

Informational Interviewing Quick Reference

Your 4-Step Checklist for Meaningful Career Conversations

What is an informational interview? A conversation to learn about someone's professional experience and explore your career options. The goal is to gather information, not ask for a job. People are more candid when there's no position on the line.

What if networking feels like using others? Networking isn't about what you can get from people. It's about building collegial relationships through respect, curiosity, and recognition. These connections become your professional community.

STEP 1: Self-Assess and Research Your Contact

Framework: *Know yourself + Know them = Better questions*

| Self-Assessment | Research Your Contact |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is my goal for this conversation? <input type="checkbox"/> What information do I need? <input type="checkbox"/> What are my strengths and gaps? <input type="checkbox"/> How does this path align with my values? | <input type="checkbox"/> Review their LinkedIn profile <input type="checkbox"/> Read any publications or talks <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about their organization <input type="checkbox"/> Identify what interests you about their path |

STEP 2: Plan Where and How to Connect

Framework: *N.I.Q. (Name, Identifying Info, Question)*

Where to find contacts: Alumni networks, LinkedIn, faculty referrals, conferences, previous preceptors/employers. Start 2-3 degrees from your immediate circle.

Your outreach email should include:

- Name:** Who you are (name, program, year)
- Identifying Info:** How you found them / who referred you
- Question:** What you want to learn + specific ask (20-30 min conversation)

Pro Tip: Keep it brief (within 200 words). Expect up to 2 weeks for a response. A polite follow-up after 7-10 days is appropriate.

STEP 3: Navigate the Conversation

Framework: *Past → Present → Future → Advice (for a 30-min conversation)*

| Focus | Time | Sample Questions |
|---------------|---------|---|
| Their Present | 10 min | What does a typical day look like? What's most rewarding? |
| Their Past | 5-6 min | How did you get into this field? What would you do differently? |
| Their Future | 5-6 min | What opportunities open up 5-10 years from your role? |
| Their Advice | 5 min | Who else should I talk to? Any resources to explore? |

Best Practices:

- Ask open-ended questions (how, what, tell me about)
- Stay curious and follow interesting threads
- Listen more than you talk; take notes
- Be genuine; don't try too hard to impress

STEP 4: Follow Up and Build the Relationship

Framework: *Thank → Update → Stay Connected*

- Thank (within 1-2 days):** Send a brief note. Be specific about what you valued.
- Update (when relevant):** Let them know when you act on their advice and how it helped.
- Stay Connected (1-2x per year):** Share relevant articles, congratulate milestones, or just check in.

Pro Tips: *Quality matters more than frequency.* An email 6 months later saying "I took your advice and here's what happened" is deeply rewarding for your contact.

- **Start now.** Even one conversation per quarter builds a professional community that will support you throughout your career. Network with the goal of being an excellent colleague.