

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

## WHAT'S AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

It is a conversation designed to produce information. They provide an opportunity to expand your network and learn more about a company, career path or what you can do with your degree. Whether you are looking to explore career paths, finalize career choices or decide which organizations to apply to, no print or online resource can give you such personalized information.

## BENEFITS OF AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- Develop insights into the skills and attributes needed to be successful.
- Learn about exciting new industries and career options.
- Learn how other graduates with your degree have used their academic training in a real work setting.
- Expand your professional network.
- Get an inside edge on job leads within the organization.
- Improve your communication skills.



## SETTING UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

When you request informational interviews, you can email or call. Or, consider an email followed up by a phone call. Phone calls can feel more intimidating than emails, so practice what you'll say before the call.

When you call or email, be clear on:

- Who you are (student or recent graduate)
- What you are seeking (advice, industry information, suggestions to make more informed career decisions, etc.)
- How much time you need (15–20 minutes) and if you are requesting a phone or an in-person meeting.
- Who referred you (if applicable) and the reasons for wanting to connect with this person in particular

When you call, make sure you:

- Have your resume with you, in case you're asked to provide more detail about your background.
- Have your list of questions, in case the person you are calling prefers to speak right away rather than schedule a meeting, and a pen and paper so you can jot down notes.
- Are prepared for voice mail. You can leave a quick message stating why you're calling, how the person can reach you if they have the time to return your call and when you'll try contacting the person again.

## SHOULD YOU BRING YOUR RESUME?

**Pros:** You can get industry-specific feedback on your resume, and you can quickly give your interviewee an overview of your skills and experience.



**Cons:** Your interviewee may feel that you're trying to use the informational interview as a job interview, so make sure that you ask only for advice about your resume. Don't ask your interviewee to keep your resume or to pass it on to anyone. Your best bet is to focus on building a professional relationship and wait on showing them your resume unless they bring it up.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Make the most of the informational interview by researching in advance the profession you're investigating and the company you're visiting. Identify your goals for the meeting.

- Connect to 600+ mentors on the [McMaster Alumni and Partners Network](#).
- Research occupations using [Career Cruising](#).
- Access professionals on LinkedIn to research your questions about career and educational paths and identify key issues in your field. Research how people in your careers of interest got their start. Post questions on professional organization discussion boards: [search McMaster alumni](#).

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

Through your research, identify thoughtful questions you will ask, keeping in mind the amount of time requested.

### ABOUT THEM

- How did you get into this field?
- How has the field changed since you started?
- What advice do you have for someone starting out in this work?
- If you weren't doing this job, what other work would your skills and experience qualify you for?
- What motivates you about this work? What excites you most about your job?

### ABOUT THE JOB

- What is a typical day like in this job?
- What are the key competencies required to be successful in this line of work?
- What do you find most challenging?

### ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

- What is the employment outlook for this industry?
- Is there a shortage of skilled people in this field?
- What are some of the trends you have noticed over the years?
- Are there opportunities for self-employment in this field?

### ABOUT THE COMPANY

- What made you decide to choose this company?
- What does this company do differently than its competitors?
- Why do customers choose this company over others?
- What is the culture like in this company?



## SKILLS, EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

- What could I do to make myself a successful candidate for a role in this organization or industry?
- What is the ideal educational path for someone in this position?
- If I'm willing to get that training at some point, but I want to get involved in this field right away to test out whether it's a good fit, where would I start?
- Would you feel comfortable giving me some feedback on my resume? How can I market myself more effectively?
- Given my skills in X, Y and Z, what other types of roles do you think I should consider?

## MORE INFORMATION

- What professional journals, organizations or websites do you recommend?
- Who else would you recommend I speak with? What information might they be able to share with me? May I use your name when I contact them?

## FOLLOW-UP THANK YOU

After conducting an informational interview, follow up with a thank you note to let your contact know their advice or referrals helped you. This will give the impression that you are professional and committed to career planning.

- Send a thank-you note through email or LinkedIn within 24 hours of your networking connection.
- Recall key takeaways from your conversation.
- Send a contact request on LinkedIn and be intentional about opportunities to stay connected.

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### Sample Thank You Letter:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for the time you spent with me on \_\_\_\_\_. I found your insights on \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ very interesting. I also contacted \_\_\_\_\_ as you suggested, and we are meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss some current opportunities with this organization.

Thank you again for your time and interest in my career. I look forward to one day returning your generosity.

Sincerely,  
MAC Student  
Contact Information (phone number, Personalized LinkedIn URL)

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## RESOURCES MENTIONED

McMaster Alumni and Partners Network: <https://mcmaster.firsthand.co/>  
Career Cruising: <https://library.mcmaster.ca/databases/career-cruising>  
Search McMaster alumni: <http://linkedin.com/alumni>

