

Informational interview questions that you need to ask

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June 15, 2020

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Landing an **informational interview** is exciting. Maybe this is someone you've always admired, maybe it's someone you met in college, or maybe it's just someone who is already in the industry you're trying to crack into. But conducting this informational interview can be daunting. You're the one that asked for the informational interview, so you are responsible for conducting it. If you have no idea where to start, use these **informational interview questions** to get you on the right path.

What is an informational interview?

"An informational interview is an informal conversation with someone working in an area of interest to you," said Sue Harbour, the Senior Associate Director of the Career Center at the University of California, Berkeley. "It's an effective research tool and is best done after preliminary online research. It's not a job interview, and the objective is not to find job openings."

As Harbour mentioned, it is important to note that this is *not* a job interview. If you're only looking for a job, and not looking to build a connection, you are going about the informational interview all wrong. As you probably know, networking is extremely important when it comes to finding job opportunities and eventually landing a job.

In most industries, a majority of job openings are filled through the unadvertised, or hidden, job market. The only way you will find these opportunities is through your network.

"The purpose of an informational interview is to connect with a potential mentor and learn from their career journey," said Amanda Nachman, author of the forthcoming book **#QUALIFIED: You Are More Impressive Than You Realize**. "You get the inside scoop on what it takes to succeed in the industry."

Here are some advantages of conducting and asking informational interview questions:

- You receive tips and insider knowledge about how to prepare for and land your first (or next) career position.

- You can learn what it's like to work at a specific organization.
- You initiate a professional relationship and expand your network of contacts in a specific career field.
- You meet people who may forward job leads to you in the future.
- You can turn this professional into a mentor by expressing your shared ambition and interest for the industry.

Informational interviews are extremely useful tools during job searches.

“Through an informational interview, you’ll learn the *how*—how she achieved her current role,” Nachman said. “Learning *the how* helps you create an intentional path.”

The informational interview can be used as a college senior, recent graduate, or even by someone who was **recently laid off or furloughed**. If you are on the hunt in the **job market**, an informational interview could be useful for you.

64 informational interview questions to ask

When it comes to the art of asking informational interview questions, you want to use open ended questions because it allows the conversation to flow in addition to helping you learn out about career paths that you didn't even know existed.

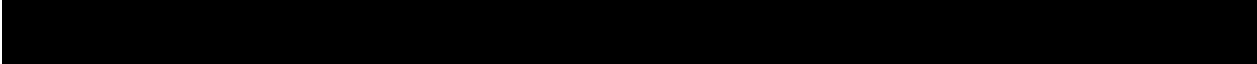
By asking questions that invite the other professional to speak and share stories, you will get firsthand, relevant information about the realities of working within a particular field, industry or position.

This kind of information is not always available online, so don't underestimate the power of the informational interview questions you chose to ask.

Here are 64 informational interview questions to ask:

1. What was event or moment made you realize this was what you wanted to do?
2. What did you do next to start moving you interest in this area towards relevant experience?
3. Did you get involved with on campus experiences that related to your career interests?
4. How helpful were these on-campus experiences?
5. Did these experiences transition you into internship?
6. Did you have any internships in college?

7. What resources did you use as part of your internship search?
8. How important were people as part of your internship search strategy?
9. Were you effective at getting multiple offers?
10. Why do you think they chose you for the role over others?
11. What was your best internship experience?
12. Did you have a mentor at one of these internships?
13. Do you think mentors are important? If so, do you still keep in touch with them today?
14. How important were these internships in deciding where you wanted to go with your career interests?
15. How important were these internship experiences in helping you land your first career position?
16. What was your first role after graduation?
17. When did you start your entry-level job search?
18. Were you focused on one specific career area of interest or were you considering a few?
19. How did you organize your search strategy? Did you use a percentage in dividing your time to multiple areas of interest?
20. What resources did you use? What were the best?
21. What were the least effective?
22. What pitfalls did you hit? How would you recommend I avoid these challenges?
23. How important was connecting to people (networking) as part of your job search strategy?
24. How many people would you estimate you connected to?
25. Did these people play a role in landing your first position?

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26. What did you do when you were in my exact position?
 27. What are common entry-level jobs in this field?
 28. Can you tell me about your career journey, and what led you here?
 29. How did you break into the industry?
 30. How did you get your foot in the door at X company?
 31. What was the timeline for when you began applying to entry-level positions?
 32. When did you begin getting interviews?
 33. Did you get multiple interviews?
 34. When did you get your first offer?
 35. Was getting multiple offers part of your strategy?
 36. Were you effective at the getting multiple offers?
 37. What do you recommend for someone like me who is looking to land an entry/mid/senior level job?
 38. Did you make any mistakes during your job search?
 39. When and how did you start your job search?
 40. What strategies did you employ to find your first post-graduation job?
 41. Which strategies were effective? Which were not?
 42. What surprised you the most about your career journey?
 43. What did you imagine your career path being when you were in college?
 44. What advice do you have for me as a young professional?
 45. How can I get started gaining experience?

