



# How to Conduct Successful Informational Interviews

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# 1

You're bound to walk away from informational interviews with new perspectives.

## Introduction

Informational interviews are truly win-win-win opportunities. They're relatively easy to set up, there's not much to lose from seeking them out, and you're bound to walk away from them with new perspectives on your desired industry or career.

There is a good chance you have already participated in an informal informational interview without realizing it! Networking and other forms of career learning can happen unexpectedly. You may find yourself looking back at past conversations and thinking,

"Oh, that was really useful for my career and shaped how I think about and how I want to approach my career growth. I suppose it was an informational interview!"

In this guide, you will obtain advice on how to arrange and conduct informational interviews with purpose to ensure you're getting what you need out of the experience. We'll also discuss what is expected of you as an interviewer and how to navigate the interview process respectfully.

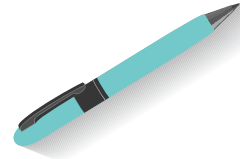
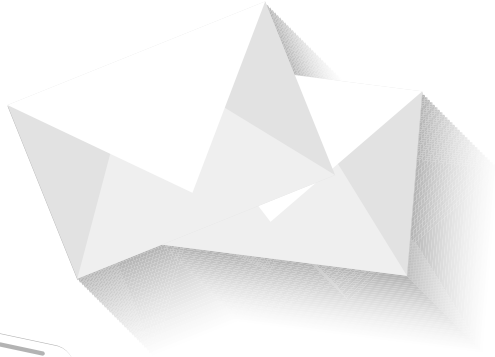


## What Is an Informational Interview?

Simply put, an informational interview is an opportunity for a person seeking career growth to talk to someone who is experienced in a desired position, field, and/or company. The interviewee, the person you're talking to, is extending you, the interviewer, a favor. Typically, there are no job opportunities discussed or offered in these interviews.

"Informational interview" may seem like an intimidating term, but these interviews do not include formal evaluations. Informational interviews are a platform for you to ask questions that pertain to that person's career and industry so you can learn more about their experiences. These interviews are often conversational and casual, especially compared to job interviews.

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## Planning the Informational Interview

Who? What?  
Where? When?  
Why? How?

First, get an idea of the type of person you'd like to interview and what you're hoping to gain from the discussion. If you're unsure, take some time to think it over and maybe even brainstorm with peers, coworkers, or friends and family. Here are some good questions to ponder prior to arranging an interview:

- What type of role would I like to have in 2, 5, or 10 years?
- What kind of values or attributes am I looking for in the next company I work for?
- Do I want to change fields or learn more about my current industry?
- What am I looking for in my next job? What do I want that job to be like, and how do I want it to coexist with my personal life?
- What skills do I possess that would make me effective in a future role/industry/company? What skills do I lack and need to obtain?
- What's holding me back from making an immediate change? What are some questions or concerns I need answered before I make a career change?





## Requesting an Informational Interview

Identify people who work in your desired industry and/or company and who possess many of the traits you listed in your answers to the questions on page 4. When possible, utilize your networking resources to obtain these individuals' contact information, or ask someone in your network to make a casual email introduction. Don't be afraid to reach out cold to a new contact, though. Many people are flattered by this!

When you reach out, be confident, polite, and to the point. Introduce yourself, explain how you came across their contact information or how you came to know of them, express your interest in their field/position/company, and make the request. If you'd like, you can customize the examples on the following pages.



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Reaching out to a cold contact:

“

Hi, my name is Frank Jones. I greatly admire your career path and am impressed by your work on [*insert contribution here*]. I'd love to treat you to coffee so I can hear your perspective on the industry and learn what it's like to work at your company. Do you have any availability in the next week or so?

”

# 4

Reaching out to someone in your extended network:

“

Hello, my name is Sally Smith. I'm a business administration student at Portland State University, and I'm conducting some career research in the human resources field. John Johnson, my academic advisor, passed along your contact information and suggested connecting with you. I'm interested in entering the HR field once I graduate and am hoping you can help me gain insights into the profession. Are you available to meet for 20-30 minutes for an informational interview?

