

University of Pennsylvania
Career Services

Guide to Informational Interviewing





Contents

What is informational interviewing?

How to find contacts for info interviews

How to ask for an informational interview

Info Interview best practices & sample questions

Follow-up after an informational interview





What is informational interviewing?

An informational interview is an opportunity to gather in-depth information about career fields and positions that interests you.

1. Research and information gathering:

- Find out about different types of jobs, firms, career paths
- Learn about skills necessary to do the jobs
- Learn about the culture of different organizations

2. Network building and personal branding:

- Share information about your skills, strengths, and interests
- Learn from the experiences of others in your field
- Find opportunities to help others



Why it matters?

Students and alumni regularly report that informational interviews are an exceptionally useful component in their career development.



Finding Contacts



www.alumni.upenn.edu › mypenn



Current Penn students and alumni are invited to open free CareerShift accounts. CareerShift was created to help job seekers successfully navigate the published and hidden job market to find career opportunities. It allows you to search for jobs, create company lists, and identify contacts (searchable by university attended) at those organizations.

<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/resources/careershift/>



You can use the Alumni tool to filter by industry, employer, location, major, and skill sets. Results will automatically sort by those with the closest connections to you.

<https://www.linkedin.com/school/university-of-pennsylvania/people/>



How to ask for an informational interview

When approaching a contact for an informational interview, start by sending a brief email explaining:

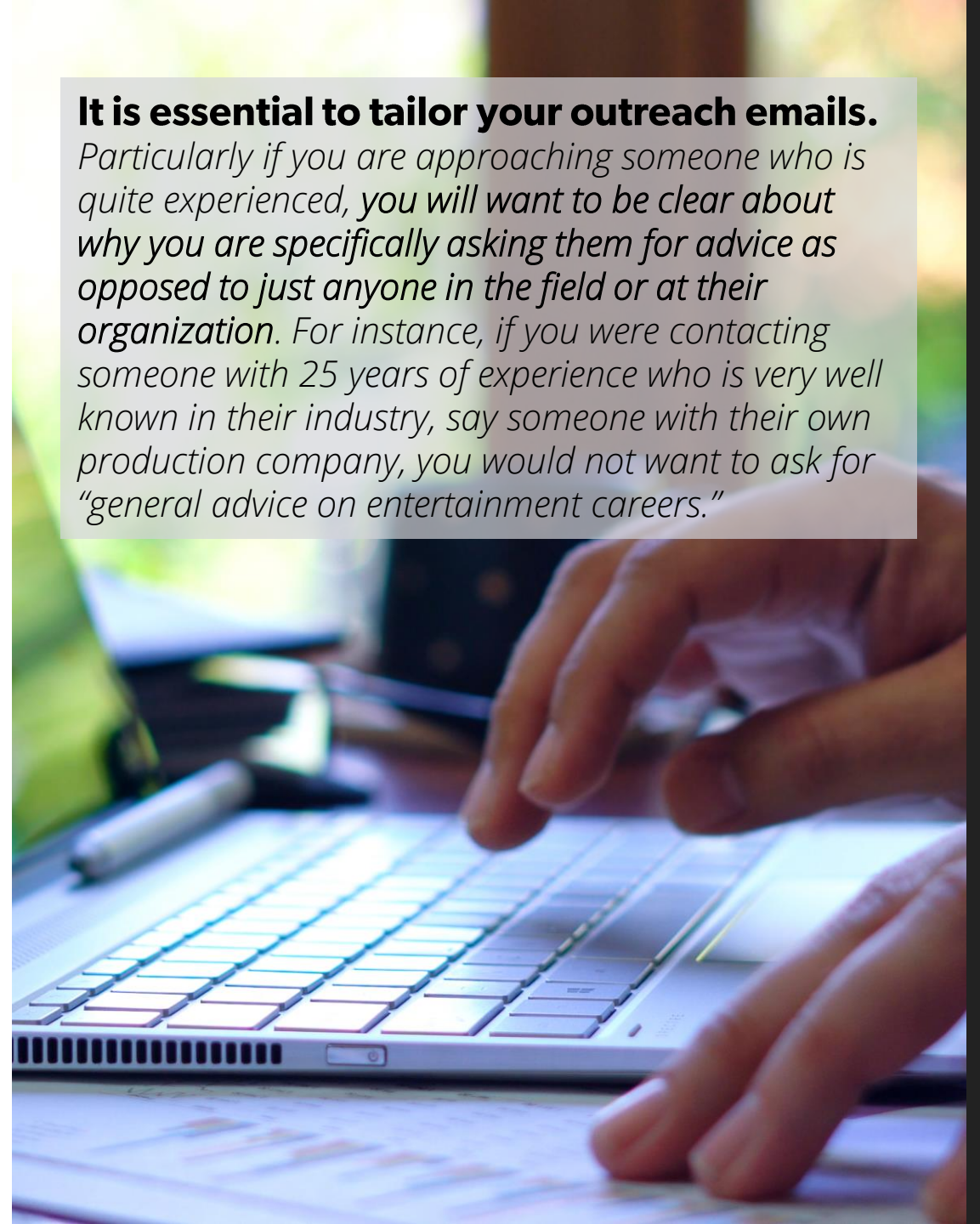
- how you found their contact information
- that you are interested in learning more about their field and;
- that were hoping you could set up a time to speak about their career path.

