**How To Conduct an Informational Interview with a Peer**



**What is an informational interview?**

An informational interview is a meeting with someone to learn about a person’s lived experiences working in a specific job, industry, or organization. Informational interviews allow you to learn “insider information” about a position that is not included in the job description. They are a great way to determine if the job, industry, or organization aligns well with your personality, responsibilities, and goals.

*Informational interviews equip you with the knowledge to act with confidence as you navigate the job search.*

Step 1. Find Someone to Interview

1. Leverage your existing network
   * Think about the people you know. Is there a friend, family member, mentor or teacher who is in a similar field you are looking to get into? If so, reach out to them and ask if they know anyone working the same job you are considering and if they would be willing to connect you.
   * Ask your Specialist if they know anyone.
2. Browse job boards such as [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/), [Indeed](https://www.indeed.com/?from=jobsearch-empty-whatwhere), or [IowaWORKS](https://www.iowaworks.gov/vosnet/default.aspx) to find relevant people or businesses and reach out, asking if they are willing to sit down for a 20-30-minute chat to talk about their experience working in the job. If you are meeting with someone that works in a hiring capacity, see **this guide**.
3. Once you’ve found someone to meet with, confirm the date and time. Consider sending them an email reminder a day or two before the informational interview.

Step 2. Prepare a List of Questions to Ask

Consider revisiting your **Career Exploration Worksheet** to identify your needs and wants for a job. What information might you need to determine if this job will be a good fit for you? Consider:

1. *What needs do you have in a job?*

This could be income, flexible hours, etc. List them out and number them by priority. Brainstorm questions that will help you identify if the job meets those needs.

1. *What preferences do you have for a job?*

This could be work culture, mentorship opportunities, etc. List them out and number them by priority. Brainstorm questions that will help you identify if the job meets your top preferences.

Here are some sample questions that you might ask during an informational interview with a peer:

1. Learning about the job:
   * What does your typical workday look like?
   * What surprised you the most about the job or industry when you first started?
   * What is your favorite and least favorite part of your job?
   * Can you tell me about the most difficult or most frequent challenges you face in the role?
   * What do you wish you had known when you were first starting out?
   * What education/certification/training is needed for the job?
2. Learning about opportunities for advancement:
   * Do you feel like your employer provides professional development opportunities for you?
   * Are there opportunities for advancement in this field/industry? Does this job position set someone up for advancement?
   * What do you see as the next step in your career?
3. Other questions to determine if this job/industry will be a good fit for me

Note: You should avoid asking questions that can easily be found online. That said, feel free to ask for clarification or confirmation on a piece of information you have found online.

Step 3. Conduct the Informational Interview

1. Introduce yourself
   * Give the person a bit of context about who you are, where you are with your career, and what you hope to get out of the conversation with them.
2. People love to talk about themselves and their stories. Consider starting the conversation by asking them to tell you about their own career journey: “How did you get to where you are today? What made you decide to pursue this career path?”
3. Refer back to the questions you drafted in Step 2 and ask about:
   * The person’s role (see ‘Learning about a new job’ in Step 2 for ideas)
   * Opportunities for advancement (see ‘Learning about opportunities for advancement’ for ideas)
   * Other topics/ information that will help you understand if this job is a good fit for your needs/wants

\*\*If you feel comfortable, share a bit about your situation and ask for advice on if they think the job would fit your lifestyle. Is this path a practical choice for you?

Tips:

* If you meet in person, show up early to make a good impression.
* If connecting via video chat or phone call, confirm who (you or the other person) will be hosting the video meeting or calling the other person.
* Express appreciation at the beginning and end of the interview.
* Consider asking the person if they have anyone else who you could connect with in order to learn more about the role/industry.
* Take notes.
* If speaking via video chat or phone call, make sure you are in good lighting and/or with no distractions.
* The goal of the interview is not only to learn more about a job, but to build a friendly connection with someone in the industry. Make sure to be personable!

Step 4. Follow-Up

Send a follow-up thank you email within 24 hours and ask any additional questions that may have come up for you after the interview. If they offered to connect you with anyone, thank them for the connection.

Step 5. Reflect on the Interview

1. Jot down your initial thoughts and feelings about the job and informational interview. Do you have a good feeling about the job/field? Are you excited? Are you no longer interested in the job?
2. What did you learn about the job? What surprised you?
3. Is there anything that would be challenging for you if you were to have that job?
4. Reflect on your lifestyle, responsibilities, personality, and skills. Does this job seem like a viable career option for you?
5. What next steps can you take?