

Informational Interviewing

What is it? Informational interviewing is a conversation (in person, on the phone, via email) with someone knowledgeable in a specific career field or industry to explore a career path and to build your network. These conversations provide an opportunity to gather career-related information and advice that is typically not available from written or internet sources. Informational interviewing also allows you create contacts and build relationships with people in your career field.

Who Should I Interview? Anyone who is knowledgeable about a certain career field and/or can provide networking sources. This is a very small world, and chances are you know more people that are good sources of information than you think. Brainstorm people you already know: friends, roommates, classmates, family members, professors and past supervisors. Think of how you can reach people you don't know that are in your career field. Try UNM alumni as great sources for information or professional associations in your field. Attending a regional or national conference is an excellent way to make new contacts. Ways to interview:

How Do I Interview Someone? Ideas: Ask the person out for coffee. Email them to set up a phone appointment. Conduct a Skype interview if they are out of town. There are lots of ways to reach out to people. Use social media such as LinkedIn. Don't be shy to ask for an informational interview. People like to talk about their profession—especially if they are passionate about their work.

Do Initial Research. Conduct research on the career field and/or industry before an informational interview. Remember, an informational interview is done to get information you can't find in career literature, trade publications, company information or on the Internet. Therefore, ask questions that go beyond the obvious. Also, try to find out as much as possible about the professional and his or her organization, as you want to appear knowledgeable, informed and interested.

Develop Interview Questions. Using your research, develop questions you would like answered in the interview. Think about what you hope to learn and the kinds of questions that will elicit that information. Most people prefer to answer questions that require them to reflect on their work. Open-ended, evaluative questions are often an effective way to start the conversation. Customize questions to fit your personality, interests, values, career goals and other criteria that are important to you.



Topics for questions:

- **What the Job/Work is Like** - Challenges, frustrations, rewards encountered; kinds of decisions required; how time is spent on the job.
- **Motivation and Interest** - How the professional was attracted to this career and what advice do they have for you?
- **Essential Skills and Abilities** - Both necessary and desirable skills, education, experience required, training or preparation.
- **Lifestyle Implications of the Work** - Salary/benefits, travel, pressure, flexibility, security.
- **Work Environment** - Physical setting, people (colleagues and clients), organizational structure and culture.
- **Current Issues in the Industry** – Personal perspective that goes beyond what you have read.
- **Ways to Get More Information** - Professional journals, professional organizations, other contacts or networking sources.

Potential Questions

- What is typical day like for you?
- What has your career path been like?
- What professional organizations do you belong to?
- What trends do you see influencing the profession?
- What is the biggest problem facing the profession today?
- What are the best sources for learning more about the industry?
- Is there anyone else you know that I should be talking to?
- May I let them know you referred me?
- What are the most effective techniques for getting a job in this field?
- Is there anyone else you know that I should be talking to?
- What is the preferred way to network within this field?
- What next steps might you suggest for me?

The Interview

- Be clear and direct about the goal of the interview. Remember, you are requesting information, not a job.
- Always cite who referred you: “My aunt, Jennifer Romero suggested I contact you as a source of information in the field of biology.”
- Stress that you will meet him or her at their convenience. However, be prepared to settle for a phone interview on the spot.
- Indicate how much time you will require. Most interviews will last 30-60 minutes.

Confirm the Interview: Call or email to confirm the interview about 48 hours prior.

Dress Appropriately: While this is not a formal job interview, appearances matter. Wear appropriate professional/business attire.

Arrive Early: Arrive about 15 minutes prior to your interview. As with any professional meeting, never be late.

Act Professionally: Showcase your professional attitude and composure to make a good impression. Networking starts here.

