

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviews are great ways to gather information for exploring career options. They generally involve 30 minute conversations with professionals about their careers and what they do in their jobs. Requesting and conducting informational interviews is about networking and gathering information about a particular industry or occupation—it is not about asking for a job.

Preparation

Begin by making a list of people you already know who might have information to help in your search. Use your existing connections or tools, like WPI TechConnect, LinkedIn, or CareerShift, to identify additional networking contacts. Potential networking contacts include the following:

- Relatives
- Friends - especially those who have had internships at companies of interest to you
- Family friends
- Faculty and academic advisors
- Former employers and co-workers
- Neighbors and community members
- Alumni

Reaching out to a Potential Networking Contact

A phone call is the best way to reach out to a potential contact, as emails can easily get lost. If you have a phone number for a networking contact, call to introduce yourself and ask for an informational interview. Here is an example of an introductory phone call:

Contact: "Hello, this is Brit Bennett."

Student: "Good morning, Brit. My name is Colson Whitehead. I received your name from Naguib Mahfouz, who is a neighbor of mine. I'm a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Naguib suggested I reach out to you."

Contact: "Oh, yes. He mentioned you might call. What can I do for you, Colson?"

Student: "I know your schedule is busy, so I will not take much of your time. I am pursuing a career in civil engineering and Naguib mentioned that you're currently working as a Project Engineer at XX Company. It sounds like you've had a lot of great experience in the civil engineering field and, if possible, I would like to arrange a time for an informational interview with you. My schedule is very flexible and I'm looking for only 30 minutes of your time."

Reaching Out by Email

If you do not have a phone number, email is the next best option. Here is a sample structure to help you draft an initial email asking for an informational interview:



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Good morning, my name is _____.
I am a senior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and am graduating in May with a Bachelor of Science degree in the _____ (field), and I'd love to find out more about working in _____ (industry, type of role, etc). You have a broad background in _____ (that industry, role, etc), and I'd love to talk with you about _____ (companies that would value my skills and strategies for getting into this industry, role, etc). Would you be willing to talk with me (or meet for coffee if the contact is local) sometime over the next week or two? When would be a convenient date and time for you?

Preparing for the Meeting

Do your research and prepare ahead of time before the informational interview. Determine the objectives of the discussion, research the company and person, and prepare an agenda with questions to ask. Your questions should be thoughtful and specific, such as the following:

- What do you think are the most effective techniques for obtaining work in this field?
- What are the necessary skills and abilities for someone in this field, role, etc.?
- What has your experience been like at your current company?
- How did you get into this field?
- What do you like or dislike about your work?
- How have you found mentors throughout your career?
- Are there any industries, sectors, or roles that you think would best match my skill set?

- What barriers would I need to overcome to make a move into this field, industry, role, etc.?
- Do you have any additional suggestions or advice for me?

Conducting the Meeting

Begin the meeting by thanking the contact for taking the time to speak with you. Set the tone and clarify your purpose by stating your career goals and what you hope to gain from the discussion. Use your prepared questions to help drive the conversation. Always be mindful of the time—if you find that you are exceeding the time agreed upon, check with the contact to ensure they are able to continue the discussion.

Close by thanking the contact again and discussing any next steps, if applicable. Ask if there is anyone else who they recommend you talk to. This is a great way to expand your network.

Follow Up

Send a thank you note or email to the contact within two days of a discussion. Also check in with them from time to time to provide updates on your job progress, highlighting how they have helped, and to ask about any potential new opportunities of which they are aware.

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