

# PROFESSIONAL

## NETWORKING: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

### WHAT ARE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

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. **Keep in mind, they are NOT job interviews!**

### BENEFITS OF AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

#### Direct Benefits:

- Gain knowledge of what you could do in a particular occupation
- 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



#### Indirect Benefits:

- Get an inside edge on job leads within the organization
- Utilize your expanded network in your job search
- Improve your communication skills

### SETTING UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

When you request informational interviews, phone calls are often more effective than emails. But calls can feel more intimidating than emails, so practice what you'll say before you call. Be clear on:

- Who you are (student or recent graduate)
- What you are looking for (advice, industry information, suggestions to make more informed career decisions)
- How much time you need (15-20 minutes)
- Who referred you and the reasons for wanting to speak 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; your list of questions, in case the person you're calling prefers to speak right away rather than schedule a meeting; and a pen and paper so you can jot down notes.

Be 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 reaching the person again. When sending an email, write in a professional manner.

# PROFESSIONAL

---

## 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**: [mcmaster.evisors.com](http://mcmaster.evisors.com)
- Research occupations using Career Cruising. Student access: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/tools/career-cruising/>. Alumni access in our resource area (Gilmour Hall 110) or through public libraries online resources.
- ACE Links: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/tools/ace-links/>, click on "Career Information" to get started.
- Access professionals on **LinkedIn** to research your questions about career and educational paths and identify key issues in your field of interest. Research how people in your careers of interest got their start. Post questions on professional organization discussion boards. Tip: Search McMaster alumni | My Network | Find Alumni

**Note:** There are pros and cons to bringing your resume to an informational interview. On the pro side, you can get industry-specific feedback on your resume, and you can quickly give your interviewee an overview of your skills and experience. On the con side, 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. If the person you're interviewing offers to hang on to your resume, thank them, let them know when you plan to be on the job market, and offer to send them an updated resume at that time.

## FOLLOW-UP THANK YOU

After conducting an informational interview, follow-up with a thank you letter 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 Letter 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 touch, be reciprocal.

## 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 his organization.

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

# PROFESSIONAL

---

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

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

Though 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 does a typical day look 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?
- Who are the most important people in this field today?
- 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?

### 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 want to get involved in this field right away to test out whether it's a good fit, where would I start looking to explore?
  
- Would you feel comfortable giving me some feedback on my resume? How can I market myself

# PROFESSIONAL

---

more effectively?

- Given my skills in X, Y and Z, what other types of work 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?

## NETWORK USING A CAREER STORY

What do you say when you're at an information session and are asked, "What interests you about our organization?" or you bump into a former professor who asks "What are you doing after convocation"? If your answer is vague, the other person won't have a clear idea about how to help you. If you provide too much information, your contact may lose interest. The career story you tell will help people make sense of your experience and remember what's most important about you.

There is no set formula for a career story. Keep in mind that you might have several stories: one that you use for potential employers and recruiters at career fairs and company information sessions, one you use with friends, one you use with current colleagues, one for family members. Your career story is about you, but it makes key information about you known to your target audiences. Here are some examples of what a career story might look like:

### SITUATION: JOB FAIR





I will be graduating in the spring with a double major in Science and Economics and want to apply my knowledge of chemistry and business at work. When I job shadowed pharmaceutical sales rep recently, the role and industry were both a great fit with my experience and education. I know your organization is a leader in the area of respiratory diseases, which I studied extensively during my thesis research. Can you tell me a bit more about your firm's new graduate training program?

### SITUATION: TALKING TO A FORMER PROFESSOR

Because I love working with ideas, I had planned on becoming a teacher, but after volunteering in a classroom, I understand that I enjoy gathering information more than I enjoy teaching it to large groups. I'm considering research options—either as a grad student or in industry, so at this point, I'm talking with people doing both to get a sense of what might make the most sense for me as a next step. Is there anyone you could recommend that I speak with? I promise that I won't ask them for a job—just for information about what they do.

### SITUATION: INFORMATION SESSION

I graduated from McMaster in December with an Honours English degree and have been working as an agent for a local real estate firm since that time. I was excited to learn more about your firm's expertise in real estate law and need for new talent with solid communication and critical thinking skills. My recent experience and educational background seem to be a great fit for the role. Could you tell me a bit more about your planned expansion?

    @MacSSC, #MacTalksCareers

Student Success Centre | GH 110 | [studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca](mailto:studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca)

Author/Reviewed By: Jillian Perkins-Marsh, Fall 2016

# PROFESSIONAL

---

## **SITUATION: FORMER EMPLOYER**

I recently read the news of your upcoming expansion in the Alumni News. It sounds like an exciting venture that has been years in the planning. I would love to get together for a coffee to learn more about the impact on the division.

## **SITUATION: FORMER EMPLOYER UNLIKELY TO BE HIRING**

I'm just about to complete my studies and know that you probably don't have opportunities in your organization right now. However, I was wondering if you'd let me take you out for a coffee in exchange for ten minutes of brainstorming. I'm hoping to draw on your grasp of the field to generate some new ideas about employers who might benefit from someone with my skills.

## **SITUATION: SPEAKING WITH A STRANGER OR AQUAINTANCE**

I'm in my second year of Kinesiology, and I'm thinking about training as a chiropractor afterwards. At the moment, I'm looking into what other professions would allow me a lot of one-on-one time with people and to work with people who are well in addition to those who are injured. This summer, I'm hoping for paid or volunteer work that will give me an idea of what's right for me.

## **SITUATION: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY**

This is the first meeting of the Canadian Public Relations Society that I've attended, and I am gaining so much relevant information. I'm still a student and haven't started working in the field yet—I want to make sure I'm a good fit for the industry. I enjoy establishing meaningful relationships with people, and I am very involved in my community. Would you have 15 minutes to share some of your insights into the industry in the next few weeks? I would love to hear an experienced professional's perspective on the industry's change and continuity over the past 10 years.



@MacSSC, #MacTalksCareers

Student Success Centre | GH 110 | [studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca](mailto:studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca)

Author/Reviewed By: Jillian Perkins-Marsh, Fall 2016

