Informational Interviewing

What is an informational interview?

Unlike a job interview, an informational interview is a career development tool that goes beyond online research to gain an insider’s perspective on careers. You’ll schedule a brief meeting with individuals in career fields of interest and ask them a few questions to learn more about what they do. You’ll then compare what you learn to what you know about yourself to decide if this is a career field to explore.

Why informational interview?

You’ll get your questions answered and make connections that can become friends and mentors. Through these connections, you’ll likely learn of new opportunities you can pursue. While you may affirm career fields of interest, you may also learn that what you assumed about a field isn’t accurate and can then avoid pursuing careers that lack meaning and purpose for you.

How do I get started?

Identify someone at UT (LinkedIn can be a great resource) who works in your area of interest and send them an email like this:

Hello Cearra,

I’ve worked in communications and marketing at UT for three years and recently attended your career development workshop on life design. Learning more about your work prompted me to contact you to see if you might have 15-30 minutes to meet with me to share what it’s like to be a career development coach and how you entered this field? I’m typically free Monday and Friday afternoons from 1-4pm if there’s a date and time that works well for you.

Thank you very much for considering this and I look forward to meeting with you,

Your Name
The informational interview

After arranging your meeting -- a campus coffee bar can be a great spot -- prepare questions that will help you understand more about the career field and specific roles within the field; required skills, education and experience; and how to enter the field. You may want to share your resume -- or at least your LinkedIn profile -- with your contact prior to the meeting.

Give your contact the chance to tell their story; there’s a lot you can learn from what motivates and inspires them about their work. Ask them about the state of their field and future trends. Finally, ask them for referrals to other individuals you can speak with to continue learning.

How did you enter this field and what inspires and motivates you about your work?
What challenges do you face and what do you enjoy least about your work?
What trends do you see within this field and what does the future hold?
Are there roles within this field where my skills would be valued?
Is there additional training you would recommend to transition into this field?
What resources do you recommend for me to learn more?
Who else would you recommend I speak with and may I say you shared their name?

The University at Buffalo School of Management has a very comprehensive list of informational interview questions if you’d like additional ideas.

After the interview

Your follow-up is just as important as the interview itself. Send a thank you email (a hand-written note is also welcome) immediately and in the message, reflect on what you learned. If you’ve decided this isn’t a field that inspires you, a simple thank you is sufficient, but if what you learned aligns with your career aspirations, you’ll want to keep connected and communicate with them at least once per semester. Ways to keep the connection alive include:

- Request a connection on LinkedIn (and be sure to add a note)
- If you connect with any contacts they recommended, let them know what you learned
- Share any resources/articles/podcasts you’ve read that they recommended
- Update them on happenings within your current role and any trainings you’ve completed that they suggested

UT Knoxville staff, schedule your Career Development Coaching session here:
hr.utk.edu/career-development