



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

An informational interview is basically a networking meeting where a professional (the interviewee) agrees to share some career advice with you (the interviewer). It's a great way to get insider info on a career path or organization that you would not be able to get just by researching online. And it's a perfect chance to practice code-switching and professional communication without the pressure of an internship or job interview. (For more information on code-switching, ask your counselor about the Code-Switching huddle in the Networking tab.)

### **Informational interviews can also help you:**

- Make decisions about your chosen major and career path.
- Find out about different positions in a certain industry.
- Get a sense of the job market in your field of interest.
- Make connections with a specific company or organization.

### **They are not so scary because...**

- People enjoy giving advice and love to share their stories.
- They've been in your shoes before.
- The worst thing that could happen is that a person you ask is too busy to meet with you, or they don't return your call/email.

### **How to Set Up an Informational Interview**

Start with people in your network—your LinkedIn contacts, people in your community, professors. If you don't know anyone who works in a career that interests you, ask people you already know if they know anyone who could give you some information, and if you can use them as a reference when you contact the potential interviewee.

If the interviewee is someone you know, like a professor or a family friend, you could ask them for an informational interview in person or by phone; schedule a time to talk that works best for them. Otherwise, if it's someone you don't know well or at all, stick to email so they can respond at their convenience. Use a professional email subject



## Informational Interviews, cont....

heading, like “Request for an Informational Interview” or “Professor Smith suggested I contact you.”

As an example, here’s a message a student wrote to someone her professor referred her to:

*Good afternoon, Dr. Singh,*

*My name is Helen Cho and I’m a student at Northeastern University. I’m in the process of researching careers I might want to pursue when I graduate, and one of the paths I’m exploring is biochemistry research. My professor Margaret Reynolds said you would be a great person to talk to since you have been working in this field for over 10 years. I was wondering if we could set up a 30-minute meeting sometime next week so I can learn more about what you do and how you got to be in your position. I can be reached by email or by phone at 617-989-5555.*

*Thanks so much for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Sincerely,  
Helen Cho*

### Informational Interview Pitfalls to Avoid

- 1. Not being prepared.** Have a list of questions, be on time, and be ready to jot down notes during your interview.
- 2. Not following up.** Always send a thank you email after your interview.
- 3. Dressing unprofessionally.** Dress as you would for a professional networking event.
- 4. Giving the person you’re interviewing your resume and/or asking for an internship or job.** Informational interviews are *not* a time to ask about jobs, internships, or other employment opportunities.
- 5. Not returning phone calls and emails in a timely fashion.** If someone takes the time to call or write you, you should *always* respond within 24 hours.



## Informational Interviews, cont....

Another example, designed so that you can fill it in with your own info:

*Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a student at  
\_\_\_\_\_ College/University.  
\_\_\_\_\_ gave me your name and suggested  
that I contact you. I am in the process of making some decisions about my  
future. I'm interested in \_\_\_\_\_ and am  
hoping that you have a few minutes to talk with me about careers in this  
area. Would it be possible to set up an informational interview? I hope  
we can meet in person or have a short chat by phone at your earliest  
convenience.*

*Thank you for your time and consideration.*

*Sincerely,*

\_\_\_\_\_



## Informational Interviews, cont....

### How to Prepare for an Informational Interview

When someone agrees to meet with you, plan a time and confirm that time at least 24 hours in advance of your scheduled meeting or phone interview. You want to show that you take this opportunity seriously and respect their time. Here's an example confirmation email:

Dear Ms. Richardson,  
Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. at the coffee shop in your office building. I look forward to seeing you then. By the way, I will be wearing glasses and a gray coat. If you need to reach me for any reason, my cell phone number is 617-555-5555.  
Best regards,  
Walter Jefferson

During informational interviews, you are the one asking the questions and you want to show that you're excited to learn insider information. What exactly you ask depends on what you want to know, but always be sure to ask open-ended (not "yes or no") questions.

### Informational Interview Questions

Here are some examples of the kinds of questions you should prepare in advance:

#### The ins and outs of the work:

- What does a typical workweek look like for you? What are your main responsibilities? What hours do you work?
- What part of the job do you find most rewarding/challenging?
- Can you tell me about typical starting or entry-level positions in this field?

#### Background and career path:

- What is the typical career path in this field?
- How did you come to work in your present job?



## Informational Interviews, cont....

- What kind of education and training did you pursue before you started your career? Does the work you do now relate to what you studied?
- What part of your college experience best prepared you for your job now?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?

### Preparation, skills, and strategies:

- What advice would you give to someone starting in this field?
- What kind of personality traits do you think are most helpful to be successful in this field?
- Are there any professional organizations you recommend I join?
- What strategies work best for job hunting in this field?

### Company/Organization—what's it like to work here?

- How do you describe the culture at your organization?
- How does your organization differ from its competitors?
- What is work-life balance like for most people here?

### Possible final questions:

- What advice do you have for someone who wants to get into this field?
- What actions should I take now to set myself up for getting a job when I graduate?
- Is there anyone else you can recommend I speak with to learn more?
- Are there any books, media sources, blogs, Twitter feeds, and the like you would recommend to someone who wants to stay in the loop in this industry/field?

I conducted tons of informational interviews when I was a student and young alum, and now I'm often the one being interviewed. And here's the thing: If someone impresses me, I'll go out of my way to help that person find a job or connect them with other people I know. If that person doesn't seem to take the informational interview seriously, I usually end it early...

—Lindsay Pollack, career expert and author of *Getting from College to Career*



## Informational Interviews, cont....

### During the Informational Interview

- **Be on time!** It shows that you respect the fact that your interviewee is making time for you. This is the case whether the interview is in person or by phone.
- **If the person you're interviewing has never met you,** introduce yourself and explain why you want to interview them. You can also give the brief version of your elevator pitch so they know a little bit about you.
- **Bring a notepad and pen** to take notes. You can bring a copy of your resume, but don't offer it unless the interviewee asks to see it. You can also bring business cards but only offer one if you get the sense that it's appropriate.
- **Pay careful attention** to what the person says and show that you're listening. Repeat some of what your interviewee shares with you and jot down notes. Ask questions when something isn't clear.

### After the Informational Interview

Send a thank you email within 24 hours. It's another key way to show your appreciation. The sooner you send a thank you, the more likely you'll be to stay on the person's radar. If they offered you advice, mention that you will follow up on their suggestions in your note. That will make them feel as if they really helped you. For example maybe they suggested someone else to contact or a book to read.

If the person is on LinkedIn, send them a personalized request to connect in which you thank them again for their time.

### Finding More People to Interview

Other resources for informational interviews include:

- Your University/College's Alumni Directory. Ask the alumni office at your school how to access a list of alumni.
- Faculty members/professors. If you have a professor or advisor you're close to, ask them if they know anyone you might speak with.



## Informational Interviews, cont....

- Professional organizations. Organizations exist in every occupational field, and some have discount memberships for students and lists of members you might connect with by email.
- Workshops and conferences. If you attend events in your career interest, ask if you can contact any presenters.
- Online networking. Once you have a LinkedIn or other professional online network account, reach out to your contacts for referrals and suggestions.
- Web and print articles. If you read professional magazines, blogs, newsletters, or other publications, you can see who is knowledgeable and active in your field.