A photograph showing a man and a woman in professional attire sitting at a table, engaged in a conversation. The man is on the left, seen from the side, wearing a dark suit jacket and a light-colored shirt. The woman is on the right, smiling, wearing a dark blazer over a white collared shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a cafe or meeting room.

# Informational Interviewing as a Student or Postdoc

Patti Meyer, Program Director, Non-Academic Career Development

# Credits and Copyright

Visuals by my talented colleagues at the Office of Career and Professional Development (OCPD) at UCSF

Concepts from Naledi Saul, Director, OCPD

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platform for the  
UCSF community.



## Our Agenda: By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

- A. Define what an informational interview is
- B. Describe how to approach someone to request an interview
- C. Determine which questions you should ask, based on your goals
- D. Discuss how to handle the etiquette and pacing of an informational interview
- E. State steps to take post interview to maintain the relationship over time

Our Agenda: By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

A. Define what an informational interview is

# What are informational interviews...

A 20-60 min conversation with a person who could be helpful to you

...why are informational interviews useful to you?

# **...why are informational interviews useful to you?**

Explore career options

Research for future interview

Research an organization

Establish a professional relationship



# **What are informational interviews and why are they useful to you?**

Explore career options

Research for future interview

Research an organization

Establish a professional relationship

What are informational interviews and why are they useful to you?

Explore career options

Research for future interview

Research an organization

Establish a professional relationship

**Job  
Search**

# Your Turn: Think, Pair, Share!

## A. Reflect on your goals by answering these 3 questions:

1. Who do you want to meet?
2. Why do you want to meet them?
3. What, specifically do you want to know from them?

### Career Exploration



**Explore career options**

### Job/Postdoc Search



**Research for a future interview**

### Professional Success



**Establish a Professional Relationship**

# Your Turn: Think, Pair, Share!

## A. Reflect on your goals by answering these 3 questions:

1. Who do you want to meet?
2. Why do you want to meet them?
3. What, specifically do you want to know from them?

### Career Exploration

I have a career exploration goal.  
I would like to meet Roshini, a Medical Science Liaison.

Because I would like to increase my understanding of careers involving communications and developing expertise in a particular health/science area.

Specifically, I want to know about a typical day in the life of an MSL & salary.

Barbara Gordon

Clark Kent



### Research Org. for Future Job Interview

I have a job search strategy goal.

I would like to meet someone who works at Abt Associates, a global health consulting firm.

I'd like to find out more about the company and make connections there.

Specifically, I want to know how they recruit, what people like about working here, and typical skills and experiences of competitive candidates.

# Your Turn: Think, Pair, Share!

## A. Reflect on your goals by answering these 3 questions:

1. Who do you want to meet?
2. Why do you want to meet them?
3. What, specifically do you want to know from them?



Your answers will:

1. Be included in your approach to ask for an interview
2. Focus your conversation when you meet

Our Agenda: By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

- A. Define what an informational interview is
- B. Describe how to approach someone to request an interview

# Why will people make time to meet with you?

# Why will people make time to meet with you?



# Why will people make time to meet with you?

- 1. Connection**
- 2. Affinity**
- 3. Paying it forward**

## Three Reasons Why People Will Take Time...

- 1. Connection – close bond:** You know each other, or know a connector person.
- 2. Affinity – middling bond:** You have a related connection to each other – attended the same university, belong to the same group, etc.
- 3. Paying it forward – loose bond:**
  - They have the time/interest to do so
  - To share their knowledge
  - Because they have hard won lessons they want to share
  - They believe/benefitted from professional connection

## Three Reasons Why People Will Take Time...

- 1. Connection – close bond:** You know each other, or know a connector person. *My ex-colleague has student that could use an info interview for a next step.*
- 2. Affinity – middling bond:** *I am a proud alum of a PhD program at UCSF, so I said yes to this request.*
- 3. Paying it forward – loose bond:** *A person spoke at a conference and is passionate about increasing understanding about the topic she researches; someone asked her for 15 min on skype so she gave it.*

Don't leapfrog to middling or loose ties: try to find the close connections



# LinkedIn

LinkedIn is perfect for this:

Type in a person's name and it will find the connection for you.

