

# Informational Interviewing

## What is informational interviewing?

Informational interviewing is an opportunity for you to talk with professionals working in a field, industry, or organization that you are interested in. The main purpose is for you to gather information and prepare for your career. Be mindful that it is not asking for a job, but simply learning more about your chosen career.

### 1. Make a List

**Identify a few contacts or leads** to ask for an informational interview. These can be people in your network, colleagues or associates of those in your network, Loyola alumni, or professionals you uncover through your research. Family members and friends may also know people you can reach out to.

### 2. Research Contacts

**Research the organizations and people** on your list through resources available such as CareerShift and Glassdoor, or through additional resources available online such as trade journals, LinkedIn, and Google.

### 3. Request a Meeting

**Compose a request for a meeting.** If the contact was recommended by someone in your network, mention that person's name if you have their permission to do so.

**State that you seek information** for support in your research process. Highlight one or two pieces of information you gathered about them or their organization that has piqued your interest. Propose that you only want 20 to 30 minutes of their time; if you can afford to, offer to take them for coffee, breakfast, or lunch, whatever is convenient for them.

**When emailing/calling, use professional business style:**

professional salutation, simple paragraphs, appropriate capitalization, a close with your full name, and no typos. Include your resume, so they can see where you are in the professional development process.

**Follow up.** If there is no response to your initial request for a meeting, call the person three to five business days after your initial email/call to confirm your interest and ask for the appointment. If they are able to meet, be sure to confirm

the time and location. If they are unable to meet, ask if they have a recommendation of someone else in the industry. Be sure to thank them for their time!

### 4. Prepare

**Develop a short, personal presentation.** This is often referred to as an elevator speech, which is a 30-second introduction you would make to someone who could be important in your job search process. Highlight experiences, talents, developed skills, and interests that support your career path. Approach this the same way you would prepare for the "Why should we hire you?" question.

**Practice your presentation** so you sound natural, not rehearsed. Be ready to answer other regularly asked interview questions, in case the contact develops an interest in you and your path.

**Use your research to prepare a list of questions** to ask at the meeting.

## Informational interviewing can help you:

- Explore career options and clarify your career goals
- Glimpse the realities of working in a particular occupation
- Gather the information you need to choose or refine a career path
- Learn how to break into a field and to find out if you have the skills and qualifications to succeed
- Build confidence in your networking and interviewing skills
- Expand your network of professional contacts
- Discover employment opportunities that are not advertised
- Find career opportunities that may not have been advertised in traditional media

## 5. Make a Good Impression

While this is only an informational appointment, give it the same respect you would give an interview. Practice your handshake, direct eye contact, and listening skills. Dress nicely to ensure a strong first impression is made.

If you meet at their office, they become the host. However, if you meet at some neutral location, you are the host.

**Know your business etiquette for professional events.**

**Bring your research with you** to refer to in your discussion. If you have samples of work (*design, writing, analysis, or other projects and examples*), bring them in a professional portfolio. Do not go through the portfolio item by item; rather point out certain highlights that supplement your conversation or demonstrate answers to their questions. Bring a notepad to write down ideas, suggestions, items for follow-up, and leads. Have a pen at hand, as well as your calendar and extra copies of your resume on quality, resume paper.

### Business Etiquette: Things to Know

- You need to arrive early to greet your guest.
- You are responsible for the agenda and the flow of conversation.
- You are responsible for keeping the meeting to the agreed upon time.
- You are responsible for the bill, although some contacts may insist on paying; politely remind them that you invited them and would like to pay. If they continue to insist, because you are a student or recent graduate, thank them and do not push any further.
- Thank them for their time and information.

## 6. Do Not Ask for a Job

This is important. When you made the appointment, you said you were looking for information only; keep to your word. If you have made a positive impression and an opportunity exists at the organization for which you would be a good fit, the professional will be savvy enough to start that conversation. Hiring good people is a struggle, and they will not let a good candidate get away. But this is their move; not yours.

It is acceptable to ask questions about the best way to apply at the organization one day in the future, best times to apply, and the appropriate person to whom you should address a cover letter and resume. Start the questions with "If I were to pursue a career at XYZ organization after I graduate, who, how or what ..."

## 7. Make the Interview Work for You

Chances are, once a professional has invested time in an informational interview with you, they will want to hear from you again with updates on your success. Ask for their business card before the appointment is finished, and, as soon as you arrive home, add their information to your address book or contact management system.

