be specific!**
- Specify how much time you would like to spend with them—usually 20-30 minutes is adequate—and the preferred mode of communication (e.g. over Zoom, in person)
- Reflect and identify why you are interested in the field or company

Here are some examples of how you can request a career chat:

Sample Request Email

Subject: Request for Informational Interview

Hi Alice Smith,

My name is Charlotte Student, and I'm a second year student at St. Kate's. I'm majoring in nursing, and am considering specializing in orthopedic nursing. I'm currently taking a course from Dr. Allen, who said you are an orthopedic nurse, and they encouraged me to reach out to you. I would love to set up a time for us to connect in the next few weeks, so I can ask you a few questions about your career.

Would you be interested in meeting for about 30 minutes at Quixotic Coffee in St. Paul? If you would prefer to meet virtually or at a different location, I am more than happy to do that as well.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Charlotte Student

Sample LinkedIn Message

Hi! My name is Susan Student, and I'm a junior at St. Kate's. I'm majoring in history, and am trying to clarify what I want to do with my degree. I see that you work at the Minnesota Historical Society, and I thought you might be a good source of information. I would love to set up a time for us to connect virtually in the next few weeks. Would you be interested in meeting for about 30 minutes?

Preparing for the meeting

Most individuals in the workforce are eager to guide and mentor young professionals—Take the initiative! Make sure you prepare the following for your conversation:

1. A short personal introduction including information about your values, interests, abilities, goals, etc.
2. A list of questions (next section) based on research you've done on the person and the industry.
 - a. There's a big difference between asking "Are you involved in any charitable work?" And "I really enjoyed your recent LinkedIn post about the volunteer coaching you've done with elementary school students. How did you get involved in that organization?" Show that you're really interested in the person's experiences by being specific!
3. Have appropriate, professional attire—nothing sloppy or too casual.
 - a. A nice shirt, conservative skirt or pants, and modest heels/shoes work well
4. A copy of your resume to share if requested

Example of career chat questions

Background:

- Can you tell me a bit about your professional background?
- What were some of your earlier roles in the industry?
- What do you wish you'd known when starting out in the field?
- What types of training or professional development opportunities are you currently undertaking or considering?

Job-Specific:

- What does a typical workday look like in your role?
- What skills are most important in your job?
- What do you like most about your job? Least?
- How would you describe the company/work environment culture?
- Does your company and role require mostly in-office or remote work? Do they allow a hybrid work schedule?

Field Specific:

- What are some pressures and difficulties you experience in your work?
- What do you recommend for someone wishing to enter this field? Is there specific academic preparation or experience I should be aiming for?
- What should I do to prepare myself for emerging trends and changes in this field?

Entry-Level Positions:

- How competitive is entry into this work? Outlook?
- What attributes and skills does a person need in this work?
- What are good entry level jobs to learn about this work?

Next Steps:

- What books or podcasts would you recommend to someone new into the field?
- Do you recommend that I speak with anyone else?
- Would it be okay to stay in touch? If so, what is your preferred mode of communication?



Making the most of your career chat

Career chats can sometimes be nerve wracking, so here are a few things to remember as you are preparing so you can make the most of your meeting:

1. Come up with a learning objective, before your interview—what are you most hoping to learn or gain from this experience? Let that be a guide to selecting questions.
2. Don't just rattle off questions one after another—it's okay to let the conversation flow more naturally.
 - a. Remember: They're people too! Try to ask some questions that are specific to their experiences.
3. Make sure to thank them both at the end of the meeting, and through a follow-up email or message.
4. Ask for assignments, and ***actually do them!***
 - a. Assignments can be things like book/movie/podcast recommendations, a connection request on LinkedIn, or reaching out to someone who they think would be helpful for you to meet. Regardless, it's good to show initiative by following through.

Following up

Sending a professional thank you note is an important courtesy. The content should be clearly written, professional in tone, and carefully proofread. Try to include specific information that was discussed in the meeting.

Sample Thank You Email

Subject: Thank you!

Hi Alice Smith,

It was so nice to meet with you today! Thank you for taking the time to answer my (many) questions and talk about what it's like as an Orthopedic nurse—it seems like it is a really interesting field to work in. I especially loved hearing about your personal journey into this field—it was so cool to see the interesting parallels between our stories!

I look forward to staying in touch as I continue figuring out my next steps. I definitely plan on using your advice to join the National Association of Orthopedic Nurses. And if Regions has any internship openings in the orthopedic department down the road, I hope you'll let me know so I can apply.

All the best,

Charlotte Student