

Informational interviews

One of the best ways to find out what a particular job role, career, company or sector is like is to speak to people who already work in it. Informational interviews are a great way of doing this.

What is an informational interview?

Informational interviews may be planned (best option) or spontaneous, informal conversations between you and someone working in your field of interest. The goal of an informational interview is to help you learn more about a particular job role or sector, get tips and advice on getting in, or possibly some opinion on your CV; it is not about asking for a job. It can also be a great way to start building a network of contacts in your preferred sector.

Finding people to interview

You will have greater success asking for informational interviews if you begin where there is an existing connection.

- Start off with people you know; ask if they know anyone working in your field of interest
- Leeds Network – Leeds Alumni who are willing to speak to current students about their careers
- Using advanced people search on LinkedIn to identify people – again, focus on those where there is an existing connection, for example Leeds Alumni or perhaps any 2nd degree connections who one of your connections could introduce you to.

See the Networking page of our website for additional ideas on where you might find contacts.

How to set up an interview

- Make contact by telephone if possible, but if not in a short e-mail
- Introduce yourself, say how you got their details and why you are contacting them
- Be clear that you are seeking information, advice or opinion about getting into their sector or type of job; you are not asking for a job
- Ask for a convenient time to arrange a short meeting or telephone conversation
- Be prepared to ask your questions (see some ideas on what to ask below) on the spot in case they are happy to talk then
- Have a brief synopsis of your background, interests skills and experience ready in case they want to know a bit about you
- Offer to meet where most convenient for them; for example at their place of work, or perhaps offer to take them for coffee nearby

During the interview

- **Be professional** – arrive in plenty of time, dress smartly and be polite
- **Be respectful of their time** – Reiterate what you are hoping to get from the interview and how long you expect it to take. Make sure you stick to the agreed timescale
- **Be prepared to lead the interview** – As you arranged the interview, you need to take the lead. Prepare your questions beforehand (see suggestions below), but be flexible enough to let the conversation take its natural path
- **Be interested** – listen, show your enthusiasm, take notes if appropriate
- **Be grateful** – thank them for their time; if appropriate, ask if they would mind if you contacted them with any follow-up questions
- **Be proactive** – Ask if they could recommend anyone else it might be worth you speaking to

After the interview

- **Reflect** – Spend some time reflecting on what you have learnt. Has this caused you to question your current ideas, or given you any additional insights or ideas to pursue? Jot down any additional notes or questions which occur to you after the interview; these could form the basis of a follow up conversation
- **Follow-up** – Always thank them again for their time, this could be a short e-mail or note in the post. If they have given you any contacts or leads, let them know how these progress
- **Stay in touch** – If they have indicated they are happy for you to stay in touch, do so. This does not have to be constant, maybe just drop them an e-mail occasionally letting them know how things are progressing, or sharing anything useful that you come across which may be of interest to them. You might also want to ask if they are happy to connect with you on LinkedIn.

What to ask

What you ask is up to you – remember to keep it professional – we have listed some questions which might be useful below:

1. How did you get into this field?
2. What is a typical career path in this field?
3. Can you describe a typical day/week?
4. How do people get into this field?
5. What do you like most/ least about your job/ working in this field?
6. Industry trends – for example is it currently growing/shrinking?
7. Are there professional or trade associations I should look into?
8. What skills and/or experience are typically sought after in this field?
9. What do you read to keep up to date with latest developments in this field?
10. What advice would you give to someone considering this job/field?
11. Can you suggest other people I should speak to/ further sources of information?