



LAKE FOREST
COLLEGE

Career Milestone Guide: Conducting an Informational Interview

One of the best ways to learn about your career options and to target specific professional pathways is to master the informational interview. An informational interview is a conversation with a professional who works in a field that you are interested in. These conversations can help you gain a stronger understanding of the skills necessary to be successful, identify important trends, and learn tips for job searching or interviewing.

Informational interviewing is *not about asking for a job* and you might (and should) perform informational interviews to explore careers even when you are not actively job searching. When you are job searching, they can be effective as you may identify ways to strengthen yourself as a candidate or learn about unpublished opportunities.

Informational Interview Prep Sheet

An effective informational interview involves several steps: 1) researching professionals, organizations and industries; 2) contacting professionals; 3) preparing appropriate questions; 4) conducting the informational interview; and 5) following up.

To get the most out of these opportunities, you should conduct each interview in a way that is focused on both gaining knowledge from the professional and sharing information about yourself and your interests.

Research

Create a list of potential interview candidates from your network (family/friends, faculty/ staff, alumni, people in the community and LinkedIn). After completing training, the Career Advancement Center can give you access to the [Forester Career Network](#) to help you get started.

List 5 potential interview candidates:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____

Learn more about each person to demonstrate your interest in them, their organization, and their field. What did this individual study? Does he/she have a graduate or professional degree? Where did he/she start working after college? What products/services does his/her organization offer? This will help you have a richer conversation during your interview.

List 3 interesting things about each person, organization or field:

Request an Informational Interview

Email/Letter: The best way to make the first contact is to write a brief, professional email or letter addressed to the person who you are interested in meeting with. Your message should include information on how you found their contact information, a summary of your background, and why you are interested in speaking with him/her specifically. Ask for 20-30 minutes of his/her time at a time and place convenient for him/her. Thank them in advance for their time. See below for a sample email:

Subject: Request for an Informational Interview: Career in Financial Planning

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I discovered on the Forester Career Network that you are the Managing Partner at Merrill Lynch & Co. and lead a wealth management team that focuses on high net worth individuals and families. I am a junior at Lake Forest College majoring in economics and am exploring ways to combine my passion for business with my interest in working closely with clients.

I am very interested in learning more about wealth management and the knowledge and experience required to pursue a career in your field. I would appreciate it if we could set up a 20 to 30 minute phone or in-person meeting to hear your ideas and suggestions. Please let me know a few days and times that are convenient for you. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your consideration.

*Sincerely,
Pat Smith*

Call: You may call the professional instead of sending an email or letter. It is important to prepare for the call and to be clear in what you are asking. The call may be directed to an administrative assistant who will inquire about why you are calling and possibly ask that you leave a message or schedule a time if possible. If so, leave a message explaining your reasons for calling and ask for the best time to reach your contact. Indicate your willingness to call back at that time. Sometimes you may reach your contact directly and find that he/she can only do the informational interview over the phone. This is why it is important to be prepared with questions and comments before making any calls. However, personal meetings are always best. Attempt to set up a meeting with your contact, and emphasize that it should be at their convenience. See *below for a sample phone script:*

“Hello. My name is _____ and I am currently a _____ at Lake Forest College. I received your name from _____ and thought you would be a great resource as I explore my career path of _____. Would you be able to set up a 15 to 20 minute meeting with me to talk more about your career path and how you got to your current role at _____? Please let me know a time and location that is convenient for you. I am also willing to speak via phone.”

Prepare appropriate questions

Develop a list of at least 10 questions that you would like to have answered. Topics could vary from the education and experience needed to enter the field, how the contact came to choose that career field, or just asking for a critique of your resume. Below are some general questions you might ask, **but be sure to include specific details from your research.**

Career Development

- How did you decide on _____ as a career path?
- What was your major in college? (Or) I see you majored in _____ in college. How did this prepare you for a career in _____?
- Do you use, or how do you use your _____ major?
- How did you get into this field and your present position?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How did you get your present job?

What it takes to get the job

- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- Can you tell me about entry level opportunities in this field? When do companies in this industry typically do their entry-level hiring?
- What advice would you give to someone who’s interested in starting out in this field?
- What skills, interests, values and personality traits are important for a position in your field?
- Did any of your leisure activities have an impact on your choice of profession?
- Do you have any special words of advice or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- Are there any professional associations and/or journals that you would recommend?
- How do people usually learn about job openings in your field?

Is it a good fit?

- What are some of the top qualities that your company looks for in entry-level candidates?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- What experiences would you advise undergraduates to have while in school if they want a job like yours or a job in a related field? (Or) in a related field?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
- What types of employers, other than your own, hire people to perform the kind of work you do? Do you know of any which offer entry-level training programs or opportunities?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- What are opportunities for advancement? What does the career ladder look like?

Follow Up:

- Would you mind if I sent you my resume to review?
- May I send you a LinkedIn connection request?
- Is there anyone else you can recommend I speak to for additional information

Conduct informational interviews

To conduct a successful informational interview:

1. Arrive 5 minutes early or call at the scheduled time
2. Dress professionally. We recommend a suit, but dress pants and a dress shirt/sweater are also appropriate. If the meeting is at a more casual venue (like a coffee shop) you may wear something less formal (dress pants and a sweater).
3. Try to relax and be sincere; it's okay to be nervous but if you come in prepared with good questions written down, you will feel more relaxed and confident.
4. Pay attention to the time and the cues the professional is giving you during the interview. The length of the responses that he or she gives to your questions should help you determine the amount of time that he/she is willing to share.
5. Practice active listening; make eye contact and nod in agreement. It's also a good idea to take notes so that you can remember important points later.
6. Ask each interviewee for 2-3 additional people you can contact so you can expand your network. Remember, everything is connected!
7. When the meeting comes to a close, be sure to obtain a business card; feel free to ask for any additional literature on the company/organization or field that might be available to you.
8. **Lastly, be sure to thank your contact for their time.**

Follow-up

This is may be the most important step! The thank you email will be the last impression that you leave with your contact. It could help him/her keep you in mind for the next time they need to fill a position, or inspire him/her to mention you to a colleague who is hiring. The email should be brief, polite, professional and specific to the contact you met with and the topics you discussed. **Send this personalized email within 2 days of your interview.**

Some informational interviews may lead to additional meetings and others may be one-time discussions. Check out the [Career Milestone Guide: Maintaining Your Network](#) (*hyperlink*) for tips on how to stay connected with the professionals who you meet.