46. Here's my portfolio/e-portfolio, can you look it over for a few minutes and tell me what you think?
47. Here are my job search strategies, is there anything in this process that I'm missing?
48. Am I conducting my job search in an effective manner?
49. Am I positioning myself well to employers?
50. Now that you know how I am positioning myself with my resume and portfolio, do I seem like a strong candidate for an entry-level position in this industry?
51. If not, what should I do differently?
52. What does a typical day look and feel like for you?
53. What are some of your favorite parts of what you do in your role as X?
54. What are the rewards of your work?
55. What are the challenges or frustrations of your work?
56. What tips or advice do you have for a college student interested in this company/industry/line of work?
57. What are the most important skills or qualities necessary to be a successful entry level candidate at this field/in this industry?
58. What steps should I take to prepare to enter this field?
59. Where do you see growth or change in this industry?
60. Can I show you my resume and have you take a quick look at it?
61. Is this the **best resume** I could possibly have?
62. What other advice do you have for me as an entry level candidate who's interested in doing what you do?
63. Who are the other people with whom I should be having these conversations?
64. I'd love to stay in touch, what's the best way to do that for you?

How you should ask informational interview questions

If you only have a one hour informational interview, you can't just go in thinking that you will wing it and get the answers to all of your informational interview questions. In order to make the most out of your time, you need to structure the informational interview so that you are sure to touch on all important points and ask all of your informational interview questions. Your informational interview questions should fall into five categories. Here is exactly how to structure your informational interview:

- **The first half hour:** The first chunk of your informational interview conversation should focus on the other professional you are meeting with. In order to do this, the informational interview questions that you ask should be focused on the person and their career. You should focus on learning how the person made the successful transition from college, graduate school, their first job, etc. to where they are today.
"Remember, this is about them, not you," Nachman said. "You're there to understand their journey and learn from them instead of asking questions about how they can help you. By asking questions about them, you're showing your interest and you're also able to learn and connect with a potential mentor."
- **The next 5 to 10 minutes:** During this portion of the informational interview, you will be doing most of the talking and not asking many informational interview questions. Instead, you should explain your job search process and describe each element and resource that you have been putting to use. The main informational interview question you want to ask during this time is: Am I conducting my job search in an effective manner?
- **The next 15 minutes:** The third part of your informational interview should focus on presenting the materials you use to represent yourself to potential employers. Show the professional your portfolio, your website, your creative book, your clips, your **cover letter format**, etc. Show the professional any materials you submit with job applications. Then, ask the professional this: Am I positioning myself well to employers?

- **The next 5 to 10 minutes:** You will want to present your resume separate from the rest of your materials so that the professional can really focus on it. In this section your informational interview questions will focus only on your resume. Ask them to take about a minute to look it over and then ask for their feedback. Ask informational interview questions about the style of your resume, the structure of it, the **resume action words**, as well as the content of the document. When it seems they have given you all their feedback, ask them this question: Am I presenting myself well with this resume?
- **The last 5 minutes:** Conclude the informational interview by of course thanking the person for their time, but also asking informational interview questions about your next steps. Ask them for additional information and the best way to stay in touch with them. Don't forget to ask them this question: Who are the other people with whom I should be having these conversations?

Who should you ask informational interview questions to?

“Once you’ve identified what you want, what you’re passionate about, now it’s time to identify who’s already got it,” Nachman said. “In other words, you want to find someone who is already in your dream job, or they’re working for your dream company.”

Start by taking a look at people you admire from your college or those who are working in your city that are a couple years ahead on the path you desire. If you are in college and don't know anyone personally, try asking your career center, meeting with your department's internship coordinator, or conducting an online search.

Nachman recommends searching for those people who graduated a few years ahead of you and are working in the role you one day want, the company you love, the industry you want to break into, or even the city in which you hope to find employment.

The informational interview questions you should not ask

There is one main informational interview question that you should not ask your contact, and that is if they can get you a job in the industry.

“Don’t ask for a job or internship,” Harbour said. “You are there to gain information and build a professional relationship.”

In addition to asking for a job, you also do not want to ask any informational interview questions that are unprofessional.

“Build a relationship first before asking more personal questions like personal struggles, dating or even family life,” Nachman said.

So stay away from the individual’s personal life, but can you ask about salary?

“As for salary talk, the elephant in the room, I wish more young people had these candid conversations so that we could achieve equal pay for all women and minorities; however, it can be perceived as a personal question, and can be met with resistance,” Nachman said. “Build the relationship first where both parties will feel more comfortable having these conversations, or broach the topic of salary by getting their feedback on what range you should consider and then see if they want to offer their compensation and how they’ve negotiated with employers.”

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