”



# 4

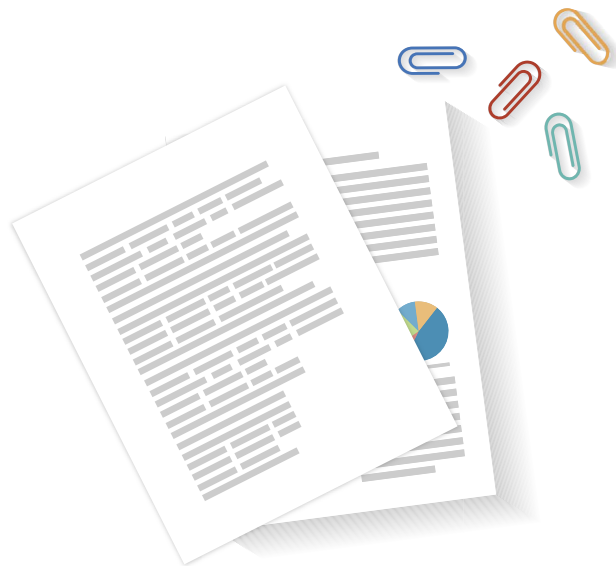
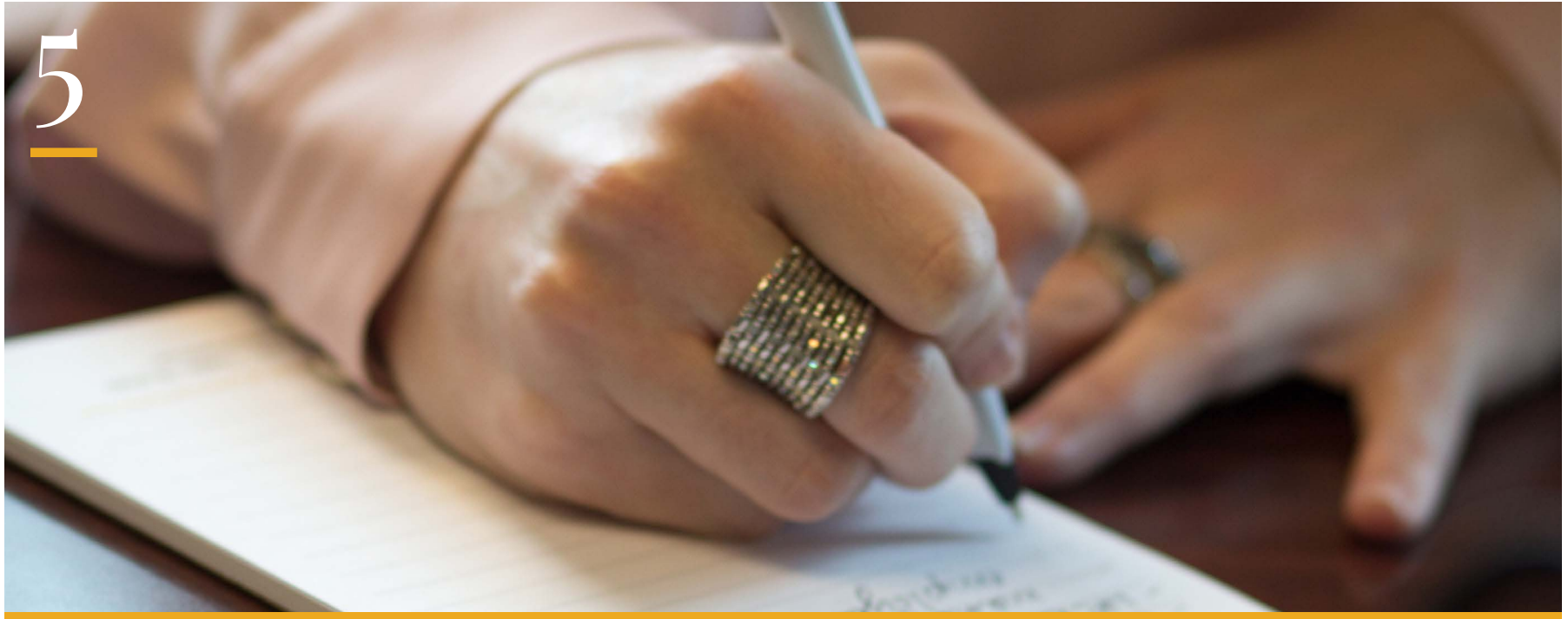
Or even more  
to the point:

“

Hi! My name is Barney Rubble. I'm a personal friend of Fred Flintstone, who recommended reaching out to you. I currently work in construction and am interested in making a career change. Can I buy you a cup of coffee and learn more about working in the aerospace engineering field?

