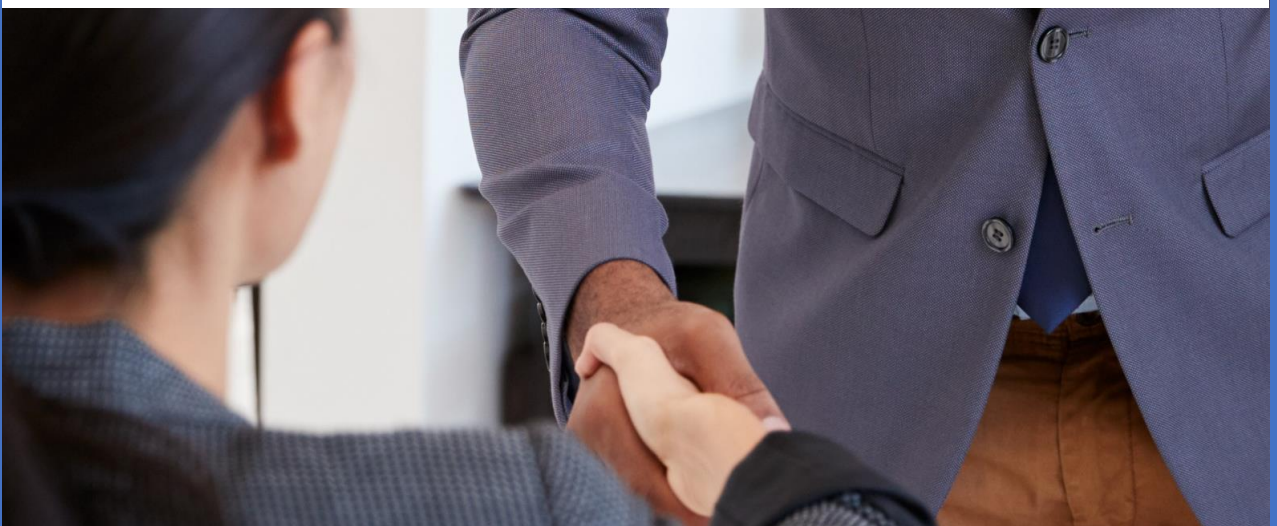




Quick Guide to Informational Interviewing



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What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is an opportunity to gather in-depth information about career fields and positions that interest you, for instance: traits that fit well in a certain position, rewarding aspects of a particular job, opportunities for advancement, academic training requirements, a typical day in this field or position, hiring trends, etc. The more you about an industry and particular roles, the easier it will be to decide if that might be the right path for you. Students and alumni regularly report that informational interviews are an exceptionally useful component in their career development. Informational interviews will not only enrich your understanding of various career fields, but will also broaden your network of professional contacts.

How to Ask for an Informational Interview

When approaching a contact for an informational interview, start by sending a brief email explaining how you found their contact information, that you are interested in learning more about their field and were hoping you could set up a time to speak about their career path. Be sure to also briefly state how you became interested in industry and be clear about your goals for the meeting. For a more detailed approach, take a look at our sample email.

Subject: Consider using "Penn" within your subject line to catch the recipient's attention

Dear Mr. or Ms. _____:

In the first paragraph explain how you learned about the person to whom you're writing and what you want from him or her. Do not ask for "an informational interview," which sounds stuffy and formal. Instead, use a phrase such as "a brief meeting with you to discuss _____" or "a chance to meet with you briefly to learn from you about _____."

In the second paragraph explain something of your background and why you have developed the interests which you wish to discuss with this person. This paragraph can be brief and low key. You're asking to meet with someone for an informal conversation; this is not the place to try to overwhelm the person with your qualifications.

In the final paragraph, give a few specific examples of the kinds of questions you have. Make it clear that you will make good use of this person's time. Offer to call within the next few days to try to arrange an appointment.

Sincerely,

Your name

Add a professional signature beneath your name containing basic contact information and possibly your anticipated graduation year and area of study

Informational interview best practices

- Start by browsing QuakerNet, which is an online directory of Penn alumni. Alumni tend to be an approachable and friendly audience, so they may agree to schedule a time to speak with you about career-related questions. As you proceed, please keep the following guidelines in mind.
- Make your appointment with a potential contact 2 or 3 weeks in advance. Be flexible and have a variety of times you can be available. If you are not able to meet with the individual in person, try to schedule a convenient time to speak on the phone. Many alumni are also happy to offer advice via e-mail.
- Respect the contact's time - don't wear out your welcome. The average time for an information interview is about 30 minutes. Be familiar with the industry and organization before your meeting. Read relevant trade journals and websites to find out what is going on in the industry, and have a list of questions you might ask.
- For in-person interactions, arrive on time. If you know you will be late, call and let the individual know.
- Come prepared with questions that are relevant to your contact, and that value their professional experiences and insights. This will help you organize your thoughts on what you want to learn. Demonstrate that you have done some background research for yourself by asking smart questions.
- Also come prepared to talk about yourself, including your past experiences and some of your future goals. Create a personal narrative that is relevant to your contact (you may have a slightly different narrative for each person you meet).
- Do not ask for a job. You can be clear that you are looking by asking for general advice about the best places to look or how to best market yourself.
- Be prepared to answer questions concerning your interests, values, skills and where you would like to use them. You may want to bring a copy of your resume but only provide it if asked.
- It is a good idea to ask the person you interview for referrals to others who might be able to provide valuable information on the career(s) that you are considering.
- Be sure to send a thank you note within 24 hours following the interview. This can be either via email or hand written.
- If the interaction went well, find ways to keep the conversation going. Ask if you can connect with your contact via LinkedIn.

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Questions to Help Prepare for a Career in this Field

- What educational preparation do you believe would be best for working in this industry?
- What skills, talents, and personal qualities are most essential in this job?
- What kinds of experiences (paid employment or other) would you most strongly recommend?
- How rapidly is your present career field growing? What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- What entry-level opportunities offer the most ability to learn a great deal? What is the typical salary for these positions?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?

Questions about a Particular Organization/Company

- Why did you decide to work for this organization and what do you like most and least about it?
- How does your organization distinguish itself from other organizations doing similar work?
- In what ways does this employer provide ongoing training and education for its employees?
- What is the "corporate / organizational" culture here?
- What do your hiring managers look for on resumes and in cover letters? in interviews?

Contact's Present Job

- How did you choose this career field?
- How do you spend your time during a typical workweek?
- What do you find most rewarding about the work?
- What are the toughest problems you must deal with?

Contact's Career Future

- Does your work become more interesting as you stay longer?
- If things develop as you would like, what does the future hold for your career?

Contact's Prior Experience and Preparation

- How did you prepare for this kind of work? What was your college major?
- If you were a college student again and had it to do all over, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?
- What has been your career path?

Lifestyle

- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours, vacation, place of residence, etc.?
- What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary workweek? Do you enjoy these obligations?

Referral to Others

- Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to? Can you give me names of a few who might be willing to see me?
- May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?