INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is an informal conversation, scheduled in advance, to ask questions about a career that you are interested in. You can use this process to better understand how your skills, values, and interests may relate to that industry, and to build your knowledge about job titles, responsibilities, industry trends, and types of employers in that field. Informational interviews can be conducted with any professional contact—alumni, faculty, family friends, acquaintances, or other professionals you’ve met while networking. This is an excellent way to expand your network and build those professional relationships that may assist you in securing a job or internship. Informational interviewing also allows you to practice your professional communication, both in scheduling a conversation and speaking with your contact, a skill that will better prepare you for applications and interviews as you seek opportunities in that industry.

Even though informational interviewing is an informal interaction, you want to treat this as a professional opportunity and be prepared for every conversation you schedule, using the following steps:

**Step 1: Reaching Out**
Send an email to a contact in your network to ask if you can schedule an informational interview.

- Introduce yourself and/or mention who referred you, and briefly explain why you would like to talk.
- Make it clear that you are not asking for a job, instead, that you’re interested in career insight and advice.
- Ask if you can meet in person or by telephone at their convenience, for a 20-30 minute conversation.
- Send a confirmation email once you’ve finalized a day/time to talk or meet.
- Reconfirm a day or two before your meeting as well, since schedules or availability may have changed.

**Sample Messages**
You may want to first connect with your new contact on LinkedIn since this site is a great resource to manage and grow your professional network. As you can see in the samples below, your connection request is simply that, a connection, wait to ask about the informational interview once your connection has been accepted. See the Career Services LinkedIn Guide or join us at a workshop if you haven’t created a profile.

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<tr>
<th>Outreach LinkedIn Connection Request</th>
<th>Follow-Up LinkedIn Connection Request</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Courtney,</td>
<td>Dear Courtney,</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m excited to find your profile on LinkedIn because you’re an Oxy alumni working in Higher Education and I’m very interested in this field. I hope you’ll accept my connection request.</td>
<td>It was great meeting you at last night’s panel on Careers in Higher Education. I look forward to staying in touch.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thank you! - Megan</td>
<td>Thank you! - Megan</td>
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Once connected with a professional, through LinkedIn, an email introduction, a referral, or because you’ve met in person, your request for an informational interview could look like either of these next two samples.
Use the first name of your contact only if you’ve already met, otherwise opt for a formal greeting.

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<tr>
<th>Outreach Email – 1st Request</th>
<th>Follow-Up Email – 1st Request</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Good morning Ms. Stricklin,</strong>&lt;br&gt;My art professor, Amy Lyford, recommended that I reach out to you because of my interest in conceptual performance art. I am especially interested in your use of sound and dance in your work. &lt;br&gt;I’m a graduating studio art student at Occidental College and I’m also interested in the production of interactive artwork. Would you be available to answer a few questions about your career path and your practice? I would really appreciate the opportunity to buy you a cup of coffee or exchange a few emails with some of my questions.&lt;br&gt;Thank you for your time,&lt;br&gt;Megan Smith</td>
<td><strong>Good morning Courtney,</strong>&lt;br&gt;I really enjoyed our conversation at last night’s speed networking event, especially your suggestions on how to create my portfolio. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me and for being so generous in sharing your advice.&lt;br&gt;I would love to ask you a few more questions about your own artwork and career path. Would you be available to meet me sometime in the next couple of weeks? I would be glad to treat you to a cup of coffee in exchange for your time.&lt;br&gt;Or, if you prefer email, perhaps I could send you a few more questions?&lt;br&gt;Thank you again!&lt;br&gt;Megan</td>
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It’s important to be professionally persistent as you reach out to your new connections. If someone doesn’t respond to your first message you may hear back after some gracious follow-up. However, you won’t create a professional impression if you write too often. It’s best to wait a week after your first message and then send a second follow-up, similar to your first. Avoid making your contact feel guilty if they haven’t had time to get back to you. If after another week you still haven’t received a response, plan to send a final email to withdraw your request. This demonstrates your professionalism, since you’re not taking a lack of response personally, and will help you avoid any uncomfortable situations in the future if you’re able to reconnect at a later date.

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<th>Follow-Up Email #2 - Reminder</th>
<th>Follow-Up Email #3 - Withdraw</th>
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<td><strong>Good morning Ms. Stricklin,</strong>&lt;br&gt;I hope you’re well!&lt;br&gt;Professor Lyford again mentioned you in our Contemporary Art History class today so I wanted to follow-up on my email from before.&lt;br&gt;As mentioned, I would love the opportunity to ask you questions about your artwork and your career path, either over coffee or over email. Please let me know if you’re interested in sharing your expertise with me, especially since I so admire your work.&lt;br&gt;Have a great rest of your week,&lt;br&gt;Megan Smith</td>
<td><strong>Good afternoon Ms. Stricklin,</strong>&lt;br&gt;Thank you for your time in reading my previous emails. I’m sure that you are incredibly busy in your studio right now and I understand that you’re probably not able to connect with me. I hope that our paths will cross sometime in the future.&lt;br&gt;Until then, I look forward to seeing your next show and will be keeping my eye on your website for any updates.&lt;br&gt;Thank you again!&lt;br&gt;Megan Smith</td>
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Step 2: Preparing for Your Conversation
Now that your informational interview is scheduled, there are a few things you should do to prepare yourself for a productive conversation.

