



Making the Most of Informational Interviews

WHAT IS IT?

An informational interview is a conversation with someone who works in an industry or for an organization of interest to you or who has the type of job you might like to have. It is a chance to learn from someone who can provide professional insight you might have a hard time getting on your own. Keep in mind that an informational interview is an important professional networking opportunity: dress properly, be on time, and come prepared so that you make a good impression. If the informational interviewer has, or knows of, an opening in the future, you want them to think of you!

HOW TO ASK FOR (AND GET) AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW



1. CHOOSE WISELY

Think about your goals for this interview and which employees at various organizations might be able to tell you what you want to know. Choose someone whose responsibilities are similar to the role you are seeking. His or her network is likely to include peers, both in and outside that office, some of whom may make hiring decisions.



2. MAKE A CONNECTION

Use LinkedIn to find people with whom you have some preexisting connection: People are much more likely to accept your request to visit if they share a connection such as:

- *A mutual friend*
- *The same home state*
- *Membership in the same fraternity or sorority*
- *The same alma mater.*



3. LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

If an organization you are really interested in is not hiring for your desired role, ask for an informational interview with the recruiter. Recruiters are busy people with limited time, but building a pipeline of qualified prospects is part of their job. Getting the chance to talk with recruiters about organization culture, overall hiring process, and what their job pipeline looks like in the coming months is invaluable.



4. BE SPECIFIC!

Begin by thinking about what you want to do and where you want to do it. Next, give the targets of your request something easy to say yes to: Ask specifically for an informational interview seeking their unique perspective or expertise. "May I take you to coffee near your office for 20 minutes next week to talk about your career path and your work at Global Corp?" Steer clear of asking for a job or job lead at this point.

MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

Once you have arranged an informational interview, do the preparation and follow-up necessary to make it worth your time.



1. KNOW YOUR TARGET

The key to preventing an informational interview from becoming awkward is knowledge and enthusiasm about what your contact does. If you are looking for insight into a specific career path, employer, or job, do enough research to understand with whom you will be speaking and what sort of insight he or she can provide. The better prepared you are beforehand, the better you will be able to carry on an interesting conversation.



2. BRING YOUR QUESTIONS

Everyone knows that the best conversations and interviews are those that flow naturally, but getting to that level of comfort is not always easy. Bring a small notebook with questions you can turn to when you need to spark the conversation. Some of these could include:

- *How did you get your start in this field?*
- *What traits would you say your organization's culture values most?*
- *What's the thing that worries you most about this field 10 years from now?*
- *Who has been most influential on your career within your current organization?*



3. KEEP IT QUICK

When you schedule your informational interview, note the length of the scheduled meeting and stick to it. Not only should you be on time to kick things off, but you should also note when your time is almost up. This not only gives each of you a moment to offer any parting thoughts, but also gives your interviewee a chance to make his or her exit without cutting you off, as well as a chance to extend the visit if he or she wants to.



4. FOLLOW THROUGH

It is impossible to overemphasize this point: Take the time—every time—to say thank you. A handwritten note is great. At the very least, send an email thanking the person for his or her time. If the conversation went well, consider whether this contact could be a permanent connection, in which case connect with him or her on LinkedIn, and check in by email occasionally.

The more regularly you do these informational interviews, the easier and more natural they will become, so get out there and get the scoop.

Your dream job might be just around the corner!