

Informational Interviewing

WHAT IS IT?

An informational interview provides a **"reality test"** to your perception of the field. You contact a person who has experience in the area in which you are interested and request an appointment with them. In the meeting you can ask questions to help you decide if you want to pursue that path.

Informational interviews are an opportunity for you to ask questions of someone working in a position that you would like to learn more about (a major, minor, internship/research opportunity, employer, or job field).

What it is NOT?

It is important to remember that an informational interview is NOT a job interview and is NOT an opportunity for you to ask for a job; informational interviews are field research to gather information.

How can it help?

Informational interviews can help in two main ways:

1. If you want to learn more about specific careers, jobs, employers or majors; there is no better way to learn than by going to the source. You can read about jobs online and in Alumni & Student Connections (ASC) resources; however, talking with a professional working in the field will provide real-world information.
2. If you are job searching, informational interviews are a great way to build your professional network. You can connect with professionals for insights on their career path and entry into the industry. Informational interviews are a great way to learn about specific companies and organizations that you are interested in.

Where do I find a contact?

Search for an interview candidate by reaching out to your current network (friends, co-workers, professors, advisors, family, family friends, etc.), let everyone know that you are looking to gain more information about a particular subject, and you will be surprised at the contacts that people will share with you.

You can search Lutelink, the PLU student and alumni community, by logging in at lutelink.plu.edu. Here you will be able to search by your field of interest and locate alumni who are offering informational interviews. Another way to locate an interviewee is by searching the PLU alumni group on LinkedIn or a company's website for people that are in positions in which you are interested.

Initiate contact?

Sending an email to ask for an informational interview is preferred, but calling is also an option. Introduce yourself as a college student (specifically PLU if you are contacting an alum) who is looking to learn more and then make the request. It is okay to leave a voicemail saying they can email you back if that is easiest.

*"Dear Mr. Anderson,
My name is Sophia Lopez, and I am a junior at Pacific Lutheran University majoring in Economics. I am currently building my network in the accounting field and found your information on Lutelink. I am very interested to know about your experience in the field, and I would like to take this opportunity to request a 30-minute meeting with you at your convenience. If you are unavailable, I would greatly appreciate it if you could connect me with someone in your network that could also share their experiences in the accounting field. I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your help.
Sincerely,
Sophia Lopez"*



Alumni & Student Connections

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www.plu.edu/alumni-student-connections

For more tips on informational interviews, or if you want to practice, schedule an appointment with a career advisor.

Informational Interviews Continued

How to prepare?

Informational interviews are a way to provide context to what you are reading online about your area of interest. You are encouraged to ask questions during the interview that you could not find answers to, or questions that help support what you already researched. If the interview is happening face-to-face or virtual, then you should dress business appropriate. While an informational interview is not a job interview, this is your first impression, and by dressing in business appropriate attire you are showing that you are a professional and are taking this meeting seriously.

During the interview?

An ideal informational interview will happen in person, over coffee or in that person's office: however, interviews also happen on the phone or virtually. You are not encouraged to conduct an informational interview over email. Arrive early, bring your questions, and be attentive; the interviewee may answer questions you had planned to ask later. Before asking your questions, start by giving an overview of yourself. You are encouraged to take notes and to get a business card so you can send a thank you. Never go to someone's personal residence.

Sample questions to ask:

- How did you get started in the field? Is this typical of most people?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important to succeed in this field?
- What do you most enjoy about your work?
- What is a challenge this field is facing?
- What are the opportunities for advancement in the field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- Who makes the decision to hire someone for this kind of job?
- Have you noticed whether or not it is necessary to change companies in order to advance in this industry?
- What else do I need to know in order to make a well-informed decision about my career?
- Would you recommend doing an internship to gain more knowledge or experience?
- Does your organization offer internships or research opportunities?
- What are some professional associations that you would recommend?

After the interview?

Send a personal thank you note: handwritten is encouraged, but email is also acceptable. Thank you letters are exceptionally important in maintaining your network (which now includes this person). Gently remind the interviewee who you are, how you met, and thank them for their time. This would be a great opportunity to connect with this person on LinkedIn (refer to our LinkedIn handout to learn more).

Ask these questions at the end of every interview:

- Can you suggest two other people I would benefit from speaking with?
- May I use your name when contacting these people?



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You can make an appointment with a career advisor through the Opportunities Board.