

What Is an Informational Interview?

This type of interview is conducted to collect information about a job, career field, industry, or company. It is not a job interview. Instead, it's an opportunity to speak with a person working in a field you'd like to know more about.

Through an informational interview, you can find out about a specific type of job, a person's career path, or details on an industry or company. Through the conversation, you can (hopefully) discover what a person's job is like, what they do, what responsibilities they have, and what it's like to work in their job at their company.

How to Find People to Speak With

Your network can help. You can [reach out to friends, family, and acquaintances](#) to see if they know anyone in the industry you're interested in exploring, and can make a connection. If there is a specific company you'd like to work at, consider cold-contacting someone through LinkedIn to request an informational interview. You can also follow up with people you met during networking events or job fairs.

Here is more information on [how to use networking in your job search](#).

The Benefits of Informational Interviews

The informational interview communicates the firsthand experiences and impressions of someone in the occupation and is directed by your questions.

Interviewing Without the Stress

An informational interview is less stressful for both you and the employer than a typical job interview. You are the one in control. You can discuss what is done on a day-to-day basis and relate it to your own interests and feelings. Beyond the advantages of gaining valuable career information, the [informational interview](#) provides the opportunity to build

self-confidence and to improve your ability to handle a [job interview](#).

Insider Information

Because this conversation does not center around a job, it can be a bit more frank.

Asking about topics that are typically taboo in a first formal interview (like salary, benefits, and hours) is acceptable. You may find that the person you're speaking with will share tough aspects of the industry, as well as positive ones. You may also get tips and advice that will help you strengthen your application. For instance, if the person you're speaking with keeps using a particular buzzword, you might want to include it in your cover letter.

Building Relationships

A big part of a successful job search is who you know. Your connections may know about jobs that aren't posted yet or can make valuable introductions. Through this informational interview, you are expanding your network.

How to Conduct an Informational Interview

You should regard each interview as a business appointment and conduct yourself in a professional manner.

If you have made clear, in advance, the explicit purpose of your interview you will, in all probability, find your contact an interested and helpful person.

Remember the appointment time and appear promptly for your interview. You should neither be too casually dressed nor overdressed. Regular [business attire](#) is appropriate. Be sure you know the name of the person you are meeting, the correct pronunciation of his/her name, and the title of his/her position. Do some research on the person and their company.

Come with questions, and be prepared to steer the conversation. Be sure to be considerate of the person's time. Aim to keep the conversation brief (about 15 to 30 minutes) unless you've agreed on a different time frame beforehand. And, remember: your contact might ask you questions as well. Be ready with an [elevator pitch](#).

Informational Interview Questions to Ask

Because there are so many questions you can ask in the informational interview, individuals sometimes take notes during the meeting. A limited amount of note-taking is justified provided that your contact is agreeable and that it doesn't interrupt communication between the two of you.

During the interview, try to ask questions that go beyond what you could find out through a quick online search. You can ask the person about their journey to this position, for a description of their day-to-day responsibilities, and for tips they would offer you as someone interested in working in the field.

After the interview, sketch out a brief outline of the topics covered and the information you discovered. This will require only a few minutes and will ensure that you remember the important points discussed. Later, working from your outline, you can construct a more detailed report of the interview.

Occupational Questions to Ask

1. What is the title of the person you are interviewing?
2. What are other commonly-used titles for the position?
3. What are the duties performed during a typical day, week, month, year? Does she or he have a set routine? How much variety is there on a day-to-day basis? As the person describes the duties, ask what skills are needed.
4. What educational program is recommended as preparation? Inquire about the distinction between courses which are desirable and those which are indispensable.

5. What kinds of courses are most valuable in order to gain the skills necessary for success in this occupation? Inquire about the distinction between courses which are desirable and those which are indispensable.
 1. What degree or certificate do employers look for?
 2. What kind of work/internship experience would employers look for in a job applicant, and how does a person obtain this experience?
 3. Are any co-curricular activities recommended?
 4. What steps (besides meeting educational and experiential requirements) are necessary to break into this occupation (e.g., exam, interview, union membership)?
 5. What are the important keywords or buzzwords to include in a [resume](#) or [cover letter](#) when job hunting in the field?
 6. What are the opportunities for advancement, and to what position? Is an advanced degree needed, and if so, in what discipline?
 1. Which skills are most important to acquire (i.e., which [skills](#) do employers look for)?
 2. What are the main, or most important, personal characteristics for success in the field?
 3. What are the different settings in which people in this occupation may work (i.e., educational institutions, businesses, non-profits)?
 4. What other kinds of workers frequently interact with this position?
 5. Is there evidence of differential treatment between male and female workers with respect to job duties, pay, and opportunities for advancement?
 1. What are the employment prospects in the advisor's geographic area? Where are the best employment prospects? What are the employment prospects at the advisor's company? Is mobility a necessary factor for success?
 2. What are some related occupations?
 3. What are the different salary ranges?
 4. Does the typical worker have a set schedule, or are the hours flexible?
 5. What are the demands and frustrations that typically accompany this type of work?
 6. Is there a typical chain of command in this field?
 7. How can you determine that you have the ability or potential to be successful in this specific occupation?
 1. Is this a rapidly growing field? Is it possible to predict future needs for workers in this field?
 2. What types of technology are used, and how are they used?
 3. Where are job listings found?
 4. What entry-level positions are there in this field that a liberal arts graduate might consider?
 5. What does the advisor know now that would have been helpful to know when she or he was in your shoes?

Functional Questions to Ask

1. How many hours does the advisor work?
2. What sort of education does the advisor have?
3. What was the advisor's career path from college to present?
4. What are the satisfying aspects of the advisor's work?
5. What are the greatest pressures, strains, or anxieties in the work?
6. What are the major job responsibilities?
7. What are the toughest problems and decisions with which the advisor must cope?
8. What is most dissatisfying about the work? Is this typical of the field?
9. How would the advisor describe the atmosphere/culture of the workplace?
1. Does the advisor think you left out any important questions that would be helpful to learn more about the job or occupation?
2. Can the advisor suggest others who may be valuable sources for you?

Follow Up With a Thank You Note

Write a [thank you note](#) to the people you have interviewed. Report back to them if you have followed up on any suggestions. You can also connect with them on LinkedIn if you have not already.

By building a strong rapport with career contacts, you enhance the likelihood that they will offer assistance with your job search when you are ready for the next step in the job search process.

Resource:

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-an-informational-interview-can-help-your-career-20585>