# Informational Interviewing

An informational interview is when you meet with a professional in a career field you are interested in

to ask questions and get advice in order to learn more about that career and how to prepare for it.

## 1. What’s your goal?

Informational interviews can serve multiple purposes in your career planning and job search processes.

1. It can help you determine whether a career you’re interested in is right for you by giving you a new perspective on what the job is really like, and how similar your interests are to those of people working in the field.
2. It can help you learn what you’ll need to do to Make College Count! and make yourself competitive for future job opportunities in that field.
3. Informational interviewing is one of the best ways to network, and it can help you expand the network of professional contacts in your field you’ll need when it’s time to look for a job.

Are you exploring career options, are you working on creating your career preparation plan for the field you’ve chosen, or are you strategically building relationships within companies you’re interested in? Determining your main goals and priorities will help you choose the right professionals to reach out to, construct your request, and ask the right questions.

## 2. Find and contact professionals.

In the digital age, professionals are easy to find. Use all the resources available to you, including:

* Professional organizations’ websites: Find local professional organizations for your career field, and look for member information. If you can’t see specific members, contact the organization itself to ask for referrals to members.
* LinkedIn: Join groups relevant to your career field to access professionals. Search for professionals by keyword, industry, or company. Explore who in your existing network might be able to refer you to a contact.
* Company websites and social media pages: Search for staff in companies of interest to you.

When contacting professionals, make sure your request clearly explains what you’re asking for (don’t assume they’re familiar with the term "informational interview"), is respectful of their time and schedule, and represents you well. Make it clear you are seeking information and advice, not a job.

Example email requesting an informational interview:

*Hello [professional’s name], my name is John Doe, and I am a sophomore Sociology major at Boise State University. I am hoping to pursue a future career in a non-profit organization, and I am especially interested in grant writing. I heard about the grant ABC Non-Profit just received this month, and when I asked on the organization’s Facebook page who was involved in writing it, I was given your name. Would you possibly be willing to meet with me to answer some questions I have about what you do, and give me some advice about what I should be doing while in college to prepare myself for this type of career? I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to talk with you at your convenience and learn from your experience.*

*Thank you for your consideration!*

*John Doe*

## 3. Do your research.

Find out all that you can about the person you’ll be meeting with so you seem prepared and can use your time effectively.

Use LinkedIn and/or a Google search to find out:

* Their job/job title and where they work
* What types of things they do in their current job
* What their company or organization does
* What past jobs they had and/or what their career progression looked like
* What education they obtained, and if they received any additional training or certifications
* What some of their professional interests are (check out Groups, Pages, Skills, and other LinkedIn sections)
* What some of their personal interests are (bonus!)

Use this information as a starting point and write questions that build upon what you’ve already learned.

## 4. Write your questions.

Don’t rely on generic questions! Write your own and make them specific to you, the person you’re interviewing, the career field, company or organization, and of course, your goals for the informational interview.

If your goal is determining whether this career is right for you, you might ask about things like:

* What a typical day looks like
* What made them choose this career and why it’s a good fit for them
* What they find most enjoyable or rewarding about their job, and what they find most challenging or least enjoyable about their job
* How much time they spend doing the kinds of things you enjoy and want to focus on in your career, and how much time they spend doing things you don’t enjoy
* What interests, abilities, and characteristics they think someone should have to enjoy and be successful in this career
* What type of job you’ll likely start in and what your career progression might look like
* What other types of jobs exist within this career field that may be similar or different from this person’s job

If your goal is determining how to best prepare for this career, you might ask about things like:

* What the required education is, and if there are certain majors, minors, certificates, or elective courses that will make you a more competitive applicant
* How much and what kinds of experience you’ll need to compete for entry level positions
* What types of experiences will be the most impressive and help set you apart from other applicants
* How much it matters what organization you gain experience with, or whether experiences are paid or unpaid
* What the most important skills or competencies you’ll need to have are, and what the best ways to gain those will be
* What professional organizations you should join as a student and how to get involved with local chapters
* What else you can be doing to meet and build relationships with professionals in this field

If your goal is researching the organization or strategic networking, you might ask about things like:

* What they enjoy about their job, why they chose it, how they got to where they are, and other things that help you get to know the person
* Why they chose to work for that organization, what they like about it, what they may dislike about it, and how the experience compares to other organizations they’ve worked for
* The mission, values, and goals of the organization and how those impact the work this person does
* Things the organization is doing that make it unique or different from its competitors or counterparts
* What problems the organization has and what role someone in this type of position can play in helping to solve them
* What qualifications and attributes are most important to have for this type of position with this organization
* The process by which positions in this field are filled at this organization and elsewhere
* What the best ways are to set yourself apart from the competition in a job search
* Tips specific to resumes, portfolios, profiles, cover letters, applications, interviewing, or other job search aspects

At the end, always ask if there is anyone else they would recommend you contact for an informational interview as well.

## 5. Make a good impression.

Follow these guidelines to make a good overall impression:

* It’s critical to be on time. Find the location ahead of time, and allow extra travel time just in case.
* Dress professionally – however that is defined in the career field you are pursuing.
* Bring: your questions, something to write with, extra paper for notes, and a folder or binder.
* It’s up to you whether to bring a resume. If you bring one, make sure it’s targeted, and don’t offer it unless they ask for it. Alternatively, you can email a resume after the interview if they request one.
* Express genuine gratitude throughout your meeting for their time, insight, and advice.
* Discuss next steps (such as if they offered a job shadow or referral), and/or how best to keep in touch
* Send a thank you email no later than the following day, which may reiterate or follow up on key points of your conversation, or discuss next steps or keeping in touch.

**Need help? Call (208) 426-1747 to make an appointment, or use our** [**Virtual Career Center**](file:///C:\Users\jenniferiuvone\Google%20Drive\Handouts-%20Resource%20Room\career.boisestate.edu\virtualcareercenter)**.**