

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

Learn how to explore career paths and make connections with information interviews

In this tipsheet you'll learn about the purpose and power of information interviewing, how to prepare, and we'll show you some examples to help you get started.

What is information interviewing and why should you do it?

An information interview is a great way to tap into someone else's experience through a conversation with a professional working in one of your fields of interest. Your goal is to get accurate, current information about a career path so that you can make informed career choices, and express yourself well in applications and interviews. Information interviews are not about asking for a job, though sometimes the process can end with a job offer. And, yes—generally, if you are polite and professional, people will want to talk with you.

Information interviewing vs. networking

Information interviewing is a kind of networking. Where networking focuses on building relationships as part of a job search strategy or to improve your opportunities, information interviewing focuses on career exploration to aid your career decision-making process. Of course, conducting information interviews often has the effect of developing a network that may lead to opportunities in the future. The skills required to be effective with informational interviewing are the same skills required to effectively network. Check out our [Networking](#) tipsheet to find more information on how to build healthy connections and plan your job search.

Why would someone talk to you?

- Most people don't want to say no; in fact, they would rather be helpful, especially if you're respectful and don't take too much of their time. You are asking for something they can give you—information. As long as you are looking for information—and not a job—you're well on your way to talking with them.
- Many people like to reward initiative. As they see you in your quest for good career information, they may recognize their “younger self” and want to help you find information that they needed at the start of their career.
- You're asking them to talk about their expertise. That's a compliment to them, and people often respond well to endorsement.

Making your request

Asking someone you don't know for information may seem a little daunting. Generally, though, people are keen to help, particularly if you are polite and professional in your approach. We suggest that you offer your contacts a “graceful exit” from the conversation or alternative ways of connecting if they are not in a position to speak with you directly.

STEP 1: Offer a 30-second introduction

Be polite and succinct in your introduction, and to give a clear, concise picture of yourself as it relates to the information that you think the person could provide. Clearly introduce yourself with a brief statement including your complete name and your connection to them. Then, briefly summarize your background and describe your professional interests.

STEP 2: Request information

Briefly state your request and suggest ways they can offer you information without spending a lot of time with you. You're asking them to give you a valuable commodity—their time. Be courteous and find a convenient time for your new contact. Here's one way to ask for help:

Here's a sample request to an information interview:

Hello, my name is Emma Nguyen.

I recently spoke with Ian So-and-So and they recommended I reach out to you for information about careers in psychology.

I'm currently studying psychology at Queen's University and I'm interested in clinical psychology and assessment. I'm exploring the possibility of pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology and I'm curious about various career paths in research and clinical work.

I'm looking for some advice on choosing a career focus in psychology and what I might start doing now to improve my opportunities in the future. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences within the field and any perspectives you have developed throughout.

I understand that private practice is very busy, and I see that your hours vary throughout the week. I'm wondering if you might be able to find time to have a conversation either over the phone or in-person in the next 2-3 weeks. If you are able, please provide a few times that work best for you as I should be able to arrange my schedule to accommodate it. Thank you for your time, I look forward to the possibility of hearing from you.

Leaving a message? Repeat your name, telephone, and email, and perhaps indicate that you'll contact them again in a few weeks.

Prepare for your meeting

STEP 1: Research

Read about your contact's job and position using resources in our [Career Information Area](#) or online. For easy reference, you could keep a file including articles from newspapers, magazines, the Internet and company literature as well as notes taken while watching TV programs or listening to radio specials.

STEP 2: Prepare some questions

Respect your contact's time by preparing meaningful questions about essential factors in their work. Good questions will make a good impression and ensure you collect useful information to guide your

career decision-making process.

10 sample questions for information interviews:

1. What interests or passions keep you going in the work?
2. What skills are essential to doing the work?
3. What are your work/life fit preferences (values and needs) that are met in this work?
4. If you were going to start again in this field of work today, what would you do to be really ready? (*What training and experience would you need to have? What would be great ways to get it?*)
5. What professional associations do you rely on to keep up to date? What publications, organizations or people do you suggest I contact for more information?
6. Where do you foresee growth or change in the work/field in the next few years?
7. What's a typical day, week, month or project like?
8. What do you like most about your work? What is most challenging about your work?
9. What other fields could someone work in with this training and these skills and interests?
10. What advice would you have for me?

Be persistent

Remember, having professional conversations is a skill that you will get better at with practice. As you connect with more people, your network will grow, and you'll learn more information about your fields of interest.

Want to learn more?

Check out our [Networking Strategies workshop](#) and [Networking](#) tipsheet to develop your skills.

Career Services offers [Drop-in Career Advising](#) to answer quick questions related to all aspects of your career planning and job search.

How to make a good impression

- Dress appropriately for the work environment and arrive five minutes early.
- Take along prepared questions. Ask if you can take notes; if you do, pay attention to the person.
- Give a mini-introduction of yourself to briefly recap why you came to speak with them. Then, let the conversation begin.
- Remember—keep to the time limit.
- At the end of the meeting, express thanks. Follow up with a concise thank-you letter that mentions something you learned about the field or the work, and indicate what you've done to act on your contact's suggestions.
- Stay in touch. Based on what you've learned you can follow up by sharing information and contacts of interest to them as well.