Networking and Informational Interviews

What are informational interviews?

An informational interview is a conversation that’s 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 want to explore career paths, finalize career choices or decide which organizations to apply to, an informational interview is often the best way to get started.

Benefits

- Develop insights about the skills and attributes you need to succeed in a particular role or field.
- 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 advantage by learning about potential 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 by a phone call. Phone calls can feel more intimidating than emails, so practice what you’ll say before you call. When you call or email, be clear on…

- Who you are (student or recent graduate)
- What you’re searching for (advice, industry information, suggestions to make more informed career decisions)
- How much time you need (15–20 minutes is standard), and if you’re requesting a phone or in-person meeting
- Who referred you (if applicable) and the reasons you want to connect

When you call…

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

Should you bring your resume?

Let’s weigh the pros and cons.
**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 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 with more than 600 mentors on the McMaster Alumni and Partners Advisor Network.
- Research occupations using Career Cruising.
- Connect with professionals on LinkedIn to research career and educational paths and identify key issues in your field of interest. Research how people in your career of interest got their start. Post questions on professional organization discussion boards. Search McMaster alumni. Join the SSC Career and Employment LinkedIn group.

**Questions to ask**

Through your research, identify thoughtful questions to ask, keeping in mind the amount of time you 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 in this work?
- If you weren’t doing this job, what other work would you consider based on your skills and experience?
- What motivates you about this work? What excites you most about your job?

**About the job**

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

**About the industry**

- What’s 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 workplace culture like in this company?

Skills, experience and education

• What could I do to make myself a successful candidate for this organization or industry?
• What’s the ideal educational path for someone in this position?
• If I’m willing to get 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 should I consider?

More information

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

Saying 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 shows them that you’re professional and committed to career planning.

• Send a thank-you note through email, LinkedIn or mail 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 in contact.
Sample thank-you letter

Dear ____ [name],

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

Thank you again for your time and interest in my career. I hope to return your generosity one day.

Sincerely,

____ [name]
____ [contact information: phone number, personalized LinkedIn URL]