**Write a personalized thank you note** as soon as possible. Refer to the CDC's handout *The Power of Thank You Notes* for some pointers. Also be sure to complete any follow-up that you discussed.

**Send a brief e-mail** with a quick update on your activities two to three weeks later, whether it is interesting interviews or new projects you are working on in school. Thank them again for the valuable direction they gave you and how you are using their advice. From time to time, send another e-mail with updates.

**Connect on LinkedIn** and interact with them through liking posts, commenting on statuses, and occasionally messaging them to further bolster the relationship.

This person has now become an active member of your network; nurture the relationship and think of ways to become a benefit to them, as well.

# What Do I Say?

## SAMPLE PHONE CALL LANGUAGE:

### **Underclassmen:**

*"Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I am a student at Loyola University New Orleans. Is this a good time for you to talk? [Name of contact], a graduate of Loyola University, said that you would be an excellent person to talk with to learn more about working in the \_\_\_\_ industry. I am a [school classification] and I am beginning to explore my options. I was hoping that you could help me to gain insight. Would you be willing and available to meet for about 20-30 minutes in the upcoming weeks?"*

### **Seniors:**

*"Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I am a [school classification] at Loyola University New Orleans. I will be graduating in May and I am researching career opportunities in the \_\_\_\_ industry. I was given your name by \_\_\_\_ and I am hoping that you might be available to spend 20-30 minutes with me to discuss your experiences in the field."*

## SAMPLE EMAIL COPY:

### **Underclassmen:**

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_:*

*I recently met with \_\_\_\_, who suggested that you might be willing to provide me with information about working in the \_\_\_\_ field. I am a current [classification] at Loyola University New Orleans and am pursuing a bachelor's degree in \_\_\_\_\_. As I continue in my studies and gathering information about future careers, I am looking to speak to professionals to learn more about the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I would greatly appreciate it if we could set up a 20-30 minute meeting at your convenience, to discuss \_\_\_\_, including your advice and suggestions on additional internships that may be helpful and applying to graduate schools in the coming year. I look forward to hearing from you.*

### **Seniors:**

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_:*

*I recently met with \_\_\_\_, who suggested that you might be willing to provide me with information about working in the \_\_\_\_ field. I am a current Senior from Loyola University New Orleans preparing to graduate next spring with a bachelor's in \_\_\_\_\_. Would you be willing to speak briefly with me for 20-30 minutes to discuss your experience at \_\_\_\_? Through some career exploration, I have confirmed that working in the \_\_\_\_ industry is consistent with my interests and abilities and I am hoping to learn more about \_\_\_\_ industry and job searching in \_\_\_\_ [city]. Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you soon.*

# QUESTIONS TO ASK

## Background:

- How did you get started in this field?
- How did you become interested in this occupation?
- Can you tell me about your career path?
- How did you prepare yourself for this work?

## About the Job:

- Why do you like working here, and what makes this organization different than its competitors?
- Tell me about your present job and some of the responsibilities.
- What does a typical day on the job look like for you?
- What kind of hours do you work?
- What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary work week?
- What skills or talents are most essential for effectiveness in this job?
- What do you find most rewarding about your job?
- What are some of the more difficult or frustrating parts of this job?
- I read that \_\_\_\_\_ is an issue in this occupation. Have you found that to be true?

## Job Search/Hiring

- What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
- How do most people find out about jobs within this field? Are there specific websites you would suggest?
- How much do wages or salaries vary in your work by employer or region?
- If you hired someone to work with you, what factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why?

## Preparation & Training:

- How well suited is my background for this type of work?
- What tips and strategies would you recommend for someone trying to break into this field?
- What credentials, degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this field?
- What kinds of skills and experiences are absolutely essential to success in this field?
- What courses were of most use to you, or would you recommend for students today?
- What graduate degree or special certifications should I pursue to differentiate myself in this field?

## Career Future

- If things develop as you'd like, what would be the next steps in your career?
- If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel that you could do? How rapidly is your present career field growing? How would you describe or estimate future prospects?
- Do you anticipate developments in the field that will affect future opportunities?

## Information & Resources

- What are the best informational resources for conducting research on this field?
- Now that you know a little bit more about my interests, can you suggest anyone else I should speak with as I continue to gather information? May I have your permission to use your name when I call or contact them?