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.

It is essential to tailor your outreach emails.

Particularly if you are approaching someone who is quite experienced, you will want to be clear about why you are specifically asking them for advice as opposed to just anyone in the field or at their organization. For instance, if you were contacting someone with 25 years of experience who is very well known in their industry, say someone with their own production company, you would not want to ask for "general advice on entertainment careers."





Sample outreach email

Hello [Ms./Mr. Last Name],

I found your contact information on MyPenn. As a fellow [fill in the blank] major, I am especially interested in how you parlayed your studies in [discipline] to pursue a career in _____.

Would you have 30 minutes in the next few weeks where during which I could learn more about your career path and seek your advice as to ways in which I can best be positioning myself now if I'm hoping to pursue XXX next summer?

Warm Regards,
[Your name]





Informational interviewing best practices – Part 1

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.* Be willing to do either in-person or virtual, whichever is more convenient for the contact.
- **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.
- **Arrive on time.** If you know you will be late, call or email and let the individual know.

Start by looking for Penn alumni as they tend to be an approachable and friendly audience more open to answering career-related questions.

The MyPenn alumni directory is a great resource in this regard and can even be filtered by "available for mentorship."





Informational interviewing best practices – part 2

- Come prepared with questions that are relevant to your contact, demonstrate your background research, and that value their professional experiences and insights.
- **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 (and the end) for referrals to others who might be able to provide valuable information on the career(s) that you are considering.



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*
- *Personalized for the opportunity (you may have a slightly different narrative for each person you meet).*



Sample Informational Interview Questions – Part 2

Questions to Help Prepare for a Career in this Field

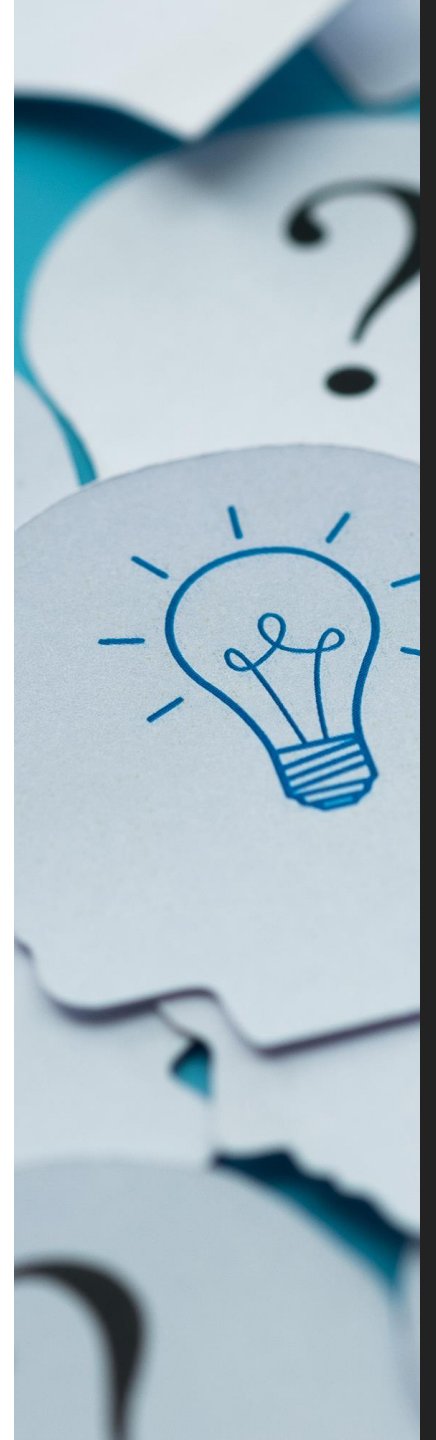
- What educational preparation do you believe would be best for working in this industry?
- What skills, talents, and personal qualities are most essential in this job?
- What kinds of experiences (paid employment or other) would you most strongly recommend?
- How rapidly is your present career field 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? 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?



