

Informational Interviews

Career Development Center, Ventura College



Informational interviews are a great way to explore a career path or occupation by talking to people in the field. The purpose of an informational interview is to:

- Help you gain insight into what is required to be successful or advance in a career field
- Learn about the potential challenges or trends within a field or organization
- Gain information about the daily tasks and responsibilities of a particular occupation
- Expand your professional network and interact with professionals or role models in your field

Informational interviewing is different from other kinds of interviewing in some key respects:

- You select people with whom you wish to talk
- You initiate the meeting
- You are in charge, asking the questions, guiding the flow of information and the conversation

STEP 1: IDENTIFY CONTACTS TO INTERVIEW

Make a list of companies and job titles or occupations you are interested in. Then, identify people who work at those companies or in those roles. It is important to target people who are in an aspirational role but who aren't so high up that they won't have time to meet with you. For instance, you can probably learn more from a manager or director than a CEO, and they are likely easier to access.

It's also helpful to identify people you already have a connection with. Consider people who went to Ventura College, worked at the same company as you, were referred to you by a faculty or staff, or someone with whom you share another mutual connection. Use professional associations or online platforms like LinkedIn.com to identify contacts.

STEP 2: HOW DO YOU ASK FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Your email or phone call should clearly address why you're reaching out and include an easy-to-understand ask about the action you want the recipient to take. Here's a simple formula:

Start by Asking for Help

People often enjoy helping others, and if they are happy in their job or field they often like talking about their experience with new professionals. Start by saying "I'd love your help," or "I hope you'll be able to help me out...".

Be Specific & Be Considerate

Ask for something specific, and make it as easy for the person to say yes. Try something like, "I'd love to take you to a quick coffee so I can hear your perspective on this industry and what it's like to work at your company. I'll actually be in your area next week and would be happy to meet you wherever is convenient for you." Although an in-person interview is typically best, you can also offer to speak over the phone if it is more convenient for them.

Show your contact you are sensitive to being pulled away from work for an informational interview. Say something like, "I can only imagine how busy you must get, so even 15-20 minutes would be appreciated."

Have a Hook

A great way to increase your chance of landing the interview is to demonstrate specifically why you are reaching out to this person. Do you admire their career path? Do you think the work they do at their company stands out? Maybe you have a shared connection and they encouraged the connection. Take the time to personalize your request.

Make Sure You Don't Seem Like You're Looking for a Job (Even if You Are)

If you sound like you're really just looking for a job, your contact will likely push you to HR or the company's career page. Make it clear that you really want to learn about their career and perspective on the job or industry.

STEP 3: PREPARE A LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

It is important to brainstorm what information you would like to obtain during the informational interview. Be respectful of the agreed upon time for the interview and select an appropriate amount of questions (approx. 5). Don't forget: Be prepared to take notes at your informational interview!

Consider addressing some of the following questions in your informational interview:

- How did you get your start in this field?
- What's it like working at your company?
- What skills and experience have helped you be successful within your industry or organization?
- What is the most rewarding thing about working in this industry? The most challenging?
- My background is in X—how do you think I can best leverage my previous experience for this field?
- What do you wish you had done differently when you first started at your company?
- What job search advice would you give to someone early in their career or in my situation?
- Could you recommend a couple more people for me to speak with to learn more about this field?

STEP 4: FOLLOW UP WITH A THANK-YOU NOTE

It is important to show your gratitude to the individual you interviewed. Take a moment to send an email or hard copy thank-you note to show your appreciation for their time and career insights. Send your thank you note (paper or email) within 48 hours of your informational interview. Review the sample below.

Thank You Letter - Hard Copy Example:

Your Name
Your Phone Number
Your Email

Date

Name
Title, Organization
Address (City, State, Zip Code)

Tip:

If sending by email, omit this header content and begin with the salutation.

For the email subject, we suggest using "Your Name Informational Interview- Thank You"

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

Thank you for speaking with me today. Your insights were truly helpful and have confirmed my decision to gain additional work experience in the field before transferring to a university program.

I will regularly check the websites you suggested for job leads, and have already contacted the ABC professional association regarding membership.

I will follow up in the near future to let you know about my progress.

Thank you again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Signature

Your Name

Tip:

Signature only needed for hard copy letter.

For an email, include your name and contact information to conclude your email.