



THE WHO, WHAT, WHY AND HOW OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

(INCLUDING SCRIPTED QUESTIONS AND EMAIL TEMPLATES)





WHAT

Informational interviews are a powerful tool to learn accurate and current information about possible careers or companies you are interested in. Informational meetings are an opportunity for you to ask questions or 'interview' someone who is working in a job you find interesting so you can learn first-hand information about that career. This realistic preview of a career that is of interest to you can help you decide if the area is one you want to pursue and can increase your confidence in making college and career decisions.





WHY

There are a few great reasons why informational interviews are so valuable.



Gain information to evaluate careers and companies of interest

I don't know of any other way, other than maybe internships, to confirm your interest in a career field (or to discover it's not a great match for you) than meeting with people who are currently doing the job. The first-hand information they can share about what their career or the company is really like is often so much more valuable than all of the information in books or online. Each person you meet with helps you further clarify your career goals.



Grow your network of contacts in your area of interest

Each person you do an informational interview with is one more person you get to add to your network. If you meet with 5 people in your career area of interest, you now have 5 people you can stay in touch with who might have future opportunities for you, or who might know people who have opportunities. Since informational interviews are done without asking for an actual job, you are able to focus on creating a great relationship. Then when it comes time to ask for help with your job search, each person you meet with can refer you to others to talk with, continuing to grow your network.

Build your confidence in interviews and professional meetings



When you go for actual job interviews, you'll wish you'd had a way to practice your interactions in a professional setting more – this is the way to get that practice. Informational interviews put you in a professional setting with someone who works at a company of interest – so you'll be basically practicing a lot of the key parts of a real interview and will be much more prepared for actual job interviews.



Gather real-world job search advice

During informational interviews, you're going to gather a lot of wisdom and great advice about your job search in general. It's likely these professionals you meet with will provide some amazing tips to add to your knowledge of how to search for jobs. You'll also become better aware of how these companies hire, the best way to get your foot in the door and insider information about what it takes to get hired.

Increase your knowledge of your areas of interest

When you talk to people actually doing the types of jobs you're interested in you'll gain first-hand and current information. This sort of information is a great compliment to your academic studies. The industry terminology and lingo you'll be exposed to you will give you real-world insights into career areas, allowing you to excel in real job interviews because you appear more knowledgeable than those who haven't spent time with industry professionals. It's a case of the 'street smarts' about a career area and not just 'book smarts.'





WHO

To decide who to set up informational interviews with, begin by making a list of the companies you'd love to work at and of job titles or positions you'd be interested in. Now you need to find a way to get an introduction to these types of people. Once you decide on the companies and job titles, become obsessed with finding someone who can make a connection for you. If you really exhaust all of your relationships and stay focused, you'll eventually find people who know people they can connect you to.



Consider all of the groups below as people you might meet with or who you can ask to connect you with people they know for informational meetings. Your family, friends, friends of parents, parents of friends, neighbors, classmates, current or former co-workers or managers are all great people to help you find possible connections.



Alumni from your High School and College are a great resource to connect with to set up informational interviews.

Professional Organizations are groups where professionals in the same career area come together to discuss industry trends and to network. Organizations or associations usually enjoy helping students out with career related information.

LinkedIn is a great resource for finding people to connect with. If you're looking people up on LinkedIn, ideally find people who you have a connection with> This could be someone who went to your same college, or has a shared connection, or someone in the same group. Something in common will make it more likely that they'll accept your invitation to meet.



Social Media can be helpful for finding people to meet with. I've seen parents be successful in helping to make connections for their students by posting messages on their Facebook pages like 'my son/daughter is hoping to meet with someone in the {insert career area} to learn more about the field and industry - please let me know if you can connect us with anyone for a brief meeting'.



HOW

The key to the informational interview process is going in with the intention of building a strong relationship, making a great impression, and being the one who is doing the work and making this very easy for the person you are meeting with. Remember that you are taking time away from their work – so show your appreciation and make it easy for them and be sure they know how much they’ve helped you. Another critical thing is to never ask for a job – you should always make it clear you are gathering information and exploring – and if things go really well in the actual meeting, you can end by saying that if an opportunity does come up you’d love to be considered. And in your follow-up email you’ll mention this too.





When reaching out to invite someone for an informational interview, you want to send a very professional email that is short and clear about what you are asking for. Here are the key parts of the email you should include:

The Ask - be clear that you are asking for their time and that the intention of the meeting is to help you gain more exposure to careers of interest and gather information about companies.