Sample Informational Interview Questions – Part 2

Contact's Career Future

- How has your work changed since you started?
- If things develop as you would like, what does the future hold for your career?

Contact's Prior Experience and Preparation

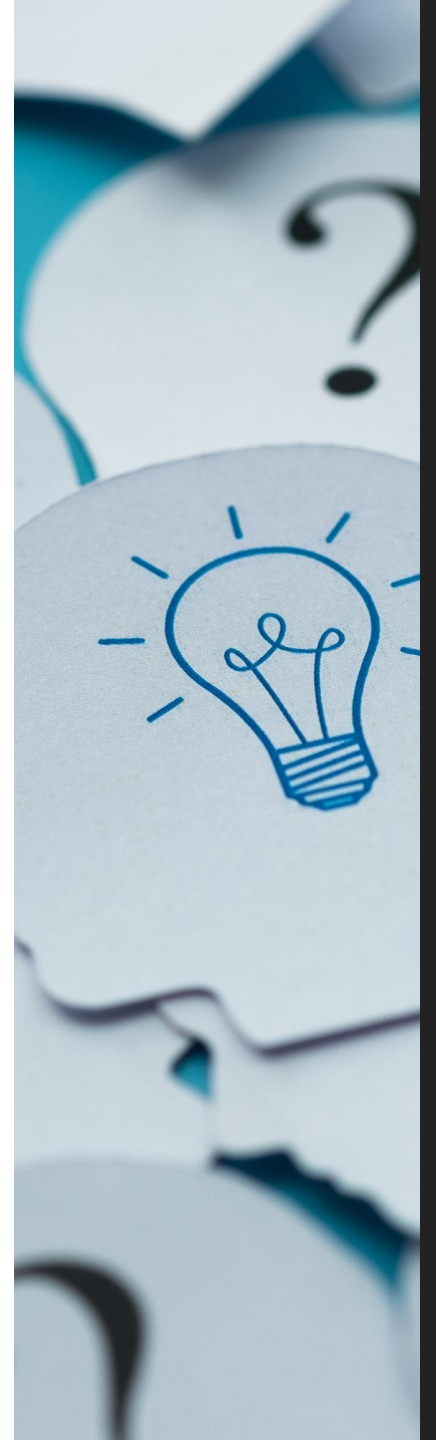
- How did you prepare for this kind of work? What was your college major?
- If you were a college student again and had it to do all over, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?
- What has been your career path?

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?





Following up effectively

- Send a thank you note/email within 24 hours following the meeting.
- If the interaction went well, find ways to keep the conversation going.
 - If someone suggested a piece of advice, follow-up to let them know that you followed it
 - Provide periodic updates on how you are doing



A great way to stay connected after your conversation is to request to connect on LinkedIn.

Once approved, start interacting with their LinkedIn content

- *React to and comment on posts if appropriate*
- *See which organizations/groups they are following and if relevant, look to join/follow as well*

