

Explore



Prepare



Develop



Informational Interviewing

A Self-help Tool

Introduction

Informational Interviews are simply a way of talking to someone about the job they do, the organisation they work for or the sector they are employed in to find out what it is like.

Informational Interviews are not about asking for a job, although sometimes as a by-product you may be told about an up coming opportunity.

The key benefit is that you get first-hand, inside information; a 'warts and all' deep-dive into a career and what it is really like.

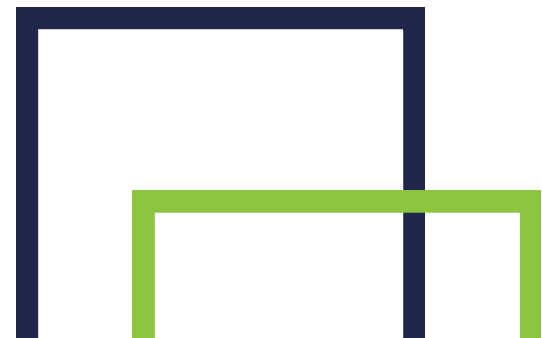
Sometimes informational interviewing can be made to sound a bit daunting. But it does not need to be. All you are doing is having a chat with someone about the career they are in. Most people like talking about their job, and are generally happy to give up 20 minutes of their time to help someone who is starting out.

This tool is designed to...

- Help you reach out to people to find out more about the career they are in.
- Make it easy to have conversations with professionals.
- Give you a richer picture of a career / sector than you could get by just relying on published sources.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Want to ask questions about what a career, organisation or sector is like, so you can decide if it is for you.
- Want inside advice on how to get into a career.
- Want to build up a number of contacts who can give you information and advice about options you are interested in.



How to use this tool

1

First, work out why you want to speak to someone.

What is the goal of the conversation? Is it to:

- Find out what an occupation is like?
- Find out how to improve your chances of getting into a career?
- Find out what an organisation is like?
- Discover what different roles a sector offers?

Obviously, your conversation may be about more than one of these.



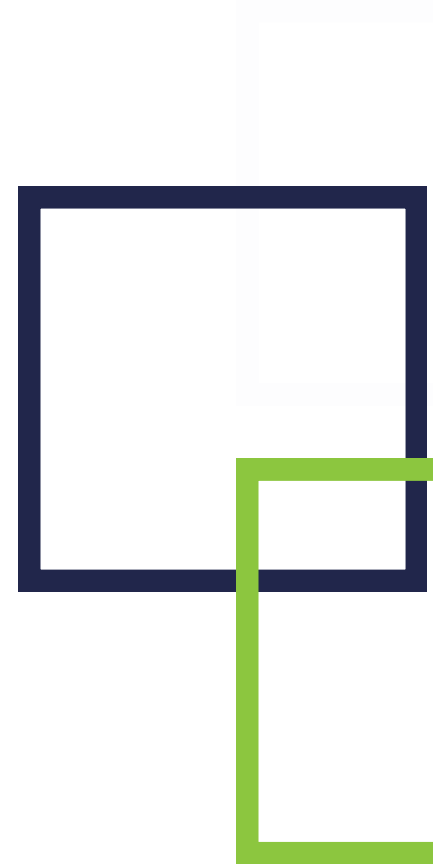
2

Second, find someone you want to talk to who has a relevant job.

A good plan is to start with someone who is already part of your circle of contacts. For instance:

- A neighbour you know.
- An aunt or uncle.
- An older brother or sister.
- A parent of one of your friends.
- Someone who works at the University.
- Someone you already know through a student job, placement year or a past / current professional role you have (e.g. if you are a mature student or studying part time).
- Someone who is part of a community group / faith group you belong to.
- Someone who is part of a voluntary organisation you belong to.

If there is no one within your immediate circle, then you may find that someone you know has a friend or relative they could put you in touch with. It is always worth asking around as it is surprising what connections people have.



The following people may be able to introduce you to someone relevant:

- Someone who is part of an SU or International Office student society that you go to.
- Someone who is part of an online community that you belong to.
- Your mentor (if you have one).
- Your Personal Tutor.
- Your PhD Supervisor
- Your Careers Advisor.

Other ways of finding people for informational interviews include:

- Searching on LinkedIn (the University of Huddersfield has a large alumni community who you can contact).
- Googling organisations (do they have a contact for graduate careers, or even a live chat function?)
- Approaching professional bodies (many will have a student membership support function). They may support online communities.
- Making contacts at employer events like the virtual and on-campus Careers Fairs run by the careers service.
- Asking employers who give a guest lecture on your degree.
- Approaching people at (virtual or in-person) networking events (these may be organised by your School or by a graduate employer).
- Using contacts you make at an academic symposium.
- Using industry / academic contacts you make at a research conference.



3

Third, decide what questions you want to ask.

Usually you can find out something about the career / organisation / sector you are interested in online. Having done this initial background research, what further questions do you have?

For instance:

- What is a typical day like in...?
- What is good about working in...?
- What are the down sides of a career in...?
- What are the opportunities for career development?
- What advice would you give to someone wanting to get into this career?
- What qualifications or experience are needed?
- How would you describe the culture of the organisation you work for?
- Where are the growth areas in this profession? (part of the country, new roles, organisations which hire a lot of grads etc.)
- What is the sector like?

