

How to use informational interviews to develop your career knowledge and networks

Preparing for an informational interview

What are information interviews and how are they useful?

An information interview is a conversation with someone who works in a role or profession that interests you. The aim of the interview is to find out more about the role, career paths and/or the industry in general. Information interviewing is also an excellent way to develop your professional networks.

An information interview can be a daunting task, however, as it may involve approaching someone you don't know and asking whether they would be willing to discuss aspects of their work and industry.

This resource will guide you through the process. You will consider:

- The benefits of information interviewing to develop your career design;
- Who to interview;
- How to prepare for an information interview; and
- Questions you could ask a professional about their role and industry.

A good way to start is to develop a clear idea about the purpose of your interview: what you are planning to ask, why are you planning to ask that, and how you will use the information once you have it. Answering these questions will ensure that your interview will be worth your time and the time of the person you are interviewing.

The following plan for an information interview is in three 'phases'. First, you will identify someone you would like to interview. Next, you will plan the interview. Finally, you will learn how to make use of, analyse and reflect on the interview once it has been done.

Phase 1: Getting started

Start by answering each of the following questions:

- What industry or type of work are you most interested in?
- What companies, organisations or individuals are doing this kind of work? Do you know people you could interview? If not, search company sites, job search sites or industry media, and write a shortlist.
- Identify three individuals you would like to interview in these industries or organisations.
- What could you learn from this information interview that you couldn't learn any other way? In other words, what do you most want to know? List at least three questions, and be curious: you could ask about career paths, hours of work, mistakes not to make, tips for getting placements or graduate work, salary scales, job security and so on.

Phase 2: Setting up and preparing for an interview

Contact the first person you identified by email or phone.

- Explain who you are (e.g. I am a student in biomedical science at ... University and I am trying to find out more about working in this field.)
- Explain that you would like to do an information interview (not asking for a job) and how much time you would need (10 to 15 minutes). Suggest you could do the interview in person or over the phone, depending on their availability.
- Using the guide below, create a script which includes your questions. If you intend to record the interview, practise using the recording device (e.g. your phone). Note that recording an interview over the phone or in person is okay only if you have the permission of the person you are interviewing: you must ask them before recording.

Creating an interview script

Create a script for your interview. A good script outlines how you will introduce yourself, thanks the person for their time and introduces the general topics you want to ask about. Your script can be formatted as a document in which you will also take notes.

Here are some suggestions for questions you could ask:

- Opportunities, pathways and networking (professional association) opportunities.
 - What led you to go into this job / career?
 - How did you get started/get your first role?
 - What opportunities are there for new graduates/students now?
 - Are there associations or networks I could join, or industry events I could attend, whilst still a student?
- Industry expectations and benefits.
 - How do you balance your work, professional development and home life?
 - What is the gender balance in your industry?
 - What are salary expectations at the beginning of a career and as you progress?
 - Does the role have particular benefits such as travel or other opportunities?
- Realities and challenges of the role?
 - What is a typical day like?
 - What are the best and worst things about your job?
 - Are there challenges I should be aware of?
- Key 'steps' (top tips) for a graduate aspiring to follow this path.
 - What university subjects or activities helped you to prepare?
 - What gave you the edge in securing your first and successive roles?
 - Could you suggest anyone I should talk to at this point?
- Your top three questions: the three things you most want to know about work and career.

Phase 3: Reflecting on what you have learned from the interview

Your analysis of the interview responses should balance the interviewee's responses with information from other quality sources (e.g. industry, graduate outlook information, network/professional association material and so on).

If you are unsure about anything, seek advice from your lecturers, mentors and careers counsellors. If you can, conduct more than one interview so that you develop a range of opinions and information.

If you're not sure where to start the reflection, use one of the employABILITY thinking [critical reflection templates](#).

Resources

Crosby, Olivia (2010) [Informational Interviewing: Get the Inside Scoop on Careers](#) (updated by Tamara Dillon) Occupational Outlook Quarterly, 54(2): 22-29

Berkeley University of California Career Centre (2019) [Informational Interviewing](#) [online] available; <https://career.berkeley.edu/Info/InfoInterview>

Mitchell, K. E., Al Levin, S. and Krumboltz, J. D. (1999), [Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities](#). Journal of Counseling & Development, 77: 115-124

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