

# 3 CAREER EXPLORATION

## THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

One of the best ways to find out what an industry, company, or position is really like is to talk with people in careers you're considering. No one else can give you a better sense of the real life experiences, the challenges and opportunities, the specifics and perhaps hidden demands, and the drawbacks and limitations of the career field.

What exactly is an informational interview? An informational interview is a conversation with a professional in a career field you are considering, which will help you gather information and advice to assist in your career planning process.

### What Are the Benefits of Conducting an Informational Interview?

- Provides you with a realistic grasp of a career, industry, or company you're considering by talking to current professionals.
- Evaluate whether your career of interest is compatible with who you are (personality, interests, values, skills, and lifestyle).
- Receive specific suggestions and ideas on where to acquire experience.
- Expand your network of contacts for future opportunities
- Gain referrals to other professionals for additional perspectives.

### Are Informational Interviews Only for Students Ready to Graduate?

Not at all. Informational interviews are appropriate for first-year students through alumni. If you are in the process of choosing an academic major, making career choices, beginning a job search, or transitioning to a different career, the informational interview can be an excellent tool to explore your options and increase your career knowledge. We recommend signing on to [UCLAone.com](https://uclaone.com) to connect with Bruin alumni.

### What Are Some Typical Subjects Discussed About the Industry or Organization During the Informational Interview?

- Work Environment
- Industry Trends
- Lifestyle
- Ideal Skill Set/Qualifications
- Challenges/Rewards
- Career Path of Interviewee
- Typical Compensation
- Career Ladder of Field

### How Does the Informational Interview Work?

The informational interview works best if it is done in person in the setting that you are interested in working (i.e., a hospital, investment bank, consulting firm, or nonprofit organization, etc.). However, it can also be done by telephone or Skype.

### How Do I Set Up an Informational Interview?

Our career counselors recommend a written request followed by a phone call. This professional and respectful approach can have a more favorable response. The letter serves as a preliminary introduction to help communicate the intent of your request—to gather information and advice about a career option (not to ask for a job). Remember, this is their first impression of you. Be formal and professional in your correspondence.

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST

### Searching and Preparing

- Research the field, company, and/or organization that you want to know more about.
- Consult with family, friends, faculty, co-workers, bosses or supervisors, UCLA Alumni, or [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com) to find people in your area of interest to speak with.
- Contact the person via email or phone (see sample scripts below).
- Arrange a convenient time for the contact to meet such as a lunch or a coffee break (no more than 30 minutes).
- Be prepared to speak about yourself (major, interests, interest in the field, your experiences, etc.).
- Have a list of specific questions ready to ask (be mindful of the contact's time and schedule).
- Bring a professional folder with a notepad inside, pen, and copies of your resume.

### The Informational Interview

- For a face-to-face meeting, dress in professional attire.
- If you meet at the company's site, ask in advance if the contact is willing to give you a tour.
- For email or phone, correspond and speak professionally.
- Express your appreciation to them for taking the time to speak with you.
- Ask the questions you've prepared in advance (see samples that follow).
- Jot down notes.
- Be mindful of the time.
- Ask the contact for their business card and whether you may follow up with them in the future.

## After Your Informational Interview

- Within 24 hours, send the contact a thank you card or email. A hand-written thank you note is recommended.
- As you continue to explore, keep the contact updated about your progress.
- If you've decided to pursue the field, ask the contact if they would be willing to review your resume and provide feedback.
- If you were given any recommendations (i.e., a web link, book or article, a contact) be sure to mention what you have done with that recommendation. For example, "Thank you for recommending that I contact Ms. Jones. She and I have a call scheduled for next week."
- Request to connect with the individual on LinkedIn.

## REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

### Develop an Outline or Script

Before you attempt to schedule an informational interview, develop an outline or script of what you are going to say. This will decrease your anxiety and increase your chances of getting the results you want. It may be helpful to rehearse out loud after you plan the kinds of things you will communicate.

### Setting Up an Informational Interview

- Say who you are and why you want to get together.
- Make it clear you are not asking for a job.
- Mention a personal referral or mutual interest to stimulate conversation.
- Ask for a brief meeting at a time that's convenient for that person.

### Example of Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a communications major at UCLA and am interested in a journalism career. Joe Bruin suggested that you might be willing to share your work experiences and offer advice on how I might better prepare to break into the field.

At this time, I am not looking for a job, but am interested in learning as much as I can about journalism as a career field.

I would greatly appreciate a few minutes of your time to get your perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in journalism. I will contact you next week to try and arrange a time that would be convenient for you to meet.

