

A Student Guide to Informational Interviews - 2017-2018

What?

An Informational Interview is a short, intentional, conversation-style meeting with a professional to learn about his or her particular career journey, job, organization and industry. Informational interviews are typically used by students, or those outside of a particular industry, to build career literacy and learn about the "world of work".

Informational interviews should be used to ask professionals for ADVICE, not for a job.



Why?

There are many benefits to conducting informational interviews. For many students, it is difficult to imagine the daily lives of professionals beyond what one might have seen on television or in a movie. Informational interviews provide invaluable, real-world snapshots of what it is like to be in a particular profession, industry or department. Most professionals are willing to share with students their opinions and experiences regarding:

- Career Path - their journey from internship to post-college job through current job - what they have enjoyed? found frustrating? what attributed to their success? what they might do differently?
- Current Role - description of typical day, roles and responsibilities, schedule and workload
- Department - mission and structure of department within organization, culture, typical backgrounds, opportunities for promotion
- Organization - basic structure, recruiting process, growth, challenges within industry, culture, leadership
- Industry - competitors, trends shaping growth/changes in hiring, best ways to network/find opportunities
- Opinions - training required, best internships for breaking into industry, other people to contact

Lastly, conducting effective informational interviews will often help a student build a professional network so that when she is internship or job searching, these professionals become the eyes and ears for opportunities and internal advocates for helping the student land interviews.

When?

The sooner, the better! The Office of Internship and Career Development at Agnes Scott encourages students to begin informational interviewing during the spring of first year. Students are advised to combine informational interviews with career panels, speakers, treks and internships to effectively build career literacy and learn about potential careers. The following chart summarizes our recommended minimum number of interviews.

	Info Interviews (per semester/summer)	Networking Events (panels, alumnae talks, treks)
First Year	2	1
Sophomore	3	2
Junior	4	3
Senior	As many as possible	As many as possible

How? Tips for Successful Informational Interviewing:

- 1) **Prepare your communication toolkit: Resume and LinkedIn.** You need to make a professional connection with prospective interviewees which requires a professional resume and up-to-date LinkedIn profile. Use the Resume Guide and Templates available on the Internship and Career Development website at [Resume and LinkedIn Guides](#) to update your resume. Then proof and upload your resume to agnesscott.edu/hireascottie for feedback and approval by a Career Coach.
 - *Clean up your social media (Facebook, twitter, etc.) before reaching out to professionals. Google yourself to make sure you know what might come up if a professional tried to "check you out."*
- 2) **Identify your objectives.** What do you hope to learn? Are there careers or organizations that pique your interest? What coursework do you prefer? Build on what you enjoy to identify potential areas about which to learn more.

Make a list of possible organizations and people from whom you would like to learn more. Ask people you trust (supervisors, ASC faculty/staff) for suggestions. Consider the following list:

- Alumnae (those you meet at networking events, names provided by the Internship/Career Development Office, those you find with the advanced search on LinkedIn in target industries, orgs or professions)
- ASC Faculty and Staff (many have friends outside the college who might work in your field of interest)
- Internship, volunteer or part-time work supervisors

3) **Ask with Intention.** Craft an “intentional” message via LinkedIn or email to contact potential interviewees. When reaching out, introduce yourself and explain your connection to them and your specific request of 20 – 30 minutes of their time. NEVER ask for an informational interview accompanied by a meal or over a drink – that is not considered professional or respectful. Always attach your resume for their easy reference. It is also helpful to suggest a convenient timeframe. For example:

- “Dear Ms. Rogers, I am interning in the ABC department and my supervisor, Sally Smith, suggested I talk to you to learn more about your career in accounting. Would you be willing to spend 20 minutes with me to share your journey and provide a glimpse into the day-in and day-out life of a career as a financial analyst?”
- “Dear Ms. Jones, I am a sophomore at Agnes Scott College and really enjoy my math and psychology courses. I see from LinkedIn that you have a successful career in Market Analytics, and I would love to hear about your journey from psychology major to your current position. Would you be willing to speak with me for 30 minutes by phone so I can ask you some questions about your career path? I do not have class on Tuesday/Thursdays.”

4) **Prepare.** Once someone replies to say yes to your request, you must prepare thoroughly and professionally. You requested the meeting so it is your role to lead the conversation and convey respect for their time and advice.

- Promptly ask and/confirm the specifics of the interview – location, time, etc. Confirm the number on which you should contact the person (if by phone). Also, confirm the day before with a short courteous email.
- Research the professional and his/her organization (core business, locations, client or service base, news and social media). You do not want to ask questions that are easily answered by on a website.
- Prepare ~ 5 written, appropriate, relevant questions. Review your objectives about what you want to learn, but the best questions are usually ones that focus on the professional’s career path:
 - Tell me about your career journey from college to your current role.
 - What factors do you think attributed most to your success?
 - What advice would you give someone like me who is interested in your industry or what you do?
 - Two great articles to review -

<http://www.levo.com/articles/career-advice/10-intelligent-questions-to-ask-on-an-informational-interview>

<https://careermuscles.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/the-only-1-questions-to-ask-in-an-informational-interview-pete-leibman-career-expert-speaker-1/>

5) **Lead a professional interview.**

- If by phone, ensure a quiet place and clear connection. Be available on time. Introduce yourself – “Hello, this is Sarah Smith. Is this still a good time to talk?”
- If in person, dress professionally and silence and put away your cell phone. Be on time and give a firm handshake. Make eye contact, smile and be attentive.
- Watch the time to honor your request for 20-30 minutes. Skip to your last questions if needed to wrap up.



6) **Thank you and Follow-up.**

- Thank the professional at the time AND by email/personal note within 24 hours.
- Invite them to connect on LinkedIn. Keep in touch with updates, articles of interest: internships, ideas discussed, your graduation. Thank them again for their advice.
- If they referred you to someone else, reach out to that person within a week and always loop back to let them know where that referral takes you.

