

What is an informational interview?

Informational interviews involve contacting someone who is working in a specific field and/or profession and inviting them for a coffee, a meal, or a brief phone call. The person could be someone you know or they could be a stranger. Informational interviews help you learn about a specific career path. They can also help you expand your professional network, which can be invaluable throughout your career.

Why should I do an informational interview as a student?

An informational interview is one of the best ways to conduct research and explore career options, because you will be speaking with someone with work experience in the field. The knowledge you will gain from one conversation can help inform your future career decision-making. For instance, if you are considering whether to enter a specific field, an informational interview can help you decide if it will be the right fit. Through informational interviews, you can also learn about:

- Pros/cons of working in a specific career or with a certain organization
- Education/work experience requirements
- Industry trends (future growth, opportunities, challenges)
- Advice on how to find job openings
- A typical working day in a career

How can I set up an informational interview?

The first step is finding someone with whom you would like to set up an informational interview. This may come from conversations with friends/family/professors, attending networking events, and/or researching online. LinkedIn can be a valuable resource, because it allows you to search for people working in a specific field or with a certain company. You can send private messages to invite LinkedIn members to informational interviews.

A common barrier when setting up informational interviews is being comfortable contacting a stranger and asking for their time. However, the majority of people do respond positively when young professionals contact them looking for career advice. Most people have been in a similar situation at one point in their life and they often enjoy sharing what they have learned. So with this in mind, why not ask them? The worst they can say is no.

Informational interview etiquette

You should not use an informational interview to ask for a job, because the purpose is to learn about a career and develop your network. With this in mind, it is imperative that you follow proper etiquette with informational interviews. Here are some important steps to follow:

- Respect the other person's time
 - If they are busy, a fifteen minute conversation might be the only time they can offer you. If this is the case, make sure that you show your appreciation.
 - If they are unable to meet with you, accept this and thank them for responding to you.
- Research in advance
 - Before meeting with someone for an informational interview, you should research as much as you can in advance of the meeting
 - This helps you make the most of your time you have and ask the most relevant questions.
 - If you can easily research the answers to your questions yourself, then you are not making the best use of their time.
- Listen more than you speak
 - An informational interview is not a chance to sell yourself. Instead, you are looking to build a relationship with someone and learn from the experiences they have had. Remember, during an informational interview, you are the interviewer not the interviewee.
 - Here are a few questions to ask during an informational interview:
 - *What led to you pursuing your current career?*
 - *What do you love about what you do?*
 - *What do you dislike about what you do?*
 - *What is changing in this industry?*
 - *What kinds of people do well in this field?*
 - *What would you do if you were in my situation?*
- Pay for any food/beverage costs yourself.
 - Keep in mind that the person is doing you a favour. Picking up the tab is common courtesy and shows that you appreciate their time.
- Show your appreciation and stay in touch
 - Follow up with an email and express your gratitude for their time.