Share A Little of Your Background - briefly tell them about your experiences/education and areas of interest

Why they should connect with you - here is where you want to share why this career is interesting to you, or maybe what you admire about their career path, or you can mention a shared connection that you have (someone in common that you know, alumni from the same school). You want to personalize the request so they feel flattered that you've chosen them to meet with.



Next Step - make it very easy for them to say YES! Provide ideas for times to meet and where, and keep the meeting short - 45 minutes to 1 hour at most.



If you don't hear back from your initial email, be persistent and check back in after one week. Remember, people are busy and a gentle reminder about your interest in meeting will likely only further demonstrate your interest and impress the person you are trying to connect with.

Below is a sample email you can use.



Dear Mr. Jones,

I am a junior at the University of XXX pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Human Resources. I was given your name by XXX who suggested I contact you to set up an informational interview because of the innovative work you are doing in the field of Human Resources and specifically within the area of Training & Development.

I'm currently exploring Human Resources career options and have been particularly interested in the field of Training & Development because I enjoy facilitating groups and sharing information with others. When I mentioned my area of interest to XXX they said that I had to meet you because they know you are so passionate about this area.

I'd love to arrange a time to hear your perspective on the field of Human Resources and to learn more about what it's like to work at your company. Please let me know if there are times available in your schedule in the next 2 weeks where we can meet. I'm happy to come to your office or a location convenient for you. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

XXXX

Your phone# and email address



BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

In advance of the meeting you'll want to research the company and the person you're meeting with. Look the person up on LinkedIn and learn all you can about their background, this will show them that you are serious about the meeting and not asking questions that you can find the answers to online. Just like for an actual job interview you'll want to dress professional, bring an updated resume, and plan to take notes. You'll also want to be prepared to talk about yourself and your background and interests.





DURING THE INTERVIEW

Here are some suggested informational interview questions. You don't want to ask all of these, but be sure to study these well so that you can make sure you get the information you need from your meeting.



- >> How did you get your start in this field? Tell me more about your background, your education/degree and previous experiences (be sure to research the person you are meeting with on LinkedIn in advance so you already have an idea of this and can share the parts you know).
- >> How did you get your job with this company?
- >> Tell me about your job. What are your main duties/functions/responsibilities?
- >> Can you tell me what a typical day looks like for you? How many meetings, how much computer work, how much people interaction? Fast-paced, slow-paced.



>> What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?

>> Why did you decide to work for this company? What do you like most about working here?

>> How do most people get their start in this career? What college major or education path do they focus in? What type of entry level positions are good to consider?



>> What other types of jobs can you get with the same/similar background?

>> Does your company hire people for your type of job in entry level positions? Do they hire new college graduates or interns for these types of roles?

>> My strongest skills are XX and XX and XX and I'm very interested in working on XX and XX. Do you think these things would make me a good fit for this type of role? (This is a great thing to have ready to share your interests and strengths to see if they think the role is a good fit, or if they have other suggestions for you on careers that might be a fit.)



>> How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field? (You can share your resume to give them more information about your background.)

>> What experiences, skills, or personality traits does your company look for in new hires?

>> Do you have any job search advice for me? Is there anything you know now that you wish you would have known about career-related information at my age that you can share with me?

>> What other companies would you recommend I look into?

>> Could you recommend any other people for me to speak with to learn more about this type of role?



AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Your follow-up after the informational interview is really where you have the opportunity to add this person to your network for the long-term. It's critical to follow-up or you'll miss the chance to create a relationship with this person that could lead to future opportunities.

Here are key steps for your follow-up:



Send a follow-up email thanking them within 24 hours of the meeting. Within the email thank them for their time and mention something specific that you learned from the meeting, or that was interesting to you, or that you'll be following up on. You really want to show them how the time they gave you made an impact for you. In the email, ask them to keep you in mind if they do hear of any opportunities or if they know of anyone else they think you should meet with. It's also great to let them know that you'd love to help them if they ever need anything. If you have specific areas you think you can help with - mention those.



Assuming the interview went well, invite them to connect on LinkedIn and you will have an easy way to keep in touch. Make a note on your calendar to check-in every few months with an email update on how you're doing, send them an article that they might find interesting - continue to nurture the relationship as this person could be a very valuable resource down the line.



After the interview be sure to reflect on your conversation and review your notes to consider if the job or company seems like a good fit for you. Keep all this information together in one place so you can easily reference it later.

I always recommend that students try to do a few informational interviews each year - you can pretty easily do 2 each school year and 2 each summer. Just meeting with 4 people every year of college will provide invaluable information about career paths and companies of interest and will yield an incredible network of people excited to help you land your dream internships/grad job.



YOUTH CAREER COMPASS

You can learn more about Youth Career Compass at

<http://www.youthcareercompass.com>

