

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

—
A "HOW-TO" GUIDE

UPPER LEVEL MCGOWAN CENTER
CAREER-CENTER@MSMARY.EDU
301.447.5202 | MSMARY.EDU/CAREER



INTRODUCTION

Informational Interviewing is an opportunity for you to interview a professional in the field of work you are interested in learning more information about. Hearing a first-hand narrative about a particular job or role can be helpful to gain insight into a career of interest, to receive advice that can assist in making career decisions, and to build your professional network. The goal of an informational interview is not to secure a job or internship. The interaction, however, may lead to various opportunities to advance you in your career journey. As the interviewer, this Informational Interviewing Guide will help you be successful in your interview with a professional.

Benefits of Informational Interviewing

- **Gain insight:** Learn more about the day in the life of a professional and explore how professionals got to where they are today.
- **Grow your network:** Increase your number of professional connections and inquire about additional contacts from your interviewee.
- **Seek advice:** Gather valuable information and advice from professionals to determine how to advance in your own professional endeavors.
- **Inform career decision-making:** Confirm or deny thoughts or interests about a particular profession to develop next steps in your career journey.

Steps for a Successful Informational Interview

1. **Assess your goals.** What is your goal of an informational interview? Who would you like to meet with? What field of work would you like more information about? What would you like to discuss?
2. **Search for contacts and develop questions.** Lean on your current network – including professors, peers, family, friends, the Career Center, LinkedIn, and current or former coworkers – to begin exploring contact(s) who you can connect with. Alumni are a great network of potential contacts to consider. Obtain relevant information to the professional's work to assist you in developing questions. Reflect on your goals to include questions you'd like answers to.
3. **Reach out.** Once you find a contact of interest, reach out in a professional and respectful way to ask for their time. Here is an example message that can be adapted and sent through email or LinkedIn. Note that your interview should be brief (≤ 30 minutes) to be respectful of your interviewee's time. Be sure to provide meeting details and options for the interviewee:

Hello <contact name>,

My name is <name> and I am a <school year> at Mount St. Mary's University studying <major(s), minor(s), concentration>. I'm interested in the <name of> industry and would appreciate speaking with you and gaining more information about your role as a <role>. Would you have time to meet for 30 minutes over the phone? I am available on <this date> at <these potential times>.

Thank you,

<your name>

<personal contact information (if desired)>

- 4. Prepare.** Preparing for the interview will help ensure a smooth and professional interaction, which will reflect well on you and might offer you a more valuable experience.
- **Before the informational interview:** Finalize informational interview details such as the name of the person you are interviewing, the time and date of the interview, and your questions. Prepare your appropriate attire if meeting your interviewee in-person or virtually. You may consider business casual or business professional wear depending on the interviewer and location of the meeting.
 - **During the informational interview:** Introduce yourself. Depending on the comfort of both parties, consider extending a handshake if appropriate. Thank the interviewee for their time. Briefly share why you are conducting the interview and begin asking your prepared questions. Out of respect for the interviewee, share that you would like to take notes as they speak. You may ask questions as they arise to discover additional details and encourage a natural flow of conversation. As you close out your interview, you may consider asking the following questions:
 - *I'm interested in learning more about <this particular role>. Is there anyone in the field you would be able to refer me to for more information?*
 - *Are there any additional resources you have found helpful in your professional journey that I should consider reviewing?*
- 5. After the informational interview:** Be sure to thank the interviewee for their time. This can be done through email. Consider connecting with the interviewee on LinkedIn if you have not done so already.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AN INTERVIEWEE

15 Questions to ask during the interview:

- Please tell me about your career path and how you reached this point of your career.
- Can you tell me about your educational journey?
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- What is your favorite part of your job? What is your least favorite part of your job?
- Does your major relate to your job? Why or why not?
- How did you get your job?
- What advice would you give to someone interested in working in a similar role?
- How do you stay up to date on current trends in your field?
- What is the best piece of advice you have received?
- What skills do you find beneficial for an entry-level professional?
- What skills are most important for someone to be successful in this field?
- What do you wish someone told you when you were in college or preparing for this field?
- Are you part of any professional associations? What led you to choose those associations?
- What future changes/challenges do you foresee in the field?
- If you could do things over again, would you change anything about your career path?

Questions to wrap up the interview:

- Are there any other individuals you recommend who would be beneficial for me to connect with?
- Can you share more about the role of interns or entry-level professionals at your company?
- Are there any questions you have for me?

FINAL SUGGESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Do:

- Follow the Golden Rule: treat the other person as you would want to be treated.
- Be respectful and professional in all interactions with your contact.
- Express gratitude for your interviewee's time and willingness to meet.
- Stay open-minded as you ask questions and gather information.
- Consider emailing your questions to your interviewee ahead of time, especially if requested.
- Arrive early to your meeting.

Don't:	Instead, try this:
Foster a one-way, or self-serving, relationship.	Be intentional and show you are invested in the person you are meeting.
Merely cross questions off your list.	Engage in deeper, meaningful conversation.
Make the interviewee work around your schedule.	Be flexible and open to interviewing during a time you are both available.
Ask outright for an internship or job.	Be mindful of how you navigate experiential opportunity questions.
Cancel last minute on your interviewee.	Provide at least one day's notice if you can no longer meet at the arranged time. If an emergency or uncontrollable obstacle occurs right before the interview, contact the professional as soon as possible and explain the situation in a humble, professional, and gracious manner.

Schedule an appointment with the Career Center today!



msmary.joinhandshake.com/appointments/new
240 Upper-Level McGowan | career-center@msmary.edu | (301) 447-5202