Sincerely,  
Your Name  
contact info: email, telephone #

## Example of Telephone Scripts

Hello . . . my name is \_\_\_\_\_.

Joe Bruin suggested I call you because I am doing some research on careers in journalism. He thought you would be a good person to answer some questions I have about the profession. I could meet you for coffee or lunch one day. Or, if it is more convenient, I could call back at a time when you might have 15 or 20 minutes to spare. Do you think you might be able to find some time for me?

Hello . . . my name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I recently heard you speak at a Los Angeles Journalism Club meeting. I'm a senior at UCLA and am interested in a journalism career. I'm not looking for a job at this time, but I'd really appreciate the opportunity to discuss some questions about this career field. Could I schedule 15 or 20 minutes with you at your convenience? If so, I'd be happy to meet you at your office.

**Preferably, use a landline indoors, alone, in a quiet space, with your notes, paper, and pen.**

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

You should develop basic questions about the career field to fit your particular knowledge and experience level. Depending on the interest and willingness of your contact to talk, you may have an opportunity to ask more specific personal, company, and industry questions.

Do some research about the career in advance in order to develop thoughtful, intelligent questions and make the most of the interview.

Based on your research, choose a few questions to keep within your meeting timeframe.

- Please describe a typical day as a \_\_\_\_\_.
- How did you get started? What was your path?  
What is your educational background?
- What do you find most/least satisfying about your job? Rewards? Challenges?
- What skills/qualities does it take to be successful in this field?
- What are the entry-level jobs in this field? What does the career ladder look like?
- What trends/developments do you see affecting career opportunities?
- How would you advise I gain the skills and experience necessary to enter this career field?
- What is the "culture" of your company?

- Are there additional resources you suggest that I look into that would be beneficial for me?
- Do you have suggestions of other people I can be referred to—to learn more?
- May I contact you in the future, should I have any more questions?

## INTERNSHIPS

### The Inside Track to Your First Full-Time Job

More than ever, employers today look at an entry-level job candidate's track record of "real world" experiences and accomplishments before extending an offer for a permanent position. They rely heavily on internships and summer programs to assess the skills, abilities, and qualifications of potential full time employees.

Internships and summer programs provide prospective employers an opportunity to observe your intelligence, initiative, creativity, skills, values, interests, and other personal attributes, which are a few of the intangible qualities that don't come through on a resume and manifest themselves only briefly during an interview.

An internship or summer job gives you a chance to explore and test your career interests on a temporary basis. You'll be able to get a realistic idea of what the career industry is all about, decide whether the job is one you enjoy, and evaluate whether you "fit" into the company culture. It's definitely a two-way street!

### Benefits of Working As an Intern

- Gain valuable real world experience and learn new skills.
- Explore and test different career possibilities before making a long-term commitment.
- Demonstrate to future employers your interest in your chosen career field.
- Make contacts and develop important networking and mentoring relationships.
- Prove yourself on a trial basis to a potential employer.

## INTERNSHIP PLANNING

It's important to give some thought to your goals for the internship or summer job. Here are questions to consider:

- What is the primary reason you're looking for an internship or summer job? To earn money? Test out career alternatives? Gain experience to add to your resume? Develop career-related skills?
- What are you interested in doing? Where? With whom? In what type of organization?

- What skills can you bring to the job? Why should you be hired instead of any other college student?
- Is money an issue? How much money do you need? What is the bare minimum?
- Can you afford to do an unpaid internship or volunteer work that might relate more directly to your career objective?
- Will you need to relocate? What impact will this have on your financial situation? Does the employer provide any assistance relocating?
- Will you get class credit? (Offered through Center for Community Learning or department based internship courses.)
- Is the position likely to provide an entrée into your dream career?
- Is it important for your internship experience or summer work to tie in with your academic pursuits and career goals?

Remember: There does not have to be a direct connection. You may feel a real need to take a break from your studies and explore an industry that may not have an obvious connection to your major.

### Summer and Part-Time Jobs

Summer and part-time work (especially if it is relevant to your career goal) can lead to great opportunities, and it should be a vital component in any job search strategy. Many employers are impressed with a person who has had to work their way through school and has still managed to maintain a good academic record and excel in extracurricular activities.

### Temporary Employment

Opportunities range from one day assignments to longer term commitments. Most often these positions can be found through employment service firms and include a diversity of professional and technical opportunities.

### Community Service and Volunteer Work

Involvement in social, political, cultural, performing arts, religious, and public service organizations can add valuable experience and leadership responsibilities to your resume. What are your interests? What issues and causes do you strongly support? Volunteer your services and get involved.

