

Informational Interviews

What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is when you talk with a person working in a given context (e.g., occupation, industry, organization, job) to learn more about that context. Informational interviews are valuable because you can ask the questions you care most about and get information that may not be available through other sources, such as the internet. Talk to multiple people to get multiple opinions.

How do I conduct an informational interview?

1. Identify the context you want to investigate via informational interview.
2. Find someone who works in that context by:
 - Searching the internet for people who are listed as employees of an organization relevant to that context
 - If you are in high school or college, speaking with your school's Alumni Association liaison to gain access to a database of working alumni in different fields that have expressed interest in sharing their experiences with current students at your school.
 - Talking to an adviser, teacher, counselor, or career center employee who may have contacts in those contexts.
 - Speaking with extended family and friends, who may have contacts in their personal and professional networks.
3. Generate a list of questions you would like to ask. See the end of this document for a list of possible questions. Make sure you don't ask questions that you can easily get the answers to from other sources; this is why you want to do informational interviews after doing research on O*NET and the Occupational Outlook Handbook, among other resources.
4. Call or email (calling is better) the people you have identified in order to schedule an appointment to talk with them. Be sure to let them know:
 - Where and how you got their contact information.
 - Your goals for speaking with them.
 - Emphasize that you are NOT applying for a job, just looking for information.
 - Be prepared to ask questions in case they offer to speak with you immediately rather than scheduling a later appointment.
 - Set up the interview for a specific place and time EVEN IF you are interviewing a family member that's easy to make contact with. This way you will both be prepared to talk about the topic.
 - See bottom of document for an email template you can use in drafting your initial email to the person you wish to do the interview with.
5. Dress professionally for an in-person interview.
6. Take notes during the interview with pen and paper, not an electronic device
7. Ask for names and phone numbers of other contacts to talk to within the field.
8. Send a thank-you note to follow-up.

Questions for Informational Interviews

Work Tasks and Environment

1. What are your job tasks?
2. What responsibilities does your job entail that I may not have thought about?
3. What is the most important skill that helps you in your job?
4. What skills are important for this job/major?
5. What is a typical day like?
6. What kind of people do you interact with on a day-to-day basis?
7. Do you work mostly with others or by yourself? How are relationships with co-workers? Friends at work?
8. Do you have control over when and how you accomplish tasks?
9. How much control/freedom do you have in your job?
10. How independent are you in your job?
11. Is there a variety of work each day or are tasks constant?
12. What is the work-environment like?
13. How hard do you work?
14. Are you busy?
15. Do you have enough free time?
16. How stressful is your job?

Work Details

1. Is there job security?
2. What is the starting salary?
3. What are the benefits in your job?
4. What advancement opportunities are available?
5. Dress code?
6. Do you have flexible hours?
7. Do you ever work odd hours or overtime?
8. How much free time/vacation do you get?
9. Are you satisfied with aspects of the job? Salary?
10. Are there travel opportunities?
11. What organizations do you belong to related to your job?
12. Is there any work that you have to do at home?
13. What are areas you can specialize in?
14. Do you see this occupation as growing? How fast or slow?

Work Preparation

1. How difficult is it to find a job in this field?
2. How did you become interested in this career? Were you always? What was your major in college? Did you change majors?
3. How did you become successful?
4. What did it take to get to your current position?

5. How did you get started?
6. How long have you been working in your current position?
7. How long did it take you to find your current job and do you want to stay?
8. What other job experiences have you had?
9. Where did you go to college?
10. How much education/training is required?
11. What is the minimum level of educational preparation needed?
12. What is the desirable level of educational preparation?
13. How necessary is advanced training to get ahead? (master's degree, extra training/certification)
14. Is licensing, certification, or continuing education required?
15. What other requirements are necessary to get a job in your field?

Work and Lifestyle

1. What kind of demand do you see in this field?
2. How does your job fit in with a family life?
3. What has been most challenging in your career?
4. What are challenges you face every day?
5. What have you had to sacrifice for your job/career?
6. Where are the most opportunities in your field? (Specific careers, locations...)

Advice

1. Do you have any advice for me?
2. How did you make your career decisions?
3. What are some common mistakes I can avoid that people make in your field?
4. What would you do differently?
5. How did you know what you wanted to do?
6. Can I make a career out of this?
7. What work/school experiences would make me most competitive to get a job in this field, get into graduate school etc?
8. What classes do you recommend?
9. What should I major/minor in?
10. What job opportunities are available for a student with_?
11. What kind of experiences should I have?

Other

1. Is this job what you expected?
2. Do you enjoy your job?
3. What is most personally rewarding about the job?
4. Do you look forward to coming to work?
5. Do you have regrets about your career?

6. What is your favorite part of your job?
7. What is your least favorite part of the job?
8. What do you dislike about your career/major?
9. What are your career goals and how are you prepared to meet them?
10. What are your interests?

Major Questions

1. What does the major involve?
2. How many different specialties/areas are within the major?
3. What type of student is most successful in this major?
4. What are the strengths of this major as a preparation for careers?
5. What are the limitations?

6. How does this major program at ISU compare to other schools?
7. What could I do with a major in _____
8. What positions/jobs does a degree in _____ prepare you for?
9. Are there requirements to be accepted in this major?
10. What are necessary classes for this major?
11. How much freedom in class choice is there?
12. What kinds of clubs/activities are available for students with this major?
13. What types of scholarships/special programs are available to students in this major?
14. How long do students usually take to complete this major?
15. Where do ISU graduates from this major work?

Sample Email Request for Informational Interview

Note: Be sure to customize the wording to fit your and the interviewee's situation.

Dear Mr./Ms. _____ :

I am a ___(type of student)___ at _(name of school)___ focusing on art history, professional writing, and Spanish. Careers that combine multi-media communication skills with socially conscious work are very interesting to me and I'm currently exploring those kinds of options. I found you through _____(indicate here how you identified this person as a potential interviewee)_____.

Your background in journalism and nonprofit management at the _____ Foundation is fascinating to me.

I know that you are very busy, but if you have the time, I would love to set up a meeting (no more than 30 minutes) to learn more about how a _____ alumni got started on this kind of path. I am planning a trip to Chicago for next month—if your schedule allows, I am hoping that I can arrange my dates around our meeting. If a phone conversation would work better for you that would be fine too.

Thank you for your time,
_____(your name)_____

Adapted from "Career Passport 11-12" from careernetwork.mus.edu