# The people in your professional community: First, look for the connection; then uncover their motivations

*Initially, you'll never know why a person chose to help you.*

*But during your conversation, if you want to strengthen the relationship, should be to be curious enough to find out what motivated them to meet you and help you achieve your goals.*

- *How do they know your connection?*
- *What role has networking or mentorship played in their career?*
- *Did they ever do an informational interview?*

*Be curious!*



- 1. Connection – close bond:** You know each other, or know a connector person.
- 2. Affinity – middling bond:** You have some type of connection to each other – attended the same university, belong to the same group, etc.
- 3. Paying it forward – loose bond:**
  - They have the time/interest to do so
  - To share their knowledge
  - Because they have hard won lessons they want to share
  - They believe/benefitted from professional connection

# B. Barbara approaches Roshini to explore careers

Dear Dr. Epasinghe,

I am a second year PhD student at UCSF and for the past two months and have been speaking with UCSF alumni in health and science communications careers. I was wondering if you would be willing to chat with me for about 20-30 minutes about your position as a researcher in the healthcare foundation for whom you work.

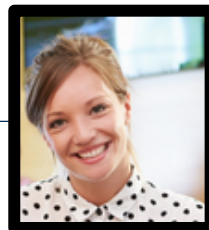
I was intrigued by your perspective, as I see on your LinkedIn profile that you have researcher experience both at a governmental organization and in a non-profit.

If you agree, I can travel to you, or you prefer, we could Skype; I'm flexible to your schedule. Thank you for considering my request. Please feel free to learn a little about my background from my LinkedIn profile at [linkedin/bgordon](#).

Barbara Gordon

## Your approach needs to include 5 things:

1. Who you are (including your connection or affinity, if there is one)
2. Why do you want to meet them?
3. What specific information do you want to know?
4. A thank you for considering your request
5. How they can find out more about you



# B. Clark approaches Daniel to research organizations

## Your approach needs to include 5 things:

1. Who you are (including your connection or affinity, if there is one)
2. Why do you want to meet them?
3. What specific information do you want to know?
4. A thank you for considering your request
5. How they can find out more about you

Dear Dr. Dolan,

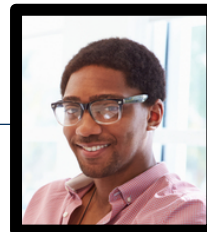
I'm in the sociology program here at UCSF, and my work focuses on community interventions involving technology to reduce incidences of preventable diseases. I've been considering health consulting, and I was wondering if you would be open to talking with me for about 20-30 minutes about your experience at Abt Associates.

I was specifically interested in hearing about your experience as someone who has been involved in policy and consulting in academe, think tanks, and in private sector firms.

Thank you for considering my request. I've attached my CV for your information should you be available to talk.

Regards,

Clark Kent



# B. Clark approaches Daniel to research organizations

## Your approach needs to include 5 things:

1. Who you are (including your connection or affinity, if there is one)
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Dear Dr. Dolan,

I'm in the sociology program here at UCSF and my work focuses on community interventions involving technology to reduce incidences of preventable diseases. I've been considering health consulting, and I was wondering if you would be open to talking with me for about 20-30 minutes about your previous experience at Abt Associates.

I was specifically interested in hearing about your experience as someone who has been involved in policy and consulting in academe, think tanks, and in private sector firms.

Thank you for considering my request. I've attached my CV for your information should you be available to talk.

Regards,

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# By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

- A. Define what an informational interview is
- B. Describe how to approach someone to request an interview
- C. Determine which questions you should ask, based on your goals

Asking useful questions that help  
you meet your goal

**One of these is likely your goal:**

Explore career options

Research for future interview

Research an organization

Establish a professional relationship

# The basic structure of an informational interview

There are four types of questions:

## Present

- What their role is now

## Past

- What prepared them and positioned them for their current role

## Future

- What opportunities interest them or open up for them 5-10 years in the future

## Advice

- What advice to they have for people seeking to succeed in their career path or their specific role.

# Career exploration Qs are about their job and similar jobs



Barbara Gordon talks to Roshini about her Research & Communications Job

**Present**

**Past**

**Future**

**Advice**

# Career exploration Qs are about their job and similar jobs



Barbara Gordon talks to Roshini about her Researcher/Communications Job

## Present

1. What does your role entail?
2. What is a typical day like?
3. What do you enjoy about it?
4. What is most challenging about it?
5. What qualities do you think are essential to succeed in this role?
6. If you weren't in this role, what position would you be in?

