

Mastering the ART of the informational interview

November 10, 2021





Agenda

- 1) When to use an informational interview
- 2) How to set-up an interview
- 3) What to say during the interview
- 4) How to close the interview effectively



When to use an informational interview

- Anytime you're looking for information to help you in a job or internship search
- If you are seeking out opportunities to expand your professional relationships
- When you're exploring or researching a career field or organization
 - ◆ ALWAYS begin from a point of curiosity to learn about their organization, field or trajectory, rather than focusing on your end goal of a job, internship or connection
 - ◆ It's a unique opportunity to learn something new, so use active listening skills and TAKE NOTES
PRO TIP: refer back to your notes when you send your thank you note or a follow up email
 - ◆ Do your research - what organizations, career sectors, post-grad opportunities excite you



How to set-up an informational interview

- ***Do your research:*** use Google news searches, comb through their organization's website, view their career trajectory and company postings on LinkedIn, research their engagement on [Whitman Connect](#)
- ***Be specific:*** if it's your first contact, reach out [via email](#) with a clear request for 20-30 minutes
PRO TIP: include a current copy of your resume and reference it as "more information about my background"
- ***Set your goal for the call:*** focus on what you hope to accomplish in the discussion
- ***Develop a set of questions:*** have them written down so you can focus on listening to their insight rather than crafting questions in-the-moment
- ***Prepare your space:*** If your interview is a video chat, ensure that your setting will be visually and auditorily free from distraction, check your wifi signal



What to say during the interview

- Start from a place of curiosity and begin with **warm-up questions** that will allow you to get to know them better, pull from the research you've done to ask relevant questions and be prepared to share your story, too
- Once you've each had a chance to share a bit about yourselves, dive into the **questions that will help you achieve your goals** for this call
- It's easy to get wrapped up in the conversation at this point, but attempt to keep some notes on the sheet you've prepared with your questions - this will be important later
- DON'T end the call without **asking one of these two questions** as they will help you tap into their networks
 - ◆ Who else should I be talking to about this?
 - ◆ What other organizations do you think I should be considering?



How to close the interview and maintain the relationship?

- **Keep an eye on the time:** even if the conversation is great, you want to respect their time and stick to what you requested. If you have more to ask, you can wrap up by asking if they would be willing to schedule another chat later
- **Show your appreciation:** of course you'll say Thank You during the call, but follow-up with 1) a LinkedIn connection request and 2) a handwritten thank you note will cement your burgeoning relationship, making a GREAT impression
PRO TIP: be sure to ask for their mailing address during your call - you can say something like, "I'd like to follow-up, can I get a good mailing address?"
- **Stay connected:** when the conversation has been good, you will want to stay connected using periodic follow-up with your new contact as you move through your own personal trajectory; if there isn't an immediate action step, set a reminder in your calendar system for 6-8 weeks out to share something interesting



Now you try...

First: Think of someone that you may want to have a conversation with, make a note of some key points of their collegiate or professional lives that you may want to learn more about (if needed, search one of the platforms - LinkedIn or Whitman Connect)

Next: Develop a set of questions you might want to bring to that conversation, focus on relationship building and tapping into their insight - rather than your end goal

Then: Structure your plan for how you might reach out to them - when is the right time, what would your request look like, what tools would you use



Resources for your interviews

- [introductory email article](#) - a good reference for writing your first few introductory networking notes to alumni and others
- [informational interview basics](#) - including several great questions to use in your interview
- [informational interview plus](#) - an additional piece to help you make your best impression
- [maintaining alumni connections](#) - helpful advice for after those first conversations
- [showing gratitude in a job search](#) - this article has excellent sample thank you notes
- [creating your “elevator intro”](#) - this article will help you articulate your introduction to a new connection

PRO TIP: You can schedule an individual appointment to learn more about resources to help you connect with Whitman grads on [Handshake](#)