

# Using Informational Interviews in Your Job Search



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## Pacific University Career Development Center

One of the most successful routes to a satisfying job or internship is through a series of informational interviews—brief meetings that you initiate with people working in professions, organizations, and industries of interest. A chief goal of these meetings is to generate ideas, advice, and information that will help you in your search. Most people in the workforce have all three of these in abundance and are glad to share—and since you’re not asking explicitly for a job, there’s no awkwardness or reason to avoid the conversation. Another goal of informational interviewing is to become known in the employment world so word of mouth can benefit you. So while you’re gathering information, keep informing people about your interests, skills, experience, and so forth. The key to making all this enjoyable and successful is to do your homework first:

1. Make a list of occupations, industries, organizations, or types of work that interest you. Then select an area to focus on first and generate a list of specific and relevant places. Enlist the assistance of Career Development Center staff if you need help. The idea here is to identify a number of employers that you can target for informational interviews.
2. Next, identify people associated with your list of targets that would be good candidates for you to interview. Again, seek assistance from career center staff, as they have many resources that will make this easy. For instance, Pacific’s Alumni Career Network contains profiles of many alumni who are at the ready to talk with students.
3. Now, before contacting anyone, make sure you’re ready for the conversation: 1) Be sure you can answer questions that someone might have for you, about your interests, career objectives, skills, background, and other relevant aspects of yourself; and 2) Have the questions ready that you’d like the person you’re going to interview to answer.
4. Also before making any calls, be sure you’re clear about what you’re going to say on the phone (or in an e-mail outreach). Be ready to identify yourself as a student at Pacific University who is in the midst of planning a career and seeking ideas and advice from people connected to [name your target profession, industry, etc.]. Explain how you came by the person’s name (by referral, directory listing, etc.), and how you hope he or she will be able to help. Give the person a chance to refer you to someone who they think might be a better fit for your questions. If leaving a message, provide them with your contact information, and be sure that when leaving or sending you a message they will be met with a professional greeting (i.e., double-check to ensure that your voicemail greeting is appropriate).
5. When you’re ready to begin interviewing, contact a target and try to set up an agreeable time to either meet at the person’s workplace or to talk on the phone. The in-person meeting is best, but not always possible. Ask for 20 to 30 minutes, and be sure to project confidence—let the person know you’re focused and will not waste his or her time. It may take a couple of weeks even to get a call back, so don’t give up too soon. Remember that people in the work world have busy schedules and may require significant lead time to schedule a meeting.

6. Be ready for the possibility that the person you call may answer immediately and simply wish to answer your questions on the phone then at that time. So, call when you have your questions and some notepaper at the ready, and when you're not rushed.
7. It's usually best to set up your interviews one at a time, so that information gained in one informs your approach to the next. Plus, you'll likely pick up referrals along the way. Keep refining your questions and approach as you proceed, and consult with career staff along the way to make the most of this learning opportunity.
8. Finally, don't forget that **you** are conducting the interview, so manage the time and the process professionally. However, keep in mind that you're also being interviewed and observed by someone in a position of influence who is connected to your career objective. So, it's imperative that you make a good impression, which may well result in opportunities coming your way. It's not just **who** you know—it's what they think of you, and what they'll do for you. If they're impressed, they'll want to help you—or perhaps help their or another employer to benefit by hiring you.

Below are examples of questions to use in your informational interviews. Be ready to answer questions too, such as...

1. Why are you interested in this industry, work, occupation, etc.?
2. What are your strengths and skills?
3. What are you studying and learning?
4. What do you want from this meeting?
5. What other types of organizations are you researching?

### Questions about a specific job or employer.

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| 1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?                          | 6. What is the normal work load/routine in your job?                    |
| 2. What training or education is required for this work?                       | 7. What's the demand for people in this occupation?                     |
| 3. How has your job changed in recent years?                                   | 8. How much travel is normally expected in your job?                    |
| 4. What types of positions are available within this organization?             | 9. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging? |
| 5. What personal qualities or abilities are important for success in this job? | 10. What qualities and skills does your employer look for in new hires? |

### Inquiries about a career field.

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| 1. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?                          | 6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?             |
| 2. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible about this field? | 7. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?            |
| 3. How do you see jobs in this field changing over time?                             | 8. What advice would you give someone entering this field?                 |
| 4. What types of training do companies offer people in this field?                   | 9. What are the journals and organizations associated with this field?     |
| 5. What are the problems you see with respect to working in this field?              | 10. What sort of training and work is expected during the first few years? |

## Questions about your contact's individual career experience.

1. How did you get your job?
2. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same career path for yourself?

## Questions about your particular situation.

1. Would you mind offering some feedback on my resume? How would you suggest I change it?
2. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further?
3. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field? What sorts of experiences and skills should I be seeking?
4. Can you recommend other people to contact for further information? May I mention your name?

**Remember to dress professionally, take notes, respect people's time, keep building your list of contacts, send thank-you notes, and enlist the support of the staff in the Career Development Center.**