



8. Informational Interviews

As you continue your job search, it is critical to be proactive in pursuing opportunities, expanding your network, and learning about new employers. Informational interviews with prospective employers can be a valuable tool for generating employment leads, as well as increasing your knowledge of career options.

An informational interview is an informal conversation with someone working in your field of interest who will give you information and advice.⁸ It is not a job interview. Rather, it is an interview that *you* conduct to collect information about a job, career field, industry or company. The primary goal is to learn what the person's job is like, what they do, what responsibilities they have, and what it's like to work in their job at their company.⁹ This information may help you decide to pursue, or not pursue, certain career paths. It can also help you practice speaking with professionals, refine your resume, or lead you to additional education or training.

Of course, one key reason to conduct an informational interview is to identify job prospects within the company and to impress the person you are meeting. Not all jobs are advertised publicly, but people on the inside may know about current or future openings. With an in-person informational interview, you can make an impression on a hiring manager, which increases the chances they will remember you when a suitable position becomes available.¹⁰

The first step is to identify people to interview. You can ask people you already know, or ask for referrals from family, friends, teachers, or colleagues. You can identify your own contacts by calling organizations directly, visiting their website, or contacting professional or business associations. You can also reach out to the alumni network of your school. You can initiate contact by phone or e-mail, and emphasize that you are only looking to discuss their profession, not a job. Be sure to mention how you got his or her name. You should ask to set up an in-person meeting, as that is the best way to get to know each other. However, if calling by phone, be prepared to ask a few questions on the spot if they are unable to meet in person.

An informational interview is less formal and less stressful than a formal interview for both you and the person you are meeting. Nevertheless, you should treat the meeting as a business appointment, dress appropriately, and conduct yourself professionally. It is also important to prepare in advance, including researching the company and/or the field you want to learn about. You should also be prepared to give a brief overview of yourself, including your education, work background, and career interests. Always respect the person's time by arriving a few minutes early and keeping the appointment length within the time you requested. Listen attentively and take notes on key points. You may also ask for names of additional people to talk to for more information or a different perspective.

Ideally, the interview is a conversation that flows naturally, but you should have several questions planned ahead of time in order to ensure you discuss the key points you want to cover. The following are sample questions you might ask to direct the discussion:¹¹

- What are the major job responsibilities?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of the work?
- What are the greatest pressures or challenges in the work?
- What are the toughest problems and decisions with which the advisor must cope?
- What is the atmosphere of the work place?
- What educational program is recommended as preparation?
- What kind of work experience would employers look for in a job applicant?
- What steps, besides meeting educational and experiential requirements, are necessary to "break into" this occupation?
- What are the key words or phrases to include in a resume or cover letter to get noticed?
- What is the career path for advancement?
- What are the most important personal characteristics for success in the field?
- What are the employment prospects in this area?
- What are some related occupations?



The questions you ask may vary, depending on what stage of the job search process you are in. For example, if you are in the early exploration phase, you might ask questions like:

- What has your career path been from college to present?
- What is the most rewarding thing about working in this industry? The most challenging?
- How do you think I can best leverage my previous experience to enter this field?

If you are further along in your job search and need specific job hunting and interviewing tips you might ask questions like:

- What advice would you give me about how to best prepare for interviews?
- What experiences, skills, or personal attributes does your company look for in new hires?
- Where are job listings advertised?

While the discussion is still fresh in your mind, it is important to reflect on what you learned and how it applies to your job search. For example, would you be satisfied working in the environment that your contact described? What do you need to do to make yourself a more competitive candidate? Are there other career opportunities available that you had not considered?¹² A good informational interview will provide several tips to follow up on.

Follow up with a thank-you note as soon as possible after the interview, and report back to the individual if you have followed up on any suggestions. If they have expressed interest, keep them updated on your job search and career. You never know when they might be able to provide assistance or a specific job lead in the future.



Conduct three informational interviews with individuals who work in your field of interest. You may choose from the questions outlined above or design your own set of questions. Be sure to take notes during the interview!



To document the completion of this activity, we recommend that you either scan or type up your interview notes and save your work electronically in an easily accessible location, with an appropriate file name and date.

Alternatively, you may also keep your notes in hard copy format and maintain the documents in your work search records. Be sure to properly label and date your print



Confirm the applicable NH unemployment insurance requirements and be sure to follow them closely to avoid benefit disqualifications or overpayments.