”

Notice what these examples all have in common: they identify interest in meeting with the recipients, are brief and straightforward, frame what kind of information the writers are hoping to obtain, and request meetings that are of reasonable length.



## Preparing for and Conducting the Interview

They've agreed to meet!  
So that's it, right?  
The work is done?

Not quite. Informational interviews are a privilege. The professional you are meeting is extending a favor to you. Return the favor by arriving prepared. Here are some tips to help you get ready.

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## **Do research.**

Check the person's LinkedIn page, Google them, read their website if they have one, consume articles they wrote and any contributions they've made as a thought leader, and research their company and field. You don't need to have a complete understanding of someone's position or industry—that's what the interview is for!—but it's helpful to have a general idea of what they do so you can save time for specific questions.

## **Think of questions in advance.**

Think about what you want to get out of the interview. Identify several topics you hope to broach and write down a few big questions you'd like to ask. You don't need to walk in with a printed questionnaire, but consider having a note with a list of your topics to ensure you cover them all.

## **Be considerate and professional.**

Dress professionally, arrive early, and offer to pay for your interviewee's coffee, drink, or lunch.

## **Do NOT ask for a job.**

Again: DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB.

Informational interviews sometimes lead to job offers or other opportunities, but do not use this time to make such a bold request. Remember, they are doing you a favor, and this is an opportunity for you to make a great impression. If you are job searching, you can mention that, but remember that informational interviews are intended to help you research a field and gain practical, on-the-ground insights.

## **Prepare for opportunities that may come from the informational interview.**

No, this is not contrary to the above statement! Job offers can happen in informational interviews, but it is not proper etiquette to expect or request a job interview. Go in with modest, reasonable expectations, but be aware that your contact may offer you the opportunity to interview for a job or meet with another contact in your field. Just in case, be prepared for your interviewee to ask, "Is there anyone else I can put you in touch with?" Know how to state what you're after—but only do so if you're prompted.



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The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge.

–Thomas Berger

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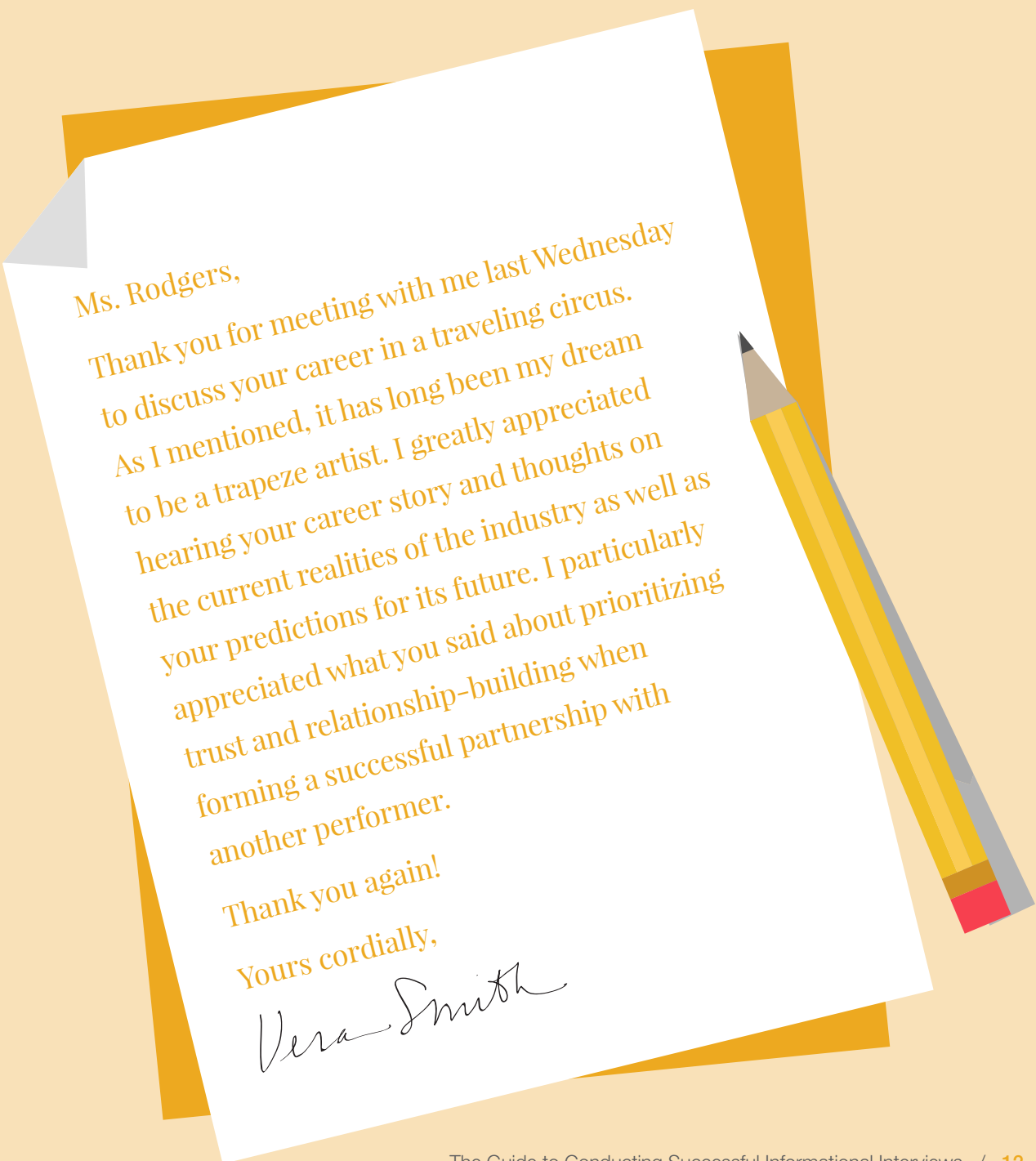
## Knock It Out of the Park with These Questions

