



# Interviews: Be a Job Search Sleuth

Get the inside scoop with Informational Interviews.

## Ask the tough questions

Chances are, you're familiar with traditional job interviews that take place after you have applied for an open position. But, how acquainted are you with informational interviews—exchanges where *you* ask the questions beforehand to learn more about a prospective employer or industry?

An informational interview is an informal networking meeting between a job seeker and an industry professional. For a job seeker, an informational interview provides career advice and insight into the culture of a potential workplace or industry. You do not actually interview for a particular role during an informational interview. Instead, a Q and A exchange with a potential employer can help you get the inside story on your dream job.

## Score the Exclusive

Informational interviews are your opportunity to sit down one-on-one with leaders in the industry or field in which you are interested and ask questions. If you are looking to explore a particular discipline or are in the process of changing careers, you can gain insights into your chosen or potential career path—direct from the source. These exchanges are an especially good tool for young professionals or new job seekers because they provide perspectives on whether or not your skills and expertise fit with your chosen field.

Plus, you might get more than just answers to questions. Requesting an informational interview demonstrates your ability to proactively take charge of your job search, and it gives an employer the opportunity to learn more about you. Often, after an informational interview, the employer will even consider the individual for future openings or will connect the job seeker with other industry contacts or recruiters.

## Uncover leads

To begin, ask friends, family, faculty, and alumni if they would be willing to connect you with anyone they might know at a company or in your industry of interest. Or, find contacts on your own. Then, make contact via phone call or email. A short script

will enable you to concisely introduce yourself, explain your connection, and ask for a meeting. For example, “Hello, Ms. Johnson. Professor Grant suggested that I speak with you. My name is Bill Smith and I am interested in the field of Journalism. Would you be willing to meet with me to discuss career paths within this field?”

Treat an informational interview with the same seriousness and rules as you would a traditional job interview: research the company and contact thoroughly; dress professionally; arrive 10-15 minutes early; come prepared with well thought out questions—don't wing it. And be brief—these busy professionals are giving up their time. Also, while informational interviews are best held in person, they can be conducted over the phone or via Skype, if necessary.

## Investigate the story

Have a discussion plan for the meeting. Topics such as desired skills and training, occupational challenges, career paths, work environment, your contact's career experience and role, even salaries and perks can be discussed. Ask questions that will help prepare you for your job search and subsequent interviews. For example, if you are looking to start a career in hospitality, ask your interviewee about their organization's customer services philosophy. Interested in pursuing accounting? Ask about current tax regulations.

However, NEVER ask for a job during an informational interview! This is not an interview for an open position but a unique networking opportunity for you to learn and gather information. If your interviewee offers to forward your résumé to their company or colleagues, you can express interest in pursuing potential positions or opportunities. But, they must broach the topic first. Finally, thank the person for their time and follow up promptly with a thank you email and written note.



## i n a nutshell:

Schedule an informational interview with an industry professional to:

- Gain meaningful insight into companies, industries, and career paths
- Expand your network contacts
- Hone your interview skills and professional image; build confidence
- Develop an early advantage over other job candidates
- Interact directly and informally with industry professionals
- Ask the important questions

Whether your career objectives are clearly defined or still being explored, ask the right questions of the right people. You'll get the inside scoop and jumpstart your career success.