

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

An informational interview is a professional, informal conversation between an experienced professional and someone who is looking to learn more about that field or organization. It's the best way to learn about the day-to-day activities, organizational culture, and other questions you can't glean from a company's website. It's an important step in the career exploration and job search process, and it can even help you get your foot in the door.

AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW IS:

- A chance to learn about a field from an insider's perspective
- A way to enhance the career research you are already doing
- A way to build contacts in your field that *could lead* to a job

AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW IS NOT:

- A job interview
- A lengthy conversation (more than 30 minutes)
- A casual, unguided discussion
- A time to ask "So what do you/your company do?"

WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

Many career questions can (and should) be answered before you begin formal informational interviews with professionals. So, before you make your first phone or email contact, consult the resources at your fingertips: The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook and O*NET online have information about industries, related occupations, educational requirements, skills, salary, and more. Your basic understanding of a field can then be put into context by your interviewee.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT?

Begin with who you already know – check with friends, family, fellow students, co-workers, and professors to see if they know anyone who could speak to your career interests. Consider connecting on LinkedIn with members of the LUC community, or use Loyola's alumni mentoring site LUConnect; you already have a connection with them through Loyola to help start the conversation. See our On Demand Videos for more about networking strategy.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

Whether with a phone call, email, or LinkedIn message, this is a professional request. Here's an example:

Dear Ms. Silver,

I see that you graduated from Loyola University Chicago and I wondered if you had time for a 30-minute call or meeting with a current student. I'm a junior social work major and I'm interested in learning about your experience at Lutheran Social Services. Please let me know if there is a day and time that would work best for you.

Thank you,
Jenna Smith, Class of '19
(312) 555-1212/jsmith@luc.edu

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PREPARE A LIST OF QUESTIONS

Write a list of questions, keeping in mind the conversation will be short – what do you most want to know?

Continue your research – look at your contact’s LinkedIn profile and their company’s website. Use web searches to find professional organizations, industry news and publications. Does that information create any additional questions for you?

TREAT IT LIKE A JOB INTERVIEW

Treat this as a job interview (even though it isn’t!): dress professionally and be on-time. Be prepared with your questions and a brief statement about who you are: what you’re doing now, what you are interested in, and future goals. Keep the conversation to the time-frame you proposed.

If you asked for 30 minutes, end the conversation after 30 minutes, unless they invite you to continue.

FOLLOW-UP AND STAY IN TOUCH

Continue job search etiquette – send a thank you note or email within 24 hours of your conversation.

Add them to your network on LinkedIn if you asked permission to do so in the interview. Send them status updates if you get a new position or if you have more questions about their job, organization, or a job posting you saw at their company. Take the opportunity to build and maintain the relationship.

Keep a tracking system of your contacts – it’s good to do multiple informational interviews! Note the person, organization, their contact information, when you talked, and what you discussed. This will be helpful for future networking and contact.

COMMON INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- How did you decide on this career?
- What was your career path? Your major in college?
- What type of individual usually succeeds in this role?
- What are some of the problems/decisions you often face?
- What are the rewards/challenges/frustrations of your work?
- What do you wish you would have known prior to entering this field? What would you change about your job if you could?
- Where do you see yourself going from here?
- What steps would you recommend that I take to prepare to enter this field?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?

SAMPLE THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Ms. Silver,

I’d like to take the opportunity to thank you warmly for speaking to me yesterday regarding careers in social work. Hearing about your career path, as well as your experience with Lutheran Social Services, helped me to understand more clearly some of the directions my social work degree can take me. You clearly bring a great deal of passion and expertise to your work, and hearing your story reinforced the importance of building professional relationships and staying committed to learning.

I hope we can stay in touch, and I look forward to sharing good news about my job search in the next few months.

Thank you,
Jenna Smith, Class of ‘19
(312) 555-1212/jsmith@luc.edu