- What's a typical day like in your role?  
Breaking it into percentages, how much of an average day do you spend on each task?
- Why does this work interest you, and how did you get started?
- What positions and experiences led you to your current role?
- Do you get a sense of purpose from your role? What is that purpose?
- How do you define success in your role?
- What are some work-related challenges that keep you up at night?
- What's the best way to enter this field/industry, and at what level?
- What shifts (economic, political, or technological) are occurring across the industry?
- Is there a typical career path in this industry/in your company?
- What makes your organization different from your competitors?
- What skills and experiences do you draw on most frequently in your role?
- How can I determine if I have the right skills and experiences for a position like yours?
- What is the general outlook for this field? What kind of employment opportunities have you seen recently?

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## How to Follow Up

Shortly after the interview, send a thank you note or email. Mention a particularly useful takeaway from the conversation, or link to a relevant article to demonstrate that you've continued to think about the meeting. Here's a sample script:



Ms. Rodgers,

Thank you for meeting with me last Wednesday to discuss your career in a traveling circus. As I mentioned, it has long been my dream to be a trapeze artist. I greatly appreciated hearing your career story and thoughts on the current realities of the industry as well as your predictions for its future. I particularly appreciated what you said about prioritizing trust and relationship-building when forming a successful partnership with another performer.

Thank you again!

Yours cordially,

Vera Smith

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Reflecting on your informational interview experiences will help shape your beliefs about what's next in your career.

## What's Next?


Take time to reflect on your experience, assess how the interview went, and orient yourself toward your next steps. Ask yourself:

- How did the interview go overall? Was it good/bad/okay/awkward? Why was it that way, and how can you ensure the next one goes even better?
- Did you get all the information you were hoping to get?
- Was your interviewee the right person to interview? Did you learn that the position you're looking to transition to has a different title, or that maybe a different field or type of company would be more ideal for you? What qualities will you focus on when you're looking for the next person to interview?
- What new topics, programs or degrees, and/or industries do you want to research now?
- What will be your purpose in your next informational interview? What questions remain?

Reflecting on your informational interview experiences will help shape your beliefs about what's next in your career. Hopefully, you'll soon get the opportunity to pay it forward and share some of what you've learned along the way—maybe from the other side of the table in an informational interview.



## Resources & Further Reading

-  **PODCAST:** [Leveraging Informational Interviews for Your Employees' Development](#)
-  **BOOK:** [Want a New Better Fantastic Job?](#)
-  **ARTICLE:** [3 Steps to a Perfect Informational Interview](#)
-  **BOOK:** [From Graduation to Corporation: The Practical Guide to Climbing the Corporate Ladder One Rung at a Time](#)
-  **ARTICLE:** [How to Get the Most out of an Informational Interview](#)



## Blog

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