



## How to Conduct Informational Interviews

Don't let the word "interview" confuse you-you are not using this technique to find a job you are seeking advice. Informational interviewing is the process of gathering career information from people who are already working in occupations, organizations, or geographic locations you are interested in. Both the content of the information and the process of gathering it will help you to

refine your career goals and possibly discover new ones. Start the process by making a list of people already in your network including fellow students and postdocs, faculty, family, acquaintances, colleagues from professional associations and alumni you know from your previous institutions.

Communicate the following when you reach out to a potential contact:

1. Why are you reaching out? What would you like to learn about them and how does this relate to your career? Be brief.
2. Why are they someone you want to learn from? What about their career, position, or work intrigues you? How did you learn about them and their background?
3. What are you asking them for? How much time will you need? How will you meet? - Phone, Skype, in person? Offer possible times, but indicate your flexibility to meet their schedule. Ask for 20-30 minutes. Make it easy for them to say yes!

You can reach out to alumni in Terrapins connect or by email (if you have the person's contact information). You can also reach out to alumni and other professionals through LinkedIn, but this requires that you send a "connect" request first. Then you can use messaging to send more information and make the request.

<p><b>Connect Request</b></p> <p>Dear ____: I am a [master's/doctoral student, postdoc] at UMD in the Communications program. Currently I'm exploring career options outside of academia. I am interested in learning more about your transition from [graduate school/the PhD] and career path in communications. Thank you, Cai Communicator.</p>	<p><b>Email or LinkedIn Message once connected.</b></p> <p>Dear Dr. _____, I am a current [masters/PhD Student/Postdoc] at the University of Maryland in the Communications Department. I came across your Profile while browsing the UMD LinkedIn alumni group. I am actively exploring career options that will utilize my oral and written communication skills. Your profile and career as a Communications Director in both government and nonprofit agencies intrigued me.</p> <p>If possible, I would like to learn more about your career trajectory and hear your thoughts on life as a communications professional in the DC area. Are you available to meet [over coffee, by Skype/Google Hangout, or on the phone] in the next month? My summer teaching schedule makes me available each afternoon between 2-6 pm, but I am glad to meet at other times that are most convenient for you.</p> <p>Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you. Sincerely, Cai Communicator</p>
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# Sample Informational Interview Questions

Below is a list of questions you may consider using in networking with career contacts, through informational interviewing, or simple conversations. It is not an exhaustive list, nor are all questions appropriate for all networking meetings. Use this list as a guide when speaking with each individual. Choose 5-10 for a 30 minute meeting. Determine the focus of the informational interview. Be prepared to open the conversation by introducing yourself and the purpose of the meeting.

## Career Path Information

1. Please tell me about your career path and how you got here?
2. What are the top skills necessary for success in this career?
3. What role has networking and mentoring played in your career path?
4. At this moment in time, what changes or current trends are most relevant to this career?

## Job Requirements and Experience

1. How do most people enter this field?
2. What type of position in this field might I reasonably target given my background?
3. What courses have been most helpful to you in your position?
4. Is there special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job?
5. What personal qualities do you see as important for success in this job?
6. How much outside or overtime work is required? Nights? Weekends?
7. Is much travel involved in your job? If so, how much and what type?
8. What are the toughest problems you deal with?
5. Are there other industries, sectors, or roles to which you think my skills and abilities would transfer readily?
9. Describe a typical day/week that you experience in the role of a(n)\_\_\_\_\_.

## Work Environment

1. How would you describe your work environment?
2. How does your organization incorporate diversity and inclusion into the workplace?
3. How would you describe a typical day/week/month/cycle – regular duties, projects, etc.?
4. How much flexibility are you allowed in your job (hours, vacations, dress, etc.)?
5. Does the organization have a mission? If so, how does it fulfill that mission?
6. How much autonomy do you have on the job?
7. How are you made aware of supervisory expectations?
8. What portion of your job involves interacting with others, including co-workers & clients?
9. What do you like most about your job? What would you change if you could?
10. What is the most rewarding part of your job? Least rewarding?

## Advice/Leads

1. If you were in charge of hiring someone to assist you in your work, what criteria would you use to make your selection?
2. Are there any professional groups in the field that you would recommend I join?
3. Can you refer me to any other people in the field who might be willing to talk with me about their experiences?
4. Do you know of any co-op or summer employment opportunities that would benefit me?
5. Have you heard of any events or developments that suggest a particular company might have a need for someone like me?
6. Are there any particular companies or employers you feel would be good targets for my efforts?
7. Can you think of anyone else I might talk to who has \_\_\_\_\_ experience or who has done a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ work?
8. Of the people you know who have moved from staff jobs to management, who do you think might be most receptive to a request for a networking meeting/informational interview?
9. What was the best advice you received when you started in this field?