

## What is an Informational Interview?

While you may think that the best way to conduct your job search is to respond to an employer by submitting your resume and cover letter, the reality is that many of the best work opportunities are never advertised (nearly 80% of the job market is made up of these 'hidden' jobs). Informational interviews can help you tap into these off-the-radar roles, while being a valuable tool to explore career options and make informed decisions about your career path.

An **informational interview** is an underutilized strategy in the job search and career exploration process. These activities typically come from successful networking opportunities, which help you find out specific information about a particular industry or role you're interested in from someone who's already established in that field. It gives you a chance to ask questions about the person's role, the company, and the industry, a way to test the waters before jumping in with both feet.

As far as who to approach, there are a few ways to do it:

- **Contact someone you already know.** Most common way to network. Even with a few degrees of separation, it never hurts to ask family/friends if they know anyone who could help.
- **Send a cold outreach email/message.** Less common, but successful if done correctly. Reaching out via [LinkedIn](#) can be very effective.

## Writing Your Request

Write a **clear message** about why you're reaching out and an **easy-to-understand request**:

- **Ask for help.** "I'd love your help with" or "I hope you'll be able to help me with..."
- **Be clear/concise.** Be specific and make it easy for them to say yes: "I'd love to take you out to coffee to learn about how you got your start in marketing and what it's like to work at [your company]; I'm actually going to be in your area next week and would be happy to meet whenever is most convenient for you."
- **Provide a hook.** Demonstrate why you really want to meet. Maybe you admire their career path or see similarities between their education and yours? Perhaps you have a shared connection? Whatever it is, be sure to mention it.
- **Be extremely considerate.** This person is putting their job on hold for you, so acknowledge how busy they must be (even 15 minutes would be appreciated).
- **Don't make it seem like you're looking for a job.** Make it clear you just want to talk to them about their perspective on their job and industry experience.

# Informational Interviews

## Before the Interview

- **Prepare a list of questions** related to the field, role, or company. Don't expect the person you're meeting with to lead the conversation. It's your job to figure out exactly what you want to ask.
- **Organize your questions.** Instead of a laundry list of questions, sort them by category: industry, company culture, role and what it involves, work/life balance.
- **Prepare your [elevator pitch](#).** Be prepared to talk about yourself and your career goals.

## During the Interview

- **Break the ice.** People generally enjoy talking about themselves, so start by asking about their personal experiences in the field thus far:
  - How did you get your start in this field?
  - What's it like working at your company?
  - What projects are you currently working on?
  - What's your opinion on [insert a recent development in the industry]?
- **Make a positive impression.** You should also be prepared to talk about yourself and your long-term career goals (Now's a great time to share your prepared elevator pitch).
- **Get the career advice you came for.** This is the time to get the inside info. Here are questions to ask if you're still in the exploratory phase:
  - How did you come to choose this company over others in this field?
  - What is the most rewarding/challenging thing about working in the industry?
  - How do you think I can best leverage my experience in this field?

Further along in the interviewing process? Ask questions related to new hires:

- What advice would you give me about how to best prepare for an interview?
- What experiences/skills does your company look for in new hires?
- What job search advice would you give to someone in my situation?
- **Extend your network.** As the meeting ends, ask for recommendations for a few more people you could talk to about the job/industry. The likelihood of someone agreeing to chat with you increases if there's already a mutual connection. Be specific and try something like: "Could you recommend a few people for me to speak with more about transitioning into a marketing career?"

## After the Interview

- **Make sure to follow up.** Send a handwritten thank you note or email. Mention something specific that was memorable that you truly learned from them. Thank them again for taking time to meet with you. If they asked for your resume, attach an updated version. This can provide a path to move the relationship forward.

## Follow-Up Email Example

Avoid standard statements of “I learned a lot from you.” Instead, start by having an attitude of gratitude: “Thank you for taking the time to meet with me,” then recall specific bits of your conversation:

*Hi [insert name],*

*Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today. I enjoyed talking with you about your experience in [career field] and certainly learned a lot from what you shared. I appreciate all the insights you provided and descriptions of the challenges you’re facing.*

*You mentioned that your team at [company name] is looking to ramp up your content marketing efforts. I’d love to help your team strategize and contribute toward increasing your blog traffic. I’ve attached a PDF with ideas I have for your company’s strategy, including: [place list of ideas here: it might include keyword suggestions, other strategies for boosting SEO, etc.].*

*Take a look, and if you’re interested, I’d love to get on a call with you anytime next week and discuss how I can help.*

*Best regards,  
[Your Name]*

## Conclusion

Informational interviews are a great way to learn about occupations when you are in the major or career exploration phase, and are a great way to push beyond the job search. When you follow these steps for planning, conducting, and follow up, you can gain valuable insight to plot a career path that’s suitable for your skills, experience, and interests.

Need help setting up your LinkedIn Profile? Be sure to contact an FPU Career Counselor at [career.services@fresno.edu](mailto:career.services@fresno.edu) or check out our [LinkedIn resource](#).