

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Informational interviews are one of the best ways to learn the ins and outs and the real story of a career. The primary goal of an informational interview is to learn about a career – not to ask for a job or internship. Hearing from someone in your targeted industry who is willing to share their experience and expertise can help you make important career decisions and expand your network. You can determine if you are a fit for the career, get tips on how to get started or advance in the field, and learn about specific employers. Informational interviews can lead to future opportunities once you have established a relationship, so be sure to present yourself professionally, research the interviewee, tailor your questions in advance, show up on time, and be respectful of their time.

Select key questions (or add your own) based on what you feel will be most helpful in making your career decisions and the length of the interview (which is typically about 20 minutes).

PERSONAL ASPECTS OF THE CAREER

1. What attracted you to this career path?
2. What satisfaction do you find in your work? What are the rewards, both tangible and intangible?
3. What are some of the challenges you find in the work? What are some of the stresses and frustrations? Did your training prepare you for these?
4. What was your first job out of college? How has your career path led you to your current role?
5. Tell me about a few projects you recently worked on.
6. What would surprise people about your daily work?
7. What previous professional experiences have helped you the most in this role?
8. What are some of the joys and challenges about your work setting, its structure, its facilities, the people?
9. What do you wish someone would have told you before you started this career?
10. What advice do you have for an entry-level candidate interested in doing what you do?
11. Does your career permit you to lead the kind of life you would like to live? How does your career affect your style of life - the required work load, the time commitment, work-life balance?
12. If you could go back in time, is there anything you would do differently?

QUESTIONS ABOUT AN OCCUPATION

1. Would you please describe a typical work day?
2. What type of education and training are recommended as preparation for the job? Distinguish between what is desirable and what is necessary.
3. Is there a certification employers look for?
4. Which skills are particularly important? Are there any personal qualities or abilities that are most marketable?
5. What kind of work experience would employers look for in in this field? How might a student obtain this work experience?
6. While a student, what can I do to make myself stand out? Specific coursework? Research? Internships? On-campus involvement?
7. How would you describe someone who would excel in this career?

8. What other steps are necessary to enter this occupation (e.g., required testing, join a union)?
9. What is a typical entry level title?
10. What are the opportunities for advancement? Is an advanced degree needed? If so, in which area?
11. What are the different work settings in which people in this occupation may be employed?
12. What are some related occupations? Are there occupations doing similar work, but at different levels, such as assistant, paraprofessional?
13. Are there professional organizations that you would recommend?

PROSPECTS OF THE CAREER

1. What advice do you have for finding a job in this field?
2. What are current employment prospects locally? Elsewhere?
3. What future trends do you see?
4. How will these changes affect the plans and training for people interested in this career?
5. What challenges do you think a person entering this field now can expect to encounter?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Are there any questions I'm not asking that I should be?
2. Would it be alright for us to stay in touch?
3. Are you willing to provide any feedback on my resume?
4. Can you recommend other people that I should speak to about this? Who can you refer me to that shares my interests and goals?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. Which aspects of the job would you like?
2. Which aspects of the job would you dislike? How long could you tolerate them?
3. What is your reaction to the conditions (e.g. stress, anxieties) of this occupation? Do you think you would be able to handle them?
4. What is your reaction to the amount of freedom or flexibility the worker has in determining what they do on the job?
5. Do you already have (or could you acquire) the skills and personal characteristics necessary for this job or career?
6. How do you feel about the duties described in relation to your strengths and weaknesses?
7. Are you willing to complete the necessary education and training?

NEXT STEPS

1. Be sure to send a thank-you note and stay connected to your new contact.
2. Reflect on skills and experiences you need to build and brainstorm ways to build upon your strengths.
3. Write down key takeaways, companies to explore, future contacts, potential internship sites, and advice.