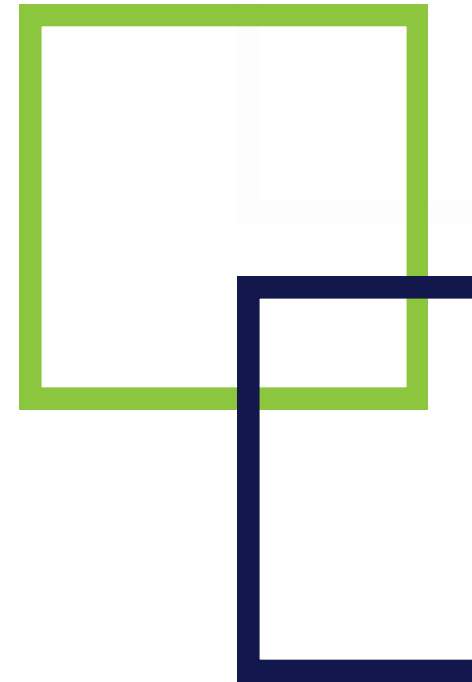
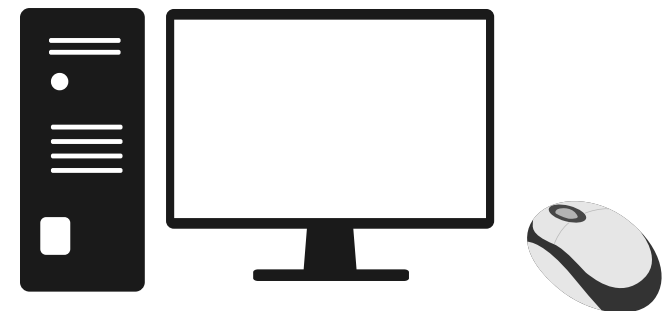
For more questions see the Suggested Questions for Informational Interviews in the References and Resources section at the end.

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Four, contact them in a professional manner.

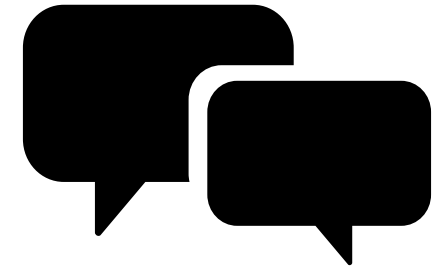
You will probably email them. Be polite, explain why you would like to chat and ask them when would be convenient. Remember to follow normal business etiquette, so do not use text speak. If they are up for a virtual meeting confirm the arrangements time and method (are you using phone, Teams, zoom etc?) and duration (probably 20 mins).

If someone does not get back straight away, you can send a polite reminder a week later. If someone does not respond, do not take it personally. Everyone is busy and sometimes other priorities can over-ride. Just try someone else.



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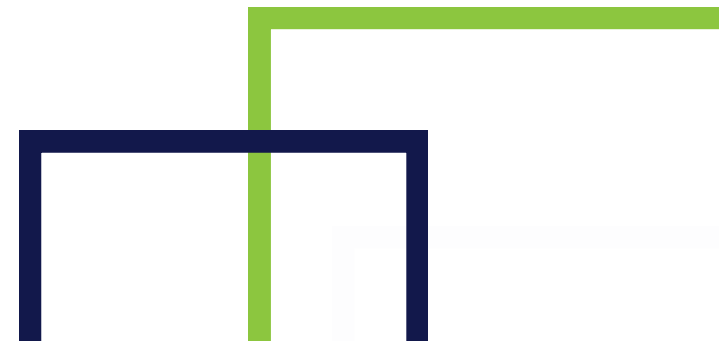
Five, have the meeting!



Make sure you are online promptly. Be somewhere you can chat which feels comfortable to you. Avoid scheduling calls on trains / buses where the connection is unreliable! If you need a private space, ask at the iPoint if an interview room in Student Central can be booked for you. Have your list of questions to hand and a way of taking notes.

Be friendly and polite. Remember the person has chosen to chat to you and wants to tell you about their line of work. Relax; it's NOT a job interview. They are on your side.

Remember it is a two-way conversation. You will naturally want to talk about yourself a bit as well and why you are interested in their career. You do not have to stick rigidly to your prepared questions. It is an interview not an interrogation! Let the conversation flow naturally.



More tips...

Towards the end of the conversation, if you feel comfortable with this you might ask the person if there is anyone they could introduce you to who would be useful to talk to. This is a great way of expanding your contacts. You do not have to do this, but it is definitely worth considering.

Be aware of the time and do not over-run.

End by thanking them for their time.

Afterwards, send them a thank you email (and thank the person who connected you in the first place). If they are on LinkedIn, why not connect with them?

For more practical advice see 4 Steps to a successful information interview in the References and Resources section.

6

Six, repeat the process.

By talking to several people working in the same or related area, you will start to build up a really rich picture. The different perspectives will help fill in gaps and give you a well-rounded and balanced view.

Pause, Reflect, Act.

- How do you feel about undertaking informational interviewing?
- If you do not feel confident in taking this forwards, who could help you with advice and support?
- If you have undertaken one or more informational interviews what are the key insights you have gained and what are the implications for your career plans?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other related Self-help Tools you would like to use as well?

NB: Because everyone is different, this tool may not work for you, so please also look at our other Self-help Tools as well.

References and Resources

- Alstyne, J., V. (Sept, 2022). What Are Informational Interviews? From PhD to Life.
<https://fromphdtolife.com/2022/09/26/what-are-informational-interviews/>
- My Future. (June, 2021). 4 Steps to a successful information interview.
<https://myfuture.edu.au/career-articles/details/4-steps-to-a-successful-information-interview>. Accessed 20.02.2023.
- University of Edinburgh Careers Service (no date). Suggested Questions for Informational Interviews.
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/suggestedquestions.pdf> Accessed 20.02.2023.

Dave Stanbury, Feb, 2023

If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our Self-help Tools with your students, we would love to hear from you and share good practice. We would ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we have used. Thank you.