

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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## AT A GLANCE

## HOW CAN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW HELP YOU?

Informational interviews give you an opportunity to **gather first-hand information about career fields** you are considering and to expand your network of professional contacts. You always want to go into this type of interview knowing what you want to accomplish. You are in the “driver’s seat” and are in control of the structure of the interview. For example:

- If you’re researching careers, you’ll learn a lot from a professional in the field. In an informational interview, you will get advice about a profession or industry and subtle signals about work environments that you will never read about in a book.
- If you’re searching for a job, talking to professionals will help you expand your network. You can investigate an organization, get valuable advice about entering and advancing in a field, and get ideas for locating contacts and job leads within the profession.

**Note:** *An informational interview is to request information, not a time for you to request job listings or interview for a job. If the interview turns into a discussion about your job search and resume, then allow the interviewee to guide that discussion.*

## HOW DO I INITIATE CONTACT?

**Sending an email is preferred**, but you can also call. Introduce yourself as a college student, explain how you got the person’s name, express your interests in his or her career field, and ask if you can meet for 20-30 minutes. For example:

*Dear Mr. Sano,*

*My name is Robert Moore. I’m an Economics major at DeSales University researching a possible career in finance. I was given your name by my professor Dr. Smith. If you have time, I would like to meet with you for 30 minutes to discuss your field. If you’re unable to meet, perhaps you could suggest a co-worker or someone else I could contact. I truly appreciate your time and consideration.*

*Sincerely,  
Robert Moore*

You should rearrange your schedule to accommodate your interviewee. Although you can also request a phone or Skype interview (if the person does not live nearby), meeting in person best prepares you for future professional interactions, lets you see their workplace, makes a more significant impression on the professional than the telephone, and opens the door to a longer observational visit (job shadowing/externship).

## BEFORE THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Informational interviewing **should supplement what you have already learned**, not a starting point for your career research. The week before the informational interview, consult the Career Resources or Online Resources on the Career Development website, to research the nature of the career, the required education and training, and other basic facts. The day of the informational interview, be sure to dress appropriately; if you have questions about the standard dress for the occupation, feel free to ask when you arrange the interview. Arrive early and don’t forget your list of questions.



## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

In preparation for your meeting, develop a list of topics to discuss. Informational interview questions typically fall into several different categories:

### Requirements and Experience

- How did you get started in this field? Is that typical for most people?
- Describe a typical week. Would these duties be the same for anyone with your job title?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important for success in this job?

### Environment

- How would you describe the professional climate in your office? In your industry?
- What portions of your job involve interaction with coworkers, clients, or vendors?
- How much evening, weekend, or overtime work is required? What about traveling?

### Benefits and Challenges

- What are the greatest rewards of your work?
- What are the greatest frustrations? How do you deal with them?
- On what basis are professionals in your field evaluated? How is success measured?
- What is the starting salary range for new professionals in this field? (**DO NOT ask for their salary**)

### Outlook

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?
- How is the field likely to be affected by changes in technology?

### Advice

- What kind of education or specialized training would best prepare me to do this kind of work?
- What classes can I take or projects can I complete that will also be helpful?
- Are there any professional organizations that would help me to build my network in this field?
- How do people find out about job openings in your line of work?
- Where do people in this field typically look for internship and job opportunities?

### **BEST CLOSING QUESTION? Make the interview open doors for you and your career!**

- Would you be able to refer me to others in this organization with whom I might be able to speak?

## DURING THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Introduce yourself and thank them for the opportunity to meet with you. During the interview, **listen carefully and take notes.** Observe the work environment, the people who work there, and their daily routine. When you are wrapping up and getting ready to leave, be sure to ask for a business card!

## AFTER THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Evaluate the information you received. **How does it relate to your goals?** Furthermore, evaluate your interview. **What could you improve upon?** Use what you have learned from this experience when you conduct future interviews. *Always* send a thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview. They are essential for maintaining contact with people who have assisted you and creating your own network of people in the field. Gently remind interviewees who you are and when you met. Thank them for their time and mention aspects of the interview that were particularly helpful. Remember that they can continue to serve as resources throughout your career. Keep a file system or excel spreadsheet to track their contacts, follow-ups, and thank you letters.

## DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ROADTRIP NATION?

Roadtrip Nation has a **great archive of informational interviews** that they gather over the years. These stories include people who have pushed through roadblocks to create livelihoods around their interests and talents ranging from CEO's of big companies to costume designers, magazine writers, biologists, chocolatiers, and beyond. Viewing the interviews will enable you to come away with a broader perspective of the world and view of your own career future. You can choose how you want to use the archive.

### Go to: [roadtripnation.com](http://roadtripnation.com)

- Click on **Create Account** and enter the requested information (write down your username and password)
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