

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

One way to strategically grow your network is through an informational interview. If you have little work experience, are making a career transition, or just need help understanding what a particular job/company/industry is really like, informational interviews serve a functional purpose. Though not intended to be a formal hiring opportunity, informational interviews should still be taken seriously as they are an opportunity to interact with someone who has valuable information. Set up meetings with contacts currently working as professionals in the field, and be prepared to ask questions and take notes.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY CONTACTS

Begin with your personal contacts such as family members, friends, neighbors, teachers, co-workers, etc. to find people who might already be working in your career area of choice. Then, begin to establish new contacts through networking events, professional associations, and event social networking sites such as LinkedIn.

STEP 2: DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Because you will be responsible for directing the interview and asking the questions, it's important to do some homework. Begin by taking notes on who you are, your skills, and why you are interested in that particular industry. Share this information with your contact upon meeting so he or she knows how to best help you achieve your goals.

Next, dig into the industry by looking at the market players, positions you find appealing, and trends in the field. Use this information to draft at least 10 questions. If you decide to ask in-depth or technical questions, consider sending them to your contact before your meeting so he or she has time to prepare. Here are a few examples:

1. What drew you to this industry? What keeps you motivated to stay in this industry?
2. What was your career path to get to your current position?
3. What does a typical day look like for you? What do you spend the majority of your time doing?
4. If you could have done something differently in regards to your career, what would that be and why?
5. What are the challenges facing this industry both now and into the future? Is this industry flexible and is it adapting to younger generations and new technologies?
6. What skills or qualities do employers look for when interviewing candidates in this industry?
7. Is there anyone else you can think of in the industry with whom I should meet? If so, would you feel comfortable sharing that person's contact information with me?

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STEP 3: SET UP THE MEETING

There are two basic ways to set up the meeting:

- Make a phone call or send an email yourself - appropriate if the contact is within your network.
- Have someone else send an email or make a phone call - appropriate if the contact is outside of your network but is connected to someone else you know and trust.

Typically, the people with whom you are attempting to meet are busy, so follow these tips for a favorable response:

- Be upfront and clear about who you are and what you're requesting.
- Offer to travel to their office at a time that is convenient for them, or offer to treat them to coffee.
- If you have some kind of connection to that person, make sure to state it. ("My professor recommended you as a reputable person in this field.")
- Give specific timing regarding how long the meeting will last and your timeframe.
- Be brief! And always be polite and cognizant of the fact you're asking someone to give up their most precious commodity - their time.
- If you are not able to get a hold of your contact in the first attempt, send a follow-up note. If you still do not hear back, move on to other potential interviewees.

Email Example (from you to someone outside your personal network)

Subject: Student Request for Informational Interview

Dear Ms. Sage,

I am currently a junior at UCCS majoring in accounting, and I received your name and contact information from my professor, Dr. Brown. Since I am seriously considering pursuing a career in accounting post-graduation, I wanted to reach out to a couple of local CPAs with whom I can meet to get a better understanding of the field and what a potential career path might look like. Would you be willing to meet with me for 30 minutes sometime in the next two weeks? I have a list of questions prepared in order to keep our meeting focused, and I would be happy to meet you at your office, a local coffee shop, or can also call you at your convenience. I've also attached my résumé for your convenience. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Jane Doe | (555) 555-555 | janedoe@email.com

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Sample Phone Introduction (voicemail)

Hello Ms. Sage, my name is Jane Doe, and I am a junior at UCCS majoring in accounting. I am calling because I know you're a CPA at ABC Firm, and I am interested in finding out more about your chosen career field since it might be what I pursue after graduation. Would you be available to set up a 30-minute informational interview with me sometime in the next two weeks? I would be happy to meet you at your office or a convenient location for you. You can reach me on my cell phone, which is 555-555-5555. Again, that number is 555-555-5555. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Email Example (from your Career Coach or other trusted mutual contact after confirming over the phone that the person is willing to meet with the student)

Subject: Introducing Jane Doe

Dear Cindy,

As part of a mentorship program at UCCS, I am currently serving as a Career Coach for Jane Doe, a junior at UCCS majoring in accounting set to graduate May 2018. Jane is an excellent student and is interested in pursuing a career as a CPA. I've attached Jane's résumé for your consideration.

As we discussed, I would appreciate you meeting with Jane and sharing your thoughts about a career in your field and what attributes you believe are most important to becoming a successful CPA. It would also be helpful if you could share with her details about your own outstanding career plus advice as to how she can successfully enter the profession.

*Jane, Ms. Johnson is a CPA with ABC Firm (**insert web-link to Cindy's biography or company website**). She has a wealth of experience and knowledge regarding the accounting field and has graciously agreed to meet with you. Please contact Ms. Johnson at your earliest convenience. Her contact information is:*

*Ms. Cindy Johnson - CPA, ABC Firm
(555) 555-5555 | cindy@abcfirm.com*

*Sincerely,
Career Coach*

**Written with help from Scott Pann, Volunteer Career Coach since 2013*

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STEP 4: CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

Arrive a few minutes early and make sure to dress professionally. Don't forget to bring your notes and questions which you took time to prepare! Start by thanking your contact for his or her time and think of something light-hearted to discuss briefly before jumping into your questions (this helps to break the ice and establish rapport). Begin by revealing a little bit about who you are and your background then proceed through your list of questions, taking notes and allowing the conversation to evolve. Honor your contact's time by ending appropriately and ask to stay in touch.

Here are a few more sample questions:

1. Who are the leading companies in your field? How does your organization compare/differ?
2. If you were back in college, what would you do differently (knowing what you know now)?
3. What certifications would I be required to get before I could be taken seriously in this industry?
4. What is your opinion of my background/résumé? Do you see any problem areas/weaknesses?
5. What next steps would you recommend for me with regards to my (major or career) search?

STEP 5: FOLLOW-UP

Immediately following the interview, write a handwritten thank you note including any advice, tips, contacts, or information you found particularly helpful. Mail your note the next day. Record your meeting in a personal contact log, which would include the name of the person, date, and any particular information or outcomes you would like to remember. You will eventually build a database which you can use to send seasonal greeting cards or invite them to an occasional coffee break to catch up. Instead of only reaching out only when you need something, begin the habit of reaching out to contacts quarterly to build your relationship.

DATE	NAME	COMPANY	TITLE	CONTACT INFO	OUTCOME
01/05/17	<i>Cindy Johnson</i>	<i>ABC Firm</i>	<i>CPA</i>	<i>555-5555 / cindy@abcfirm.com</i>	<i>Invited me to tour the company on 01/10/18</i>