

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS AND NETWORKING EVENTS

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a meeting that you initiate with a contact whose job, organization, industry or career path interests you. The goal of this interview is to gather important information about your field of interest while establishing and cultivating a professional relationship with your contact. Informational interviewing is one of the most effective networking strategies. When managed correctly, your conversations and follow-up correspondence will make it very easy for your contact to keep you in mind when opportunities arise within their organization or in a peer institution.

REQUESTING AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Once you've identified a valuable contact in your field, send the person a request for an informational interview via email or LinkedIn, ideally in the middle of the week when they will be more likely to notice and read it. Include your request in the body of the message. Do not attach a resume in your initial introductory email.

The structure of your message should look something like this:

- **First Paragraph:** Let them know how you got their name and why you're contacting them. Make it clear that you are looking for information, not a job.
- **Second Paragraph:** Provide some background information about yourself, such as how you became interested in their company or industry and any related experience you have.
- **Third Paragraph:** Make your request. Ask for 15 to 20 minutes of their time for a brief informational interview. By asking for only 15 to 20 minutes, it's more likely that your contact will agree to meet with you, it creates the possibility that they will suggest meeting for a longer period of time and increases the chances that they will provide you with another referral. Thank them in advance for their consideration and tell them that you will follow up by calling them early the following week. Include your phone number and email address in your signature block in case they decide to reach out and contact you first.

Follow-up is a delicate art; you want to take initiative, but you don't want to be too aggressive. As a general rule, follow up with your contact by calling them early the following week, as you stated in your introductory email. If you don't receive a response within a few days, send a brief email to make sure they didn't overlook your initial request. If you still don't hear back from the person, move on.

CONDUCTING AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW

- Always start off by thanking them for their time, restating the objective of the discussion and the time allotment, and briefly reviewing your background.
- Informational interviews should be casual and conversational.
- Prepare specific open-ended questions that indicate substantive knowledge of an industry or career path. Focus on topics that cannot be researched online.
- Be sure to listen carefully and attentively and to take good notes.
- Always follow up with a thank you note.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

About the Individual

- What would you say is the best path to this career?
- What attracted you to this industry, your company, and your job?
- What do you enjoy most about this industry, the company, and your job?
- What aspects of your career have you found the most and least rewarding and why?
- What are your educational and career backgrounds? What would you do differently if you were starting over?
- If you were in the job market tomorrow, what would you do?

About the Job

- What are your primary responsibilities? How do you spend your time?
- How do you value/measure your results and effectiveness?
- What is the most challenging part of the job?
- What qualities/attributes do you look for when hiring a _____?
- What are the most valuable skills in your job? Which experiences enabled you to develop these skills?
- How do you keep skills current? What do you read? What professional associations do you belong to? What seminars or continuing education do you find useful?

About the Company

- What makes your company unique?
- What would you do differently if you ran this company?
- What are the common misconceptions about working in this company?
- What do you see as the biggest competitive challenge for your company?

About the Industry

- What have been your biggest surprises in this field?
- What are the common misconceptions about working in this field?
- What motivated you to continue working in this industry?
- What are the vulnerabilities of this industry? What worries you?
- What do you expect of people starting out in this field? What educational and personal qualities in candidates attract you? How do you determine a candidate's compatibility for the field, including education, personality, and cultural considerations?

Feedback on Your Career Search

- Are there other positions / career paths to consider based on my background and interests?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you see in my current background?
- Is there anything else you think would be helpful as I consider this field?
- Looking at my resume, what advice would you have for me on next steps if I were interested in this industry/company/career?
- Do you have ideas of other companies or contacts I could reach out to?

FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW

Always send a thank you letter within 24-hours following an information interview. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm, and appreciation for the opportunity to interview. Check the letter carefully for grammar and spelling, and make sure you have the interviewee's name and title correct. Thank you letters are commonly sent via e-mail, but can also be hand written.

Be sure to include the following elements in your thank you letter:

- Thank the interviewer for their time and interest in meeting with you and explaining the position.
- Emphasize the skills, strengths, and ability you can bring to the position.
- Express your interest in the position.

Sample Thank You Letter**William J. Smith**

123 Main Street, Columbus, OH 43210 • 555-123-4567 • buckeye.1@osu.edu

March 1, 20XX

Ms. Joanna Gray
Human Resources
WM Pharmaceuticals
111 Sunny Avenue
Columbus, OH 43212

Dear Ms. Gray:

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the pharmaceutical sales position. I enjoyed speaking with you and learning more about WM Pharmaceuticals, the Formulations department, and the position.

My enthusiasm for the position and interest in working for WM Pharmaceuticals has been greatly strengthened as a result of our interview. As I mentioned, my interests in the pharmaceutical industry began long before my academic program. I hope that my skills, experience, and enthusiasm reflect what you seek in a candidate. I am certain that my strong work ethic will support your staff and customers alike. I am confident that my academic background and work experience provide a good fit with the requirements of this position.

If there is any additional information you need, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you again for the interview and for your consideration.

Sincerely,
William J. Smith

Career Fairs & Networking Events

Career fairs and social networking events offer excellent opportunities to meet with several professionals at one time and in one place. Because most people who attend these events already have the primary intention of networking, it can be much easier to engage in conversations about your professional interests and goals. Keep in mind that networking encounters in these settings are often very brief. As such they require even more effort on your behalf to communicate important information about yourself within a short period of time.

TIPS FOR CAREER FAIRS & NETWORKING EVENTS

- Conduct background research on the employers who will be attending.
- Use your elevator speech to help frame your conversations with new contacts.
- Use your time wisely, connect with the individuals on your priority list first.
- If you are apprehensive about approaching a large group of people, try approaching someone who is standing alone or in a small group.
- Bring several business cards; when you take a card from someone, offer your card in return.
- Dress professionally and conservatively.
- Write your first and last name and the name of your organization/school clearly on your nametag; place it on your upper right shoulder.

Make eye contact, speak clearly, and listen intently without interrupting.