

Overview

Often the most current information about a career field, especially in a specific geographic location, may not be available online or in books. The best information comes from people who are actually working in that career field.



An **informational interview** is an informal conversation with someone working in an area that interests you who will give you information and advice. It is an effective research tool in addition to reading books, exploring the Internet and examining job descriptions. **It is not a job interview, and the objective is not to find job openings.**

You may feel awkward making arrangements to talk with people you don't know about their work. However, most people actually enjoy taking a few moments out of their day to reflect on their professional life and to give advice to someone with an interest in their field.

Real-Life Example: Finding a Person to Interview

A student developed an interest in marketing but wasn't sure how to find people in the field to talk to. She had worked as a clerk/typist in the payroll office of University Extension for several years.

She decided to talk over her career interests with her supervisor, who pointed out that Extension had a marketing department and that she'd be happy to introduce her to the director. This "right in your own back yard" referral led to a great informational interview and lots of other contacts.

Benefits of Informational Interviewing

- Get firsthand, relevant information about the realities of working within a particular field, industry or position. This kind of information is not always available online or in print.
- Find out about career paths you did not know existed.
- Get tips about how to prepare for and enter a given career.
- Learn what it's like to work at a specific organization.
- Gain knowledge that can help you in writing your resume, interviewing, and more.
- Initiate a professional relationship and expand your network of contacts in a specific career field; meet people who may forward job leads to you in the future.

Six Steps for Informational Interviewing

1

Research Career Fields

- Do some initial research on the [career field](#) or [employer](#) using internet and print resources.

2

Identify people to interview

- Pursue your own contacts. People you already know, even if they aren't in fields of interest to you, can lead you to people who are. This includes family, friends, teaching assistants, professors and former employers.
- Identify names of Cal alumni. Berkeley graduates will often take a special interest in Cal students. Utilize the [@cal Career Network](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to connect with Cal alums.
- Call organizations directly or visit their website for the name of someone working within a particular area of interest.
- Review the Book of Lists, a directory of leading employers in major urban areas in California, available on campus at the [Thomas J. Long Business Library](#).
- Contact professional or trade [associations](#).

3

Prepare for the interview

- Develop a short (15-30 second) overview of yourself, including your reasons for contacting this person, as a way to introduce yourself and define the context of the meeting.
- Plan open-ended [questions to ask](#).

4

Initiate contact

- Contact the person by phone (see Sample Telephone Script below) or [email](#).
- Mention how you got his or her name.
- Ask whether it's a good time to talk for a few minutes.
- Emphasize that you are looking for information, not a job.
- Ask for a convenient time to have a 20-30 minute appointment.
- Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for him/her and that s/he won't be readily available otherwise.
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Sample Telephone Script Requesting an Informational Interview

Hello. My name is Jane Wilson and I'm a junior majoring in English at UC Berkeley. Is this a good time for you to talk briefly? I heard you speak at an event sponsored by the Undergraduate Marketing Association last semester. Although I am not currently looking for a job, I have become very interested in public relations and would like to find out as much as I can about the field. Would it be possible to schedule 20 to 30 minutes with you at your convenience to ask you a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field?

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Conduct the informational interview

- Dress neatly and appropriately, as you would for a job interview.
- Arrive on time or a few minutes early.
- Restate that your objective is to get information and advice, not a job.
- Give a brief overview of yourself and your education and/or work background.
- Be prepared to direct the interview, but also let the conversation flow naturally, and encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking.
- Listen well and show genuine interest in what the person has to say.
- Take notes if you'd like.
- Respect the person's time. Keep the meeting length within the agreed-upon timeframe.
- Ask the person if you may contact them again in the future with other questions.
- Ask for names of other people to meet so as to gain different perspectives.

Note: You can bring a resume, but don't take it out right away or lead with questions about it or your interviewee may think you are actually fishing for a job. You may wish to ask for input about it at some point in the interview, but first make sure you've established a comfortable rapport with the person.

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Follow-up

- Keep records. Right after the interview write down what you learned, what more you'd like to know and your impressions of how this industry, field or position would fit with your lifestyle, interests, skills and future plans.
- Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given. Based on whether the informational interview was relatively informal or more businesslike, this may be a brief handwritten note, an email, or a business letter. ([Example](#), pdf, "page 33").
- Keep in touch with the person, especially if you had a particularly nice interaction; let him or her know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result. This relationship could become an important part of your network.

More Info

[Networking](#)

[Planning Your Future - Make Connections](#)

[Quick Clip Video: Informational Interview In Action \[3:53\]](#)

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