INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW HANDOUT

Accessed from the Career Development Center’s Handshake Resources:

<https://app.joinhandshake.com/articles/20129>

Informational interviewing is a low-risk way for you to learn a great deal more about a profession than by simply sitting in the classroom. In addition, you will develop professional connections before beginning a career. The information you gain can make a world of difference in your career path and may even change the path’s direction. And, just as important, the process can build your confidence in promoting yourself along the way.

Informational interviews are great opportunities to help you determine whether you are in the right major for your career goals, learn more to make better choices about your career path, build a network of career contacts, gain confidence for job interviews by practicing asking questions and providing information about yourself, and help map out strategies for making yourself more marketable when you are looking for work.

**Watch these QUICK videos and get started with your Informational Interviews today!**

* ***How to do an Informational Interview*** [***Candid Career Video***](https://www.candidcareer.com/video-informational%2Binterviewing%2Cbddaa88aa1b24bace450%2CMNSU)

Accessed from the Career Development Center’s Candid Career Video Library: <https://www.candidcareer.com/video-informational+interviewing,bddaa88aa1b24bace450,MNSU>

* ***Get Hired: Virtual Networking Candid Career Video***

Accessed from the Career Development Center’s Candid Career Video Library:

[https://www.candidcareer.com/video-virtual+networking,8ca55652d4b2c5569d74,MNSU](https://www.candidcareer.com/video-virtual%2Bnetworking%2C8ca55652d4b2c5569d74%2CMNSU)

# Get Answers

When interviewing people for information (versus them interviewing you for a job), there is less pressure to “sell” yourself, so you can ask honest questions about the person’s job, industry, or organization. For example, in a job interview, it might be inappropriate to ask about salary, but in an informational interview, inquiring about typical compensation would be acceptable.

# Question Examples

* What is the best part about this job (industry, organization)? The worst?
* What has your career path been?
* What was your college major? If you could do it over, would you change your major or do anything else differently?
* What recommendations would you have for a student interested in moving into this career?
* What pressing professional challenges do you have?
* What is the outlook for your industry (business, profession)?
* What is a typical workday like?
* How well does your career allow for a good work-life balance?
* Who else would you recommend I talk to as I explore this field? When I contact them, may I use your name?

Other questions might be unique to you. For example, students often do self-assessments that provide ideas for informational interview questions. Let’s say a student has learned through self-assessment that she is particularly productive when working independently (versus in a group). She might ask, “In general, how much of your work is done in a team environment?”

# Find People to Interview

There are lots of ways to connect with people in your field of interest:

* Through the [Handshake community](https://app.joinhandshake.com/students?page=1&per_page=25&sort_direction=desc&sort_column=default&ref=content-type-nav&alumni_only=true), connect with alumni from Minnesota State Mankato and other schools
* Through the [MNSU Career Development Center page](https://www.linkedin.com/in/career-development-center/) on LinkedIn.
* From professional associations. Check out association web sites for student mentoring and networking opportunities.
* From people on campus, including your professors and career counselors. Ask your personal contacts as well, such as your immediate and extended family, neighbors, co-workers, internship contacts, etc. Request their ideas on people who might have relevant career information.
* From websites of companies likely to have employees in your field of interest. For example, if you are interested in learning more about the field of health-care administration, you could look at websites of local hospitals or managed-care organizations to identify key staff to contact.

# Make Contact

Once you have identified someone you'd like to talk to, what's next?

If you have their email address, you may want to try emailing your contact first.

1. Explain who you are
2. How you found them
3. Why you are writing
4. Ask to schedule a time to meet via zoom or phone call

# Introductory Email Example

For example, here is an introductory email to the Director of Operations at XYZ Medical Center:

“Dear **[Contact First Name]:**

I obtained your name from the **[XYZ Medical Center]** web site.

I am a **[Community Health Education]** student at **Minnesota State University, Mankato** and am in the process of defining my career goals. My current area of interest is **[hospital administration],** so I thought you would be a great resource for information and advice