

The Informational Interview

Conduct an informational interview with a professional in your field of interest to get inside information that will help you make career and educational decisions as well as effectively and efficiently approach a job opportunity, profession or industry. Ideally, find an individual(s) (3-5 years from earning their degree, if possible) working in a job or profession that interests you.

Before setting up an interview, research the field to gain a basic understanding of the occupation and your potential fit, so you can focus on questions that can't be answered elsewhere.

Identify Professionals to Interview

Get referrals from family, friends, and UC San Diego alumni. Conduct informational interviews and gain access to UC San Diego alumni contacts on LinkedIn (join UCSD's alumni group) and through the Alumni Advisor Network (<https://ucsd.firsthand.co/>). The Versatile PhD (<http://ga.ucsd.edu/vphd>) and professional associations in a variety of career fields are also rich sources of potential interviews. Plan to conduct several interviews in any one field to hear a wide range of experiences and viewpoints.

Setting Up the Interview

Email the professional to request an interview following these guidelines:

- Make it clear you are interviewing for information only and are not asking them for a job.
- Ask for only 20-30 minutes and then stick to it.
- Be flexible about when and how you can meet to best accommodate their schedule. Even if they are local, consider asking whether it would be easier for them to speak by phone or Skype, or answer a few questions by email, as an alternative to meeting in person.

Conducting the Interview

Dress professionally and be on time. Be prepared with your questions and a notebook in which to take notes. See the next page for sample questions.

Following Up

Write a thank you email; if the interview went well, connect with him/her on LinkedIn. Contact anyone you were referred to and ask for informational interviews with them. And one of your informational interviews later leads to a successful outcome, let them know!

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK IN NETWORKING/INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

Decide what you'd like to find out from your contact, then prepare questions to elicit that information. Below are some sample questions you might ask. Formulate some of your own as well, but don't try to squeeze in too many questions.

What Work Is Like

1. Could you describe a typical workday for me?
2. What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?
3. What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
4. What do you find the most enjoyable?
5. What are your/most people's hours like? Are you able to leave work behind when you leave, or do you need to stay pretty connected in the evenings and on weekends?
6. What do you wish you had known about the field before starting in it? Do you think there are common misperceptions people have about this work as they're looking to get into it?
7. Which seasons of the year are the busiest in your job?

State of the Industry

8. Is this field growing or contracting – would you say there too many or too few people entering this profession?
9. What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
10. How frequently do layoffs occur?
11. Why do people leave this field or company?
12. Which companies have the best track record for promoting women and minorities?
13. Are there opportunities for self-employment in your field? Where?

Money and Advancement

14. Are you able to give me a sense of what kind of starting salaries you see for roles like X and Y?
15. How often do promotions tend to occur? To get promotions, is job hopping necessary?
16. Can you tell me about how you landed in your current role?
17. If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way? Why?
18. What is the background of most hiring managers?

Skills and Experience

19. What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
20. What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
21. How do most people enter this profession?
22. Can I tell you a little about my background and experience so far, and see if you have any suggestions for things I might do to strengthen myself as a candidate?
23. Would you be willing to take a look at my resume and offer suggestions on how I might improve it?
24. Can you recommend any courses or certifications I should take before proceeding with my job search?
25. What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my background?

Fitting In

26. What types of people do you think really succeed in this field? What types have more trouble?
27. Would the work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business entertaining?
28. What personal attributes are essential for success in this field?
29. Taking into account my skills, education, and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?

More Information

30. Do you have thoughts on the best things I can do to stay current in the field — things to read or organizations to join?
31. Is there anything else you think I need to know?
32. Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I contact them, may I use your name?