



An informational interview is simply talking with a professional who is currently in an occupation that you are considering in order to gain information and insight about a career, industry, or company. This information can be used in choosing a major, exploring career options, or preparing for a summer or professional job search.

Before the Interview

□ Determine what you hope to learn

Informational interviews can give you clarity about a specific career, industry, or company. But, it is important to determine your goals of the interview. Are you interested in networking and building relationships with alumni? Researching a specific career path? Learning the skills needed for success in a particular industry? Prior to arranging your interview, it's important to know the purpose of your conversation.

□ Explore the CPDC Tartan Talks program

[Tartan Talks](#) is the CPDC's informational interviewing series. This program is geared to the undergraduate student who wishes to connect with CMU Alumni and gather information about a job, career field, or company culture. Students who sign up will be matched with an Alumni based on their mutual industry/field of interest for a 30 minute-1 hour long interview via phone or Skype. Tartan Talks is informational interviewing made easy!

□ Identify the professionals you want to talk to

The [Tartan Talks](#) program is the easiest way to connect with professionals and alumni in numerous industries. However informational interviews can be conducted with people you already know or with professionals referred to you through informal contacts--faculty, family, friends, alumni, professional associations, and the Career and Professional Development Center staff. The [Alumni Directory](#) is a resource available to you and is an excellent tool to find potential connections. Contacts can also be cultivated through [LinkedIn](#). Before you start to use LinkedIn for outreach, be sure to build your profile and join some groups, such as those for fraternities/sororities or professional development chapters, which will help you to connect to new people. You can then use the search box to look for companies or people of interest to you. Do not be afraid to ask your contacts to introduce you to others.

□ Arrange your informational interview

In arranging an informational interview, contact individuals at least a week ahead, through an introductory e-mail to arrange an appointment. A sample outreach email is included at the end of this tip sheet. Be sure to include the following in the email: how you found their contact information, why you are contacting them, and what you hope to learn. Ask them for about a half-hour of their time. Always clarify your objective - that you are seeking information rather than a job.

During the Interview

□ Ask thoughtful questions

Prepare the questions that you want to ask ahead of time. Having them in writing and taking some notes is a good habit. Because you initiated the informational interview, it's important to remember that you are leading the conversation. Your questions can focus on various skills or traits related to that career path, advice-seeking, or industry specific. See below for a list of preliminary questions.

- 1) What do you like most about your work? Least?
- 2) How did you come to choose this profession? What steps did you take to get where you are?
- 3) What personal qualities are necessary to succeed at this type of work? What skills are important?
- 4) Do you think this field will grow or decline over the next decade?
- 5) What kind of position could a college graduate anticipate when entering this field?
- 6) Are there courses that you would advise taking in college to help prepare for this career?
- 7) What are your career goals for the future?
- 8) What advice do you have in regards to seeking a career in this field?
- 9) What methods would you recommend for doing a job search in this field?
- 10) How would you describe your company culture?

□ Consider job shadowing & next steps

If you feel the meeting went particularly well, you may feel comfortable asking if you could spend some time "shadowing" him/her during a typical day's activities. You could also ask for two or three other names of people to contact for informational interviews so you can continue to learn more about this particular career or industry. Be sure to confirm permission to use the individual's name when contacting the referrals. You should also check out the CPDC's job shadowing program, [Take a Tartan to Work](#), to learn about job shadowing opportunities with alumni.

After the Interview

□ Debrief your conversation

Each informational interview should be a learning experience. Write down everything you learned and questions that you still have about that career or industry. After, create actionable next steps for yourself (e.g. conduct more informational interviews, job shadowing, applying to internships, etc.) to help you learn more about the desired field.

□ Send thank you notes/emails

It's important to follow up after your informational interview. Send a personalized thank you note—email format is common practice. Try to mention something you and the person talked about that made this a memorable or enjoyable experience in order to personalize the letter. A sample thank you note is included at the end of this tip sheet.

Need additional help?

The best way to learn more about informational interviews is to meet with your career consultant. Additionally, check our informational interviewing program, [Tartan Talks](#).

Sample Outreach Email

Dear Mr. Jones,

Greetings from your alma mater, Carnegie Mellon! I am currently a sophomore at Carnegie Mellon University, majoring in Global Studies with a minor in Russian Studies. Currently, I am spending the semester in Washington D.C. through the Washington Semester Program at CMU. As I was reviewing the CMU Alumni Database, I noticed that you reside in the D.C. area, and have an extensive career in international relations and political advocacy. Both of these areas are a passion of mine, which I hope to learn more about during my time here in Washington. If you have some availability, I would love to set up a meeting with you, via phone or in person, to discuss your background and current role. Please let me know what days and time work best for you. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,
Bobby Miller

Sample Thank You Note

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday. I enjoyed your insights into the international relations community as well as the sharing with me the rewarding aspects of your job, such as your recent trip to Thailand. It is apparent from our conversation that you are extremely passionate about your work. The passion you have for your industry and current role reinforced my excitement about the career path I am pursuing. Thank you for your advice and valuable information. I hope our paths cross again!

Best Regards,
Bobby Miller

