

Informational Interviews Guide

***How can you learn about career areas and jobs that are right for you?
How can you get insider advice and make connections in organizations of interest?***

The answer: Informational Interviews!

WHAT is an informational Interview?

Informational interviews are the reverse of a traditional interview. In an informational interview, *you interview a professional about his or her job, organization and industry.* You also share your interests and ask for the professional's advice on developing your talents and other professionals with whom you can connect.

These meetings can be used by students and job seekers to learn:

- Position responsibilities, schedule, performance demands, stresses, joys, growth opportunities, etc.
- Necessary and desired qualifications as well as work styles helpful for specific positions
- Organization dynamics, policies, procedures and cultures
- Industry challenges, trends, key players, networking/learning groups

This insight helps you decide if a particular role is right for your personality and life goals as well as what you need to work on to become a competitive candidate. In addition, the professionals you meet during informational interviews can connect you with others in roles/organizations of interest to help you learn more about career paths and make connections that will help you in the future.

WHY would a professional want to help you?

If you ask nicely and respect a professional's time, most people will say yes to your request to chat with them. There are many reasons why – maybe they know you or you were referred to them (see suggested contact list below.) Maybe they like to share their knowledge with others. Perhaps they feel flattered by your request. Maybe they are always on the lookout for new talent. Or maybe they simply want to give back to their alma mater or to the next generation of professionals in their field. No matter the reason, you have a great chance of getting a response if you reach out the right way!

HOW to find professionals to interview?

The following is a list of people you can ask for informational interviews or for referrals to others you can ask:

- Alumnae (You can use the advanced search on LinkedIn to find Alumnae in desired industries, organizations or professions)
- ASC Faculty and Staff (many have friends outside the college who work in related fields)
- Internship or volunteer supervisors (They and the colleagues they recommend – in human resources and in your desired roles - are great people to ask for informational interviews)
- Parents' friends and neighbors (You may find they work in fields you are considering!)

HOW to professionally request an informational interview?

First, make sure your social media presence is appropriate because as soon as you reach out to someone, they will look you up! Remove any questionable content from all accounts and set your personal pages to private.

Second, we recommend that you reach out to professionals via email or LinkedIn message rather than by phone so you don't catch someone off guard. The first thing to remember is that you are NOT asking for a job or internship. In your message, introduce yourself as a student from Agnes Scott College interested in learning about possible career paths before you decide on positions to pursue. Mention why you reached out to them in particular (if you were referred, you saw on LinkedIn that they had extensive experience in a particular field, you read an article about them, etc.). The more specific you can be about what you want to learn the better.

Indicate your interest in talking with them by phone for no longer than 20 minutes at a time convenient to them. Include your email and phone number and indicate that you hope to hear from them soon. It is also good to indicate spans of time that are good for you, such as, "I am available most afternoons or on weekends"

Professionals you know and some alumnae may agree to have a coffee with you, but do not assume an in-person meeting. If you are able to schedule an in-person meeting, respect the agreed upon amount of time. If you ask for 30 minutes for a coffee, stop and thank them at the 30 minute mark saying “I want to respect that you are very busy, and I have taken up the 30 minutes you promised.”

HOW to prepare for an informational interview?

Confirm the meeting and send your resume to the professional a week before. Make sure your resume is up-to-date and professional – see our [Resume Guide and Templates](#) for advice. You may also make an appointment with one of our career counselors through [Compass](#). Some professional also like to receive questions in advance.

Research the organization and professional you will be meeting. Google the individual and view their LinkedIn page. Look for common interests/background. Visit their organization’s website, noting the mission, goals, location(s), client or service base and recent news. Also view the organization’s social media pages.

Prepare appropriate, relevant questions that cannot be answered with a simple website search (see question ideas below.)

Come with a pen and your questions on nice paper with extra space to take notes. Some people are turned off by students taking electronic notes.

Conduct Informational Interviews by phone in a quiet place where you can concentrate and respectfully listen – never in the car or in an area with background noise.

Make sure you have a professional outfit to wear. A suit (pants or skirt type), conservative dress, or blouse and dress pants or skirt are appropriate. Avoid anything too tight, low-cut, short, sheer or flashy. Wear dress shoes with a low or no heel.

Types of appropriate, relevant questions to ask during an informational interview. (Choose no more than 5 questions to order to stick to the allotted meeting time):

- Questions about their job/experience – how they got started in this field; their typical day now; who they work with inside & outside the organization; skills, education & personal qualities needed for success
- Questions about working conditions – schedule, travel, what they like, what they find difficult, company culture, opportunities for advancement
- Questions about your next steps – how to prepare for this career, other related careers you should consider, other folks they’d recommend you meet and professional groups you could join, any way you could help them (to return the favor!)

Visit these websites for actual examples of questions you could ask:

<https://careermuscles.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/the-only-1-questions-to-ask-in-an-informational-interview-pete-leibman-career-expert-speaker-1/>

<http://www.levo.com/articles/career-advice/10-intelligent-questions-to-ask-on-an-informational-interview>

At the Information Interview, remember to:

- Silence your cell phone and put it away before you go in to meet your contact.
- *Be on time!* This is essential to making a good impression.
- Give a firm hand shake.
- Make eye contact, smile and be attentive in the meeting.
- Ask for their business card if you don’t have their full contact info.
- Thank the individual for their time and advice.

Things NOT to do in an Informational Interview

- Complain about anything or anyone
- Talk too much – remember the professional should be talking most of the time answering your questions
- Ask irrelevant questions like: why did you go to ASC? Do you have any jobs/internships open?

- Go over the allotted time

How to follow-up on an Informational Interview (besides following their career preparation advice!)

- Send a formal thank you by mail within 2 days. If you choose to send a follow-up email, it should be sent within 24 hours. Most professionals agree that a handwritten note is preferable.
- If they referred you to someone else, reach out to that person within a week and let them know.
- Invite any professionals you meet with to connect on LinkedIn. Keep them posted on your career progress: industry events you will attend, new internships you get, your graduation. Thank them again for their career advice.