



Informational Interviewing:

Explore Careers and Build Your Professional Network

What is an informational interview, and why should I do them?

An informational interview is a chat with someone about their life and career path. It is an opportunity to “pick the brain” of a professional whose career or expertise you admire. It is usually a short (20-30 minute) session in person or by phone/Zoom/Google Hangouts/etc.

- Learn “insider information” about what it’s really like to work in a specific career field
- Learn how to prepare for - and land - a job in your career field.
- Broaden your professional network, which may help you get a job or internship later on.

(PRO TIP: This is NOT a job interview; you are not asking for a job in this type of meeting.)

How do I set one up?

1. **Identify what you want to know.** For example: How to break into a given field? What it’s really like to do X? What a given organization is really like? List all. Prioritize the top 2-4.
2. **Identify people who may be able to answer these questions.** *TIP: The easiest place to start is people you know in person, people you know in virtual communities online, and people referred to you by those you already know.*
3. **Confirm the contact information** of the people on your list.
4. **Request a meeting.** Send a brief email or phone call to someone, introducing yourself, your common area of interest, the person who referred you (if applicable), and your request for a brief informational interview. Be friendly but professional. See samples on pg. 5-6.

Some places to meet new people who can help you:

- [ClarkCONNECT](#)
- [Alumni Job Shadow Program](#)
- [Career Fairs](#)
- [Alumni search tool on LinkedIn](#)
- [Career treks](#), employer info sessions
- [Alumni networking & panel discussion events](#)
- [Vault](#) (use Clark’s paid access) – student reviews of internships
- Get referrals from people you know (faculty, family, other students, colleagues, etc.)

They've agreed! Now what?

1. **Arrange a time and place.** (If you are meeting in person, offer to buy them a coffee. If not, set up, Zoom, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, or even a phone call.)
2. **Offer to send your resume to them in advance**, if they're interested, so they can get some quick context for your career path and interests. (This is optional.)
3. **Prepare yourself thoroughly.** Suggestions:
 - a. Learning anything about the individual that's readily available online.
 - b. Preparing 4-6 questions that can't easily be answered by what is available online.
 - c. Making sure you have a suitable outfit (dress at least as formally as the person you are meeting, if you possibly can – remember, this person may become a reference).
4. **Confirm the meeting** a day or two before by email or phone call.
5. **Get excited!** This will be great.

How to absolutely ace the conversation

1. **Be prepared** (see above).
2. **Be slightly early.**
3. **Open with a BRIEF introduction.** Try this: (1) thank the person for meeting with you (2) briefly summarize your background and interest in the contact's field and (3) express appreciation for your contact's career. Two minutes is a good length for this.
4. **Keep yourself in learning mode.** Like any interview, now is not the time to (1) focus on your own troubles or (2) speak negatively about jobs, bosses, or professors you've had.
5. Remain focused, but **conversational and relaxed.** Enjoy the experience.
6. **Keep any comments about yourself brief** – 2-3 minutes will do – and bring it back to the other person with another question.
7. **Take notes:** After you do several, notes will help you remember who said what.
8. **Wrap up by networking.** Ask the person you're interviewing if they know anyone else you could speak with, who may help you learn about your topic. If so, can they make an introduction, or let you use their name when you contact this next person?
9. **Respect the time frame previously agreed to.** Graciously end the interview when your time is up – even if you have not asked all your questions. (Say, *Thank you for speaking with me, I really appreciate your time and all that you've shared.*)
10. **Follow up** with a brief thank-you email or card.

FAQ

I've never done this before; is it hard?

Not at all! In fact, it's pretty fun once you get the hang of it. Just remember that...

- ...this is a common practice in the professional world. You won't be considered rude or unusual for asking.
- ...most people like talking about themselves – and people who are passionate about their work like it when somebody else cares about it, too.
- ...most successful leaders/professionals had some help along the way; many are happy to pay it forward.
- ...like most things, it gets easier with practice. If you're nervous, start with someone you already know.

How many informational interviews should I do?

