



Informational Interviews

An informational interview is simply a conversation you schedule with someone to get information from them. You may schedule this meeting because someone works at or used to work at a company you're interested. You may also schedule this meeting if you are interested in a new industry or a complete career change.

I prefer you think of the informational interview as simply a conversation – you are having a conversation with someone to elicit information. They are not interviewing you and you are not asking them for a job. Never imply that you want anything more than just their information. However, at the end of your meeting you can ask to network with them later, especially by connecting with them on LinkedIn.

If you approach the individual with whom you would like to meet with a request for guidance (how to position yourself in the market, what changes are happening in the industry, etc.) they are much more apt to say 'yes' to meeting with you. Make sure you do your homework/research on the person you're targeting.

Because your informational meetings are typically structured where you are asking the questions, you must be prepared with the questions you want to ask. Below are some examples of the questions you can ask. Not all of these will be appropriate for your situation or the person you're talking to – use the ones that fit for you, your goals and what you are most interested in learning and disregard the rest.

Another note regarding the questions you ask: ask open-ended questions (not 'yes' or 'no' questions) that will facilitate a fruitful conversation.

The questions you'll ask typically fall into 3 different categories:

- Questions about the organization/division/department
- Questions about the profession/career field
- Questions about the person you're interviewing

The questions are categorized into these categories and I've included a few others for different situations.

Organization/Division/Department Questions

- How would you describe the overall mission and goals of your org/div/dept.?
- What are the challenges facing your org/div/dept.?

- What are the key strategic initiatives?
- What priority projects or services are planned/being worked on?
- What's important to your internal and/or external clients?
- Where do you see growth occurring?
- How would you describe the management style of the organization?
- Is there a more busy time in your org/div/dept.?

Job/Role Questions

- What skills and knowledge are most critical?
- What personal characteristics contribute to success in your org/div/dept.?
- What advice would you give someone interested in this role in order to be successful?

Interviewee Specific Questions

- Why did you pick this type of work?/How did you get into this type of work?
- How did you get the position you have/had?
- What keeps you there?/Why did you leave?
- How did you get hired at _____?
- What did you do/are you doing to make yourself marketable?
- How do you like working at _____?
- What do/did you like about the organization?
- What do you like most/least about your work?
- What types of problems do you solve?
- What is the most challenging part of your role?
- What trends do you see for your profession/the industry?
- How do you see your role changing in the future?
- What specific advice would you give a person who is interested in _____?
- What do you think it takes to be successful at _____?
- What type of professional development would you recommend?

Questions for Networking Contacts Who Know You (Fairly) Well

Start with saying something like:

"As you know, I'm currently considering new career opportunities - I'm just in the exploratory stages of this process and I'm wondering, would you mind answering a few questions about where you see my potential next steps?"

Then ask any of these that fit for you and your situation:

- Knowing what you do about me and my background, what do you see as my strengths?
- Given those strengths, what type of roles do you think I'm best suited for?
- Can you think of other career paths I should explore?
- What industries do you think I should target?
- Can you think of any companies that might be interested in hiring someone with my background?
- Do you know of any specific professional associations or networking events I should join/attend?
- Do you have a recommendation for a great recruiter I should contact?
- Is there anyone else you recommend I talk with? When I contact this person, may I use your name?
- Is there anything else you can think of that I need to know or investigate?

Questions for Recruiters

- What types of companies do you work with?
- What types of roles do you typically place?
- Are you usually exclusively retained by the employers you work with?
- What trends are you seeing in your field/niche?
- What would it take to earn an opportunity to be considered by you for your positions?
- What do I need to do to be the most marketable candidate you have?
- How do you prefer I stay in touch with you?

Closing the Conversation

At the end of each conversation, thank them for their input and highlight some things that stood out for you. Make sure you give them your networking card and ask for one of their cards. Always ask "Can you suggest anyone else I should be talking to?" Tell them if they think of anything else in the next few days/weeks, don't hesitate to contact you and then ask: *"How I can I support you?"*

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