

From Quintessential Careers

Questions to Ask During an Informational Interview

An informational interview can be a terrific tool for a jobseeker. Informational interviews offer a jobseeker the opportunity to speak to someone in an industry they are interested in and find out whether they have what it takes to make their career in that industry.

Informational interviews are not typically planned around a specific job opening or opportunity, rather they are a chance for a student or jobseeker to learn about an industry, its corporate culture and to get advice on their career from someone who has walked a similar professional path to help them decide if it might be the right fit. Employers typically grant these interviews as a way to build their candidate pool for future job openings.

Typically, at an informational interview, you will arrive and check in with the receptionist. When the interviewer comes out, shake hands, introduce yourself and thank them for their willingness to meet with you. Re-emphasize that you are there to learn and gather information about his or her career field. Prepare your questions in advance and use an informal dialogue during the discussion.

Below are ideas for questions to ask during you informational interview. Since there are [hundreds of possible questions you can ask during an informational interview](#), use these as a guide when you are prepping for your interview. Pick a dozen or so questions that will help you get the most out of your informational interview.

You should take notes, or you may want to get permission from your interviewees to record the conversations, which will allow you to participate in the discussion without distraction.

1. Tell me about a typical day?
 1. What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
 2. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
 3. What kinds of decisions do you make?
 4. If you had to break it up into percentages, how do you spend your day?
 5. How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the workflow fairly constant?
 6. Why did this type of work interest you, and how did you get started?
 7. How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
 8. Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
 9. What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?
 10. What do you like most about working in this industry? What do you dislike most?
 11. What is your professional background?
 12. Which past jobs have been most helpful in getting you to this point in your career?

13. What other jobs can you get with the same background?
14. What are the positions in your field or organization? How do they differ?
15. Why did you decide to work for this company?
16. What do you like most about this company?
17. Which parts of your job do you find most exciting? Which parts of your job do you find most boring? Why?
18. How does your company differ from its competitors?
19. Why do customers choose this company?
20. Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
21. What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
22. How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of email, Internet, intranets, social media, website, video conferencing, etc.)
23. What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
24. How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
25. What is the best way to enter this occupation?
26. What are the advancement opportunities?
27. What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
28. What were the keys to your career advancement? How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
29. What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
30. What skills or talents are essential to being effective in your job?
31. How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program?
32. How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
33. How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
34. Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people-, service- or product-oriented business?)
35. What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
36. What is the average length of time an employee typically stays in the job you hold?
37. Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?

38. What is the dress code?
39. Is there flexibility as far as work hours, or working offsite?
40. If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
41. If your position was suddenly eliminated, what kinds of jobs would your skill transfer to?
42. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
43. How is the economy affecting this industry?
44. What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
45. What obligations does your employer place have on you outside of the ordinary work week? Are there evening meetings, or travel involved?
46. What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
47. Are there organizations you are expected to join?
48. How has your job affected your lifestyle?
49. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
50. What are the major rewards of this position, aside from things like money, fringe benefits, or travel?
51. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
52. What are the major frustrations of this job?
53. What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
54. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
55. What are the educational, requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
56. Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
57. How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
58. What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
59. How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?

60. How do you think my university's reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
61. How do you think graduation from a private (or public) university is viewed when it comes to hiring?
62. How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
63. What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
64. What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What entry-level jobs are the best for learning applicable skills?
65. Who is the department head or supervisor for this job? Where do you and your supervisor fit into the organizational structure?
66. Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?
67. What's the best advice you'd give to someone interested in this field? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which trade or professional journals and organizations would be helpful to me as I learn more about this field?
68. What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
69. What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
70. Do you have any special words of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
71. I am told that XXX, XXX and XXX are my strongest assets (fill in the blanks with skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits, and values). Where would these traits and skills be helpful in this organization?
72. Where might my skills fit in other fields? Where might they be helpful in other organizations?
73. How would you assess my experience in terms of entering this field? What steps do I need to take to become more qualified?
74. Would you mind taking a look at my resume?

Use these questions as a guide but as you practice your informational interviewing skills, [other questions will come to mind spontaneously](#). Pay careful attention to what's said by the person you speak to and ask questions when something isn't clear. People are often happy to discuss their positions and willing to provide you with a wealth of information. Try to keep the conversation friendly, brief, and focused on the contact person's job and career field.