For career exploration:

Try to get at least one to answer each specific question you have (see above). Note: You may work on this project over a period of weeks or even months.

For job-search networking:

Keep doing them until you land a job! Gather ideas, tips about unposted job opportunities, advice, inside information about organizations, etc. as often as you can. Start with people you know, then widen your circle to people they recommend and people who share group membership (such as Clark alumni).

What if someone says no?

Do not take it personally; most likely they are just too busy. You might also check:

- Have you updated and polished your LinkedIn or ClarkCONNECT profile before you reach out?
- Have you made your connection clear (fellow Clarkie, or shared colleague, etc.)?
- Have you customized your request—why are you interested in talking to THIS person?
- Have you made your request clear and manageable—that you are looking for a short call or Zoom chat?

If you are still having trouble getting responses, [make an appointment with your career adviser](#) to discuss it.

What should I ask about?

This depends on what your topic is, and what you already have already learned about your contact. However, here are some typical questions that will yield rich results. Remember, your time is limited, so pick 4-6 and prioritize.

Career exploration questions:

- Tell me about your career path – how did you end up where you are now?
- What's a typical day like for you?
- What do I need to do to be competitive in this field? (Credentials, skills, experiences)
- What graduate degrees or certificates are most useful in this field?
- What's the most likely entry point into this field? (Job description, type of organization)
- What kind of internship would best prepare me for this field?
- If you had to do it all over, what might you do differently in your career?
- (Any other questions/concerns you specifically have)
- Who else can you refer me to, who may have useful insights into (topic X)?

Job or internship search questions:

- I'm looking for an internship in XYZ field; what organizations do you suggest?
- What feedback can you give me on my resume, as someone who is already inside this field/organization?
- I'm interested in working at your organization; what advice do you have for getting an interview there or getting my foot in the door?
- What niche job boards do you suggest for your field/industry?
- I have an interview at your organization. What can you tell me about the culture there?
- Who else can you refer me to, who may have useful insights into (topic X)?

I'm pretty nervous; can't I just do this over email?

There are three benefits to actually talking with your contact: You will get much richer answers; you will have the opportunity to ask follow up questions; and, once someone gets to know you better, they are much more likely to feel comfortable referring you to another contact or even to a hiring manager.

It you're nervous, start with someone you know, and vow to get more comfortable with practice. Once you see how rewarding it is for both of you, you'll start looking forward to them.

The payoff? It's a skill you can use again and again, at every phase of your career.

Sample Emails

Informational Interview: Career Exploration

Hello (---),

I saw your profile on ClarkCONNECT and your work seems very interesting. Would you be willing to chat with me for 20-30 minutes so I can learn more about the reality of working in (name of profession)?

If so please let me know when you might be available and whether you prefer phone or Skype.

For reference, my LinkedIn profile can be found at: (LinkedIn url)

*Kind regards,
(Your Name)*

Informational Interview: Job or Internship Search

Hello (---),

I saw your profile on ClarkCONNECT and I'm very interested to find or create a summer internship in (name of field). I wonder if you be willing to chat with me for 20 minutes and share any advice you may have in terms of companies or people to connect with.

If so please let me know when you might be available and whether you prefer phone or Skype.

Thanks!

*Kind Regards,
(Your Name)*

Informational Interview: Alumni Insider Tips

Hello (---),

I am a Clark student and I'm very interested to win a summer internship at (name of company). I noticed on LinkedIn that you work there and I wonder if you be willing to chat with me for 20 minutes and share any advice you may have about getting my foot in the door.

*If so please let me know when you might be available and whether you prefer phone or Skype.
For reference, my resume is attached.*

Thanks!

*Kind Regards,
(Your Name)*

After the Conversation: Say Thanks

Hello (---),

It was great to meet you at/for (name the discussion topic or activity). I especially appreciated (describe something you learned or talked about). I'm going to make a point to follow up on (describe an action step they suggested).

I will connect with you on (name social media platform) so we can keep in touch. Thank you again!

*Best,
(Your Name)*