- Research the industry and/or organization of your contact.
- Research the career path of your contact, through their LinkedIn profile, online bios, etc.
- Write down and prioritize no less than 10 questions that you want to ask. Avoid asking questions that could be easily answered in your own research.
- Plan your professional attire (if meeting in person).
- Prepare a copy of your resume to bring, in case you have time to ask for their feedback.
- Plan your transportation and driving time (with traffic) in order to arrive 5-10 minutes early for any in-person meeting.

Sample Questions
The 10 questions you are prepared to ask could include:
1. How did you get into this field?
2. What education or experience is typical for this field? What experience is required?
3. What are the entry-level positions in this industry?
4. What was the biggest surprise when you went into this field? Any myths you want to shatter for me?
5. What do you like most about your position?
6. What do you like least?
7. What is your typical day like?
8. What is the responsibility of your position? Are these duties the same for everyone with this title?
9. What kind of individual (in terms of talent and personality) would be best suited for this kind of job?
10. What types of programs/activities does your office do?
11. What is a recurring problem for people in this field or in your office?
12. What do you think this industry will look like in 5 years? 10 years?
13. What kind of salary could I expect to make in this field? What is an average entry-level salary?
14. Who else does this? What other companies?
15. What advice would you give me on how to go about applying for/finding a position in this field?
16. What websites, blogs, or journals do you read to keep up-to-date about this industry?
17. Do you have any recommendations for other people I could talk to in this industry?

Step 3: During the Conversation
Since you’ve scheduled this meeting, be prepared to lead the conversation and make the most of your time together.

- Bring notepaper, along with your questions, to keep track of advice and suggestions from your contact.
- Pay attention to time and adhere to the amount of time you agreed to in advance (30 minutes to an hour are typical for most informational interviews).
- Begin the conversation by providing a quick reminder of your own career interests and how they may relate to your contact. You do not need to go into lengthy detail.
- Then, ask your contact about their personal career experience, and about the field in general.
- End the conversation by asking for advice about steps you can take to pursue this field, if you remain interested. You can ask for suggestions for other professionals you can talk to, recommended websites to find job listings, or professional organizations in this industry with networking events you could attend.
- Ask if you can stay in touch with this contact as you continue to pursue opportunities in this field.
- Remember that this is an information gathering and advice seeking conversation, not a job interview.
Step 4: After the Conversation
Effective networking is based on building professional relationships, which means it’s critical that you stay in touch with this contact.

- Send a thank you message within 24 hours of your conversation. This can be an email or a thank you card. If you are going to send a card in the mail this should be sent the same day that you meet so that it arrives promptly.
- Evaluate your conversation: What could you have done better? What questions do you want to ask during your next informational interview?
- Evaluate the information: Has your impression of this field changed? Does this industry relate to your skills, interests, and values? Do you want to continue learning about these opportunities?
- If your contact provided any referrals, plan to quickly reach out to these new contacts. Always let your initial contact know if you’ve met with someone in their network and thank them again for the referral.
- Keep track of your contacts as you build a network. For example, LinkedIn allows you to keep notes on contacts, only visible to you, and to easily keep track of any career changes of these new relationships.
- Stay in touch with your contacts. Send personal messages every few months to share updates and accomplishments.
- Networking is a two-way-street, so finding ways to bring value to your contacts is the best way to create lasting professional relationships. For example, you could share articles that you’ve read in class, promote events for your contacts to other Oxy students, or volunteer at programs for your network.

Sample Thank You Messages
Whether sending a card or email, your thank you message should be a specific note of appreciation. Thank your contact for their time, mention something valuable that you took away from the conversation, and demonstrate your plan to follow-through on a piece of advice or guidance that they offered. Knowing that their time with you was meaningful is actually more valuable than any sort of thank you gift would be.

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<tr>
<td>Dear Courtney,</td>
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<td>I am so grateful to you for taking the time to speak with me yesterday. Since studying Art History at Oxy I have wanted to learn more about the contemporary art industry, especially in Los Angeles. Because of our conversation I feel like there are actually several career paths I could explore that would relate to my interests and I am so excited to learn more. I will follow up with your colleague at The Broad today, thank you again for that referral. I hope that we can stay in touch as well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Again, thank you!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
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