



Informational Interview Guide

An informational interview is a **conversation that you initiate to learn about a professional area of interest and expand your network.** An informational interview is *NOT* a job interview or an opportunity to ask about employment.

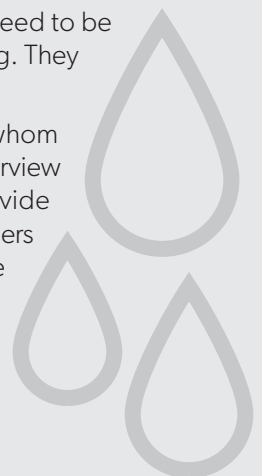
Reasons to Conduct an Informational Interview

- To **explore careers and clarify your career goals**
- To **talk to someone who can tell you firsthand** about careers or companies of interest to you
- To **start building a professional network** within a specific occupation or industry
- To **discover employment opportunities** that are not advertised
- To **build confidence** for your job interviews
- To **access up-to-date career information**



Don't Sweat It!

- Don't feel nervous or uncomfortable about reaching out to someone for an informational interview. This is one of the most profitable and fun parts of networking and conducting a job search.
- Most people feel honored when someone asks them to share about who they are and what they enjoy about their work. After all, this requires no research or preparation on their part! They simply get to show up and be the expert. Additionally, many people remember seeking the help of others during their own professional journeys, so they are happy to "pay it forward." Give them an opportunity to help you!
- Informational interviews do not need to be long, complicated, or intimidating. They are simply conversations.
- It is common for someone with whom you conduct an informational interview to remember you fondly and provide assistance or connect you with others in the future. This should not be your primary aim in setting up an informational interview, but it can often be a positive result.



Steps for Conducting an Informational Interview

- 1 Select the occupation, company, or industry you wish to explore.**

After considering your interests, abilities, values and skills, pick one career, organization or field about which you would like to learn more.
- 2 Identify people to interview.**

Start with people you know: friends, relatives, fellow students, professors, present or former co-workers or supervisors, fellow church members, and neighbors. Ask people you know if they have any connections in a particular field; they may be willing to offer an introduction. You should also consult people you know in professional organizations, contacts on LinkedIn, or members of the Northwestern Network.
- 3 Prepare for the interview.**

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Research the company or industry on LinkedIn, Career Explorer and IBISWorld. Decide what information you want to know, and prepare a list of questions you would like to ask. Do not ask questions you can find the answers to on the company's website; instead, pose thoughtful questions that allow the professional to share opinions, stories and experiences.
- 4 Arrange the interview.**

Contact the person to set up an informational interview through a mutual contact or by telephone, email or social media request.
- 5 Investigate your interviewee's background before your meeting.**

You can ask specific questions about his or her past experiences that look especially interesting or relevant.
- 6 Conduct the interview.**

Dress professionally, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Offer a brief introduction of yourself that succinctly describes your background and goals. Then refer to your list of prepared questions. Stay on track, but allow for spontaneous conversation. Remember that you drive the conversation; do not expect the professional to do so.
- 7 Ask for recommendations of 2 to 3 more people with whom you could connect.**

Before you conclude the interview, always ask if they have other contacts who might be willing to share with you. Jot these names down and promptly follow through.
- 8 Follow up.**

Immediately after the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a handwritten note or at least a thank you email within a couple days of the interview. Also, reach out to connect with this professional via LinkedIn; even if they change jobs, you will still be connected.
- 9 Reflect on what you learned.**

Ask yourself: Would I enjoy having that job or working in that industry? What elements of the work seemed exciting or not-so-exciting? What am I learning about the skills I hope to use or experiences I hope to have in my future work?

Send a Personal Note

If reaching out to a new contact via email, consider sending a personalized message like the one below.

Dear Adam Alumnus,

My name is Nora Northwestern, and I am a sophomore at Northwestern College majoring in political science. Elizabeth Pitts in the Compass Center for Career & Calling gave me your information and suggested I reach out to you as a resource while I determine next steps for my future. I am considering graduate school and have thoughts of working for the government, a non-profit, or a Christian organization. Ideally, I would like to use my skills to serve refugees, human trafficking survivors, or the homeless.

Because you are a Northwestern College alumnus, have worked in the non-profit world in various roles, and are an experienced professional, I wonder if you would be willing to meet with me for a brief informational interview. I am available for an in-person meeting, but I am also open to a Zoom meeting or a telephone call. I would only take 20 to 30 minutes of your time to ask you some questions about what your work experiences have been like. I admire the work you do to connect at-risk and homeless youth to resources, and it would be wonderful to learn from someone with your background. Please let me know if we might be able to meet or talk in the near future.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing back from you!

Best,

Nora Northwestern



Nora Northwestern

Dear Adam Alumnus,

I noticed your profile as a Northwestern College alumnus on LinkedIn. I am interested in what your professional journey has been like as a nonprofit manager who serves at-risk and homeless youth. I'm a sophomore political science major at Northwestern. Your career path looks similar to one I would be interested in, and I'd love to learn from you.

Would you be open to a telephone chat or coffee meeting?

Thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Nora Northwestern

Keep It Short on Social Media

If reaching out to connections via LinkedIn or any other social media platform, try to make the message shorter.

If You Don't Hear Back

Sometimes the person to whom you have reached out is busy. If you have not heard anything from them after about a week, send a reminder email. Be polite—acknowledge that you are likely trying to catch them at a busy time—but reemphasize your desire to learn from them and your willingness to accommodate whatever their schedule will allow. Often people just need a friendly reminder!

Sample Informational Interview Questions

1. What does a typical day on the job look like for you?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work? What kinds of experiences—internships, volunteer work, or summer jobs—should I gain before entering this field?
3. What personal qualities, skills or abilities are important for being successful in this role?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? What part do you find most challenging?
5. How did you get started in this field? What did you study in college, and how did it prepare you for your career path? What has been your career path to this point?
6. Is there a “typical career path” in this industry? What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
7. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field? Do you think my previous experience has prepared me well to enter this field?
8. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
9. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What are the challenges and opportunities for this industry in the future?
12. What is changing in this field, and who is leading the charge for innovation?
13. What advice do you have for someone thinking about entering this field?
14. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
15. Which professional journals, organizations or associations would help me learn more about this field?
16. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
17. Have you experienced many issues with work/life balance?
18. With the information you have about my education, skills and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
19. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas? How would you suggest I change it?
20. Whom do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?