## Past

7. How did you transition into this career path?
8. What activities prepared you for this role?

## Future

9. What opportunities open up for you because you are pursuing this career path?
10. What interests you about the Director of Communications role?
11. What other organizations would be appealing for you to work at?

## Advice

12. What advice do you have for someone considering this career path?
13. Could you suggest someone who is a Director of Communications who might be willing to speak to me as you have?

Research Qs are about the organization, trending issues and hiring experience



What will you ask?

**Present**

**Past**

**Future**

**Advice**



## Clark Kent Talks to David about Abt Associates and Health Consulting

### Present

1. What did your role entail?
2. What was a typical day like?
3. What did you like/not like about it?
4. How is your role different in a start up vs more established orgs?
5. How do people find positions in your field?
6. What are key issues in your field right now

### Past

7. What was your interview like?
8. Is that typical for your industry?
9. How did you find your position?
10. Why did Abt appeal to you?
11. What is the typical starting salary range for people in your field?

### Future

### Advice

12. What do you think people should look for when selecting a science communications position?
13. What professional associations do you find useful?
14. What resources are invaluable to you



# Your Turn: Think & Write!

C. Based on your goals – write up to six questions you'd like to ask.

## Present

- What their role is now

## Past

- What prepared them and positioned them for their current role

## Future

- What opportunities interest them or open up for them 5-10 years in the future

## Advice

- What advice to they have for people seeking to succeed in their career path or their specific role.

# By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

- A. Define what an informational interview is
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- D. Discuss how to handle the etiquette and pacing of an informational interview

Putting it all together  
for a  
productive conversation

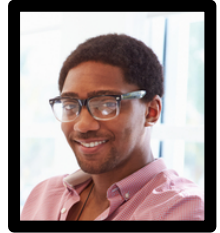


# Putting it all together: Sample timing for a 30 minute conversation

Your Questions

Focus	Length	Language
<b>Open</b>	1-2 minutes	
<b>Present</b>	3-5 minutes	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
<b>Past</b>	3-5 minutes	
<b>Future</b>	3-5 minutes	
<b>Advice</b>	3-5 minutes	
<b>Close</b>	1-2 minutes	

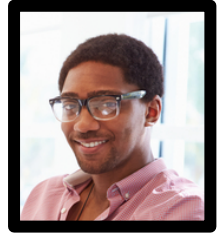
# Researching Clark has an interview



Focus	Length	Language
<b>Open</b>	1-2 minutes	<p>Thank you so much for meeting with me. As I shared in my email, I've been speaking people for the past two months, because I've been exploring career options involving consulting and health.</p> <p>I was particularly thrilled when you agreed to meet with me because one of my goals has been to learn more about the organizations involved in health consulting. I was hoping you could share a little more about your role, why you chose Abt, and where you think the field is going? in hearing your thoughts about the role is similar or different based on the size of the organization, and what some interesting things are in your field right now.</p> <p>So thank you for agreeing to talk with me.</p>
<b>Present</b>	3-5 minutes	
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<b>Advice</b>	3-5 minutes	
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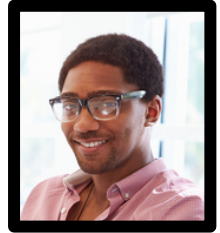
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## Select and edit your questions



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<b>Present</b>	3-5 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does your role fit into the organization</li> <li>2. What's a typical day like for you?</li> <li>3. What do you enjoy about your work??</li> <li>4. What do you think is the most interesting issue in your work today.</li> <li>5. What was your hiring process like</li> <li>6. If you didn't work here, where would you work?</li> <li>7. What opens up for you 5 years down the road?</li> </ol>
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# Tending to Your Professional Network: How often do I keep in touch?

**Let people follow your  
adventure**

1. Every time something the person said helps you
2. Any time you see something of interest or would help the person
3. 6 months to one year

## More resources for your Next Steps

- A. [ucsfconnect.com](https://ucsfconnect.com) – let us do a tech transfer example
- B. <https://career.ucsf.edu> – search by word Informational
- C. Take Charge of Your Career workshop at Parnassus – June 28
- D. Biotech Researcher Series at Mission Bay during July
- E. For Faculty Jobs, get on the PFF listserve and check out July programs

[ucsfconnect.com](http://ucsfconnect.com) Easiest with LinkedIn or Facebook

Join  
**UCSF Connect,**  
the official networking  
platform for the  
UCSF community.

