

Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are intentional conversations with a professional who is working in a career field or job of interest. The process from beginning to end should be undertaken with the utmost care and professionalism as you pursue learning from their career journey.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why should I do informational interviews?

It is a great way to build professional relationships while learning about:

- What a typical week looks like
- An organization's culture, reputation, and structure
- Challenges on the job
- Skill sets, classes, experiences, or resume tips that will help you gain a foot in the door for a future opportunity

Where do informational interviews take place?

Many informational interviews occur in person at a coffee shop or the interviewee's place of employment that both parties agree upon in advance. When an in-person meeting cannot be arranged phone calls, Skype, or email correspondence works, too.

Who guides the conversation?

You do. Be sure to bring a list of 8-10 questions to ask throughout the interview.

Can I directly ask for a job or internship?

No. Remember, this conversation is primarily about expanding your network and learning about other people's career paths. Although an informational interview may result in an offer, these are initiated by the professional and not the student.

How long is an informational interview?

Typically between 20-45 minutes. Establish your timeframe beforehand so that you and the professional are on the same page. If applicable, include time zones for Skype or phone calls.

Remember...

Puget Sound alumni, and other professionals, have been in your shoes. They remember what it was like to be starting out. When they agree to an informational interview, it's because they want to support your career development—they *enjoy* sharing their story and offering you advice!



How can I find professionals to interview?

These are excellent ways to start looking:

- Utilize LinkedIn's "Find Alumni" function and groups such as University of Puget Sound ASK (Alumni Sharing Knowledge)
- Participate in CES networking events such as ASK Night or programs like Take a Logger to Work
- Attend local interest groups or meetups, or regional and national conferences

I found a few people I would like to talk with. How should I invite them to meet with me?

Always craft a professional message to your recipient by including...

- A brief introduction of yourself
- How you found their contact information and what interests you about them
- A request to set up an informational interview to learn more about X, Y, and Z
- A meeting location that is convenient for them (such as a coffee house close to their work)

What should I wear?

Dress like this meeting matters! Business casual is usually a good standard [*trousers or skirt, and a wrinkle-free shirt or blouse are recommended*].

The interview went great! Now what?

Be sure to send a thank you note within 24 hours. Keep in touch from time-to-time to maintain the relationship. People who provided assistance want to celebrate your career success.

Before the meeting:

- Research the person, industry, and the organization before you ask for an informational interview.
- Prepare questions in advance, but make sure to genuinely connect with the person during your meeting.
- Bring copies of your resume. It's ok to ask for feedback on your resume from an industry professional, but refrain from handing them your resume for an opportunity unless they demonstrate interest in connecting you with a position.

During the meeting:

- Arrive 10-15 minutes before the agreed time.
- Tell them why you are interested in meeting with them and what you would like to learn.
- Ask open-ended yet pertinent questions and for referrals to other appropriate individuals in the field or in related organizations.
- Remember that you are here for information and not to ask for a job or internship.
- Take notes and ask for a business card from the person you are speaking with.

Getting the Conversation Started:

- First: "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me."
- Second, restate your purpose: "As I mentioned, on the phone [in my email], I am looking at different careers and gathering information and advice about the field of [...]. [Name] suggested I should contact you."

Making it Happen: Questions to Ask

To elicit helpful information, ask open-ended questions. Responses are more likely to be longer with greater detail. What other questions do you have? Add them to the list below.

- How did you break into your career and what has been your path to your current position?
- How has your major helped you in the workplace?
- How has your liberal arts education helped you as a professional?
- What previous roles prepared you for your current position?
- What is your favorite part of your role?
- What do you like about working for this organization?
- What are the most challenging and most rewarding aspects of your role?
- What is one thing that surprised you about your career?
- What is a common misconception people have about what you do?
- How is the work/life balance?
- What advice do you have for someone who'd like to enter this field?
- What kinds of professional development are offered by your employer?
- How did you build skill sets to advance in your career?
- Is there anything you would have told your college self to better prepare for your career?
- What are your main tasks or responsibilities at work?
- What does a typical week look like?
- What kind of education, training, or other preparation do you need to enter your career field?
- What advice do you have for an entry-level graduate starting their job search and getting their first job?
- What was the importance of networking in your field?
- What are advancement opportunities beyond an entry-level role?
- For your organization/industry, what social networks are relevant?
- Do you have any recommendations for other professionals in this field to contact?
- I'd like to stay in touch. May I reach out to you again or follow-up through LinkedIn?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Tips for Success

General

1. Send a confirmation email to your interviewee 24-48 hours in advance.
2. Triple-check spelling and grammar before you send any correspondence.
3. Spend time **researching** the organization, field, and interviewee to develop strong questions.

In Person

1. Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
2. Respect the professional's time. Stick to your agreed timeframe (ex. 30 minutes) and end the conversation politely once you meet that time.

Online

1. If this informational interview is happening over email, make sure your response is timely. Reply within 24-48 hours max.
2. If you're using video, test your technology and internet connection ahead of time.