

Informational Interviews

Quick Tips

WHAT IS INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING?

An informational interview is a targeted job search strategy that involves gathering information and building networks. It involves speaking with individuals who are currently in a job, organisation or industry that interests you. It is carried out for career research purposes and is not a job interview, although you should be prepared to answer questions about your goals and interests.

HOW CAN CAREER RESEARCH HELP ME?

An informational interview will help you determine whether a particular career path or employer is suitable for you or not, give you some 'insider' tips on navigating a career path, and valuable insights into the current and upcoming trends or anticipated changes in that industry. This information could impact your career plans.

Conducting labour market research at the national, state or local levels will give you some big picture information on your target occupation or industry. An informational interview will give you an idea of the everyday work practices, challenges and potential personal rewards of the occupation.

Most importantly, informational interviewing will help you to develop a network of contacts that can answer your career-related questions and may even result in an opportunity to gain work experience.

Beyond the advantages of gaining valuable career information, informational interviews provide an opportunity to build self-confidence, improve your interview skills and gain an understanding of different employment options you may not have considered.

WHAT AM I AFTER?

Try to organise interviews with people who are best placed to share the type of information you are after. Think about whether to target a person who has a substantial amount of experience or a new graduate who has just launched themselves into the field.

The experienced practitioner might provide longitudinal insights about trends and changes, have an understanding of any demand or over supply issues in

the field, tips on how you might be recruited, and have an interesting personal career story to share. A more recent graduate will have current information on how to gain entry into the work and tips on how they managed the transition.

WHO COULD I INTERVIEW?

There are two ways you can go about finding contacts:

1. The Connections Approach

Talk to friends, family, academics, work colleagues or classmates regarding potential useful contacts. People often are surprised by the connections within in their personal networks. Someone is bound to know somebody who could help.

2. The Cold Call Approach

Do some web searches including current job ads, LinkedIn groups, specialist sites such as professional associations, business directories, or social media channels you know are used in your target industry. You might also check in with some of your academics who might have some good suggestions.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before you make contact, do some research to get a picture of:

- Industry trends – see resources at the end for suggestions
- Employer information – read everything you can about the organisation your potential interviewee works for. This might include finding their annual report on their site, determining their main business, clients, and factors impacting what they do.

This will help you pitch your approach, the questions you might ask during the interview and help to create a positive impression with your interviewee.

HOW CAN I ORGANISE A MEETING?

Once you have identified an individual you would like to interview, you can make contact either by telephone, LinkedIn or email. If someone gave you the contact,



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check with them if you can mention this when you make contact. This will make your approach a little easier.

Telephone:

- Practice / write down what you are going to say
- Be flexible when scheduling interview time
- Ask if they can spare 15 - 30 minutes of their time
- If your prospective interviewee seems too busy, ask for a more convenient time or if there is another person within the organisation that may be more appropriate to talk to.

E-mail:

- Be sure that your e-mail is written in a professional manner without any spelling or grammatical mistakes.
- Keep a list of the companies contacted, as well as the details of the person you spoke to.

What to say:

1. Introduce yourself as a student or recent graduate.
2. Explain that you are interested in learning more about the profession or industry, to assist you with your career exploration and planning and that you hope the person will be able to help.
3. Show that you've done your research on the organisation and pose a specific question. (E.g. "I've been looking at your website and see that your organisation is involved in management consulting for the IT industry. I'd like to learn more about this section of your business.").
4. Request a 15-20 minute appointment to discuss the person's area of work and how they began their career in that industry. Be flexible about this – you might do this over the phone or even via email if that would work better for your interviewee.
5. Reinforce, that you are simply after information and advice to assure your potential interviewee that you will not be asking directly for a job.

WHAT QUESTIONS COULD I ASK?

Below are some ideas about questions you could ask. Of course, you should select only a few questions after you have researched your career area and the organisation you have contacted, and be sure to prioritise them due to time restrictions.

1. Could you tell me about your career progression?
2. What do you like about what you do?
3. Which skills and attributes are important in this role?
4. What sorts of organisations employ people in this sort of work?
5. How did you get your job? What experiences led you to this position?
6. Can you suggest some ways I could obtain the necessary experience?
7. What are the names of the most relevant professional associations?

8. Are there any publications (e.g. journals, magazines, newsletters) relevant to this work which I should be reading?
9. Do I need a degree in a specific discipline? An Honours degree? A Postgraduate Diploma? A Masters degree?
10. Where or how are graduate and entry level positions advertised? If such positions are not advertised, how can I find out about them?
11. What are some of the most common entry level job titles?
12. What do people do in these entry-level positions?
13. How much on the job training is provided?
14. Are opportunities in this area of work likely to expand?
15. Could you describe some common career paths?
16. How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work with?
17. What do you like most about this organisation?
18. What are the recent developments, new products and projects?
19. Where are the international links/operations?
20. How have jobs changed in this area? What changes can you see over the horizon?

GENERAL TIPS

- Remember that all organisations are busy and not everyone will be able to give up their time to meet with you. If your request is declined, don't give up – contact a different organisation.
- Be sure to keep all communications professional – you may later request work experience or apply for a job at that organisation.
- Avoid taking more time in the interview than you agreed.
- Dress to appropriately for the setting – this might be business attire.
- Arrive promptly for the interview. Find out how to get there ahead of time.
- Ensure you are well prepared and know which questions you are going to ask. Taking a list of questions may help, but try to keep the meeting conversational.
- Gain the interviewee's permission to take brief notes during the interview or write up your impressions immediately after the interview.
- Use good communication and interpersonal skills. Listen politely, use good eye contact, try to build rapport by showing a friendly and enthusiastic interest in what they have to say.
- Don't forget to ask for some additional contacts for your career research.
- Send a thank-you e-mail after your interview.

Industry Research:

Job Outlook <https://joboutlook.gov.au/>

Australian Jobs <https://www.jobs.gov.au/australian-jobs-publication>

ABS

<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/br owse+statistics?opendocument&ref=topBa>