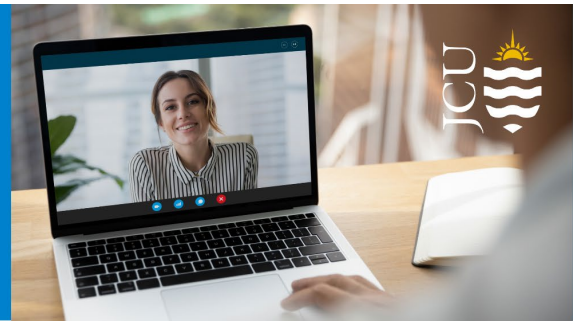


Informational interviews

Gaining firsthand career insights



Informational interviews offer a simple and effective way of gaining practical advice and information from experienced professionals that is not easily obtained through regular research. Informational interviewing involves engaging with someone at a more advanced level in their career in a focused conversation to receive useful insights about their position, background, career trajectory, the organisation and/or industry they work in and any advice they may have. Well-structured conversations with professionals can assist with exploring career options and clarifying goals by obtaining meaningful career information from firsthand experiences.

Benefits of informational interviewing

Informational interviewing is a powerful way to create new opportunities by connecting with individuals who are either employed in roles you are interested in or are completing study that you may be considering. Benefits include:

- **Learn:** Gain valuable insights by speaking to working professionals and getting an inside look at positions of interest. Test any assumptions you may have and even learn about other opportunities that align with your skills and experience. This can support you in exploring career options and clarifying your goals
- **Build your network:** While the purpose of the interview is not to gain a job, it can support you in expanding your network by linking in with people you may not have otherwise met.
- **Practice interview skills and build your confidence:** Interviewing can be intimidating when you are expected to sell yourself and convince an employer you are worth their investment. Informational interviewing can provide the opportunity to ask insightful questions and practise expressing yourself under less pressure.
- **Uncover new opportunities:** Your interviewee may consider offering themselves as a mentor or keep you in mind for future opportunities within their organisation or through their extended networks.



Step 1: Decide what you want to know

Spend some time brainstorming what is it that you want to learn more about:

- Are you exploring a specific occupation and want to know what the job is really like?
- Do you want to understand how the industry works or what it takes to be successful in this field?
- Is there a competitive graduate program you are hoping to apply for and have found someone who was successful in gaining entry into and completing that program?

Once you have identified what it is you hope to learn from the experience, start mapping out your current network. Consider anyone who you think will provide you with a new perspective or good advice. This could be fellow students, alumni (graduates from the university), senior professionals in your area of speciality, or people employed at organisations and in positions that interest you.

Step 2: Reach out to request a meeting.

Once you have identified a suitable person that you would like to learn more from, reach out in a friendly and professional way to ask them for some of their time. It is useful if you have a mutual connection that you can reach out to first and ask for an introduction via email or LinkedIn or another form of communication.

The use of online networking platforms such as LinkedIn has become increasingly common and convenient for establishing professional connections. You can make your initial connection using a personalised note to send along with a connection request, but check out their profile first and see if they have an email address listed as this can be a more formal way to request for an informational interview. Here is a sample:

Good morning [Name],

I hope you are well. I am writing because I am studying ecology at James Cook University and I am interested in pursuing a career in conservation when I graduate at the end of this year. Given that you are an environmental scientist at [organisation name], I hope to ask you some questions about your background and experience. Would you happen to have time in the next month for a coffee? I am also based in Townsville, so we can meet anywhere that is convenient for you. Alternatively, we could have a 30-minute Zoom call if you prefer? Either way, I am eager to get to know more about the industry and how you got to where you are.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Kind Regards,
[your name]

Step 3: Develop a list of questions.

Invest time in your preparation. You may already have specific questions that you want to know about the person's role and the experiences they have had that have supported their career development. Below are some example questions to help you get started.

Present professional experience

- What were the steps you took from your graduate position to reach this point in your career?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in your position?
- What skills and experiences are key to being successful in your position?
- What are the qualities and attributes of successful people in your field?
- What are the most rewarding aspects of your work?
- What are the most challenging aspects of your work?
- What makes your organisation a good place to work?
- How would you describe the organisational culture and management style at your current place of employment?



Past professional experience

- What inspired you to pursue this as a career?
- How did you find your first position? What did the recruitment / interview process involve?
- Are there common entry-level roles or pathways that you'd recommend?
- When you think about your first year as a graduate, what actions were key in creating success? (e.g. engaging with colleagues, establishing expectations, work/life balance etc.)
- What did you feel most underprepared for in your graduate position? Is there anything that you would have done differently to feel more confident or work-ready?

Future directions

- How is the industry evolving? How do you stay up to date with the latest trends?
- What do you see as the next steps in your career path?
- What opportunities do you see opening up for you in your position over the next 5 to 10 years?

General advice

- What advice would you give a student or graduate who wants to be successful in this field?
- What advice would you give new graduates about what to look for in terms of orientation, support etc?
- What questions do you suggest candidates ask before taking on a new position?
- I have a copy of my resume. Would you look at it and let me know your thoughts?

- Would you be open to recommending others I could speak with to gain further insights into my areas of interest?

Step 4: Conduct the interview

Informational interviews generally cover four key areas: The **present, past, future** and **advice**. Interviews tend to be 30-60 minutes in total and can occur in person, via email, online platforms (Zoom), or over the phone. Set yourself a timeframe for each section of the interview to ensure you can ask questions across each of the areas, for example:

Focus	Length of Time
Interviewee's Past	10 minutes
Interviewee's Present	5 minutes
Interviewee's Future	5 minutes
Interviewee's Advice	10 minutes

Step 5: Follow-up and reflection

After the interview make sure you send a thank you as soon as possible to acknowledge their contributions and express your gratitude for them giving up their time to meet with you. For example, write a thoughtful email that includes a few sentences that highlight some specific points from your conversation that have had a lasting impact on you and your next steps.

Stay connected. Following on from your positive interaction, the next step is to keep in touch and build a stronger professional relationship with them. Keep the line of communication open to remain at the forefront of their mind for potential jobs, professional development and ideas that may be useful for you. Actively engaging with and building your professional network with intentional and like-minded individuals can be invaluable to your future career.



Getting the most out of your informational interview

- ✓ Do your research before going in so that you remain professional and come across as a committed individual who is genuinely interested in seeking new opportunities.
- ✓ Prepare a clear and succinct introduction about who you are and what you are looking to achieve.
- ✓ Be respectful of their time and demonstrate professionalism. Respect their schedule by showing up on time and dressing according to the position you are hoping to learn about in your interview.
- ✓ Have a professional and up-to-date LinkedIn profile. Establish or refine your LinkedIn profile by working through our checklist – Launch your LinkedIn.
- ✓ Stay connected. The interviewee has now become a valuable member of your professional network.

Want to know more?

There are a number of informational interview training modules available on LinkedIn Learning. Take a look at Barbara Bruno's [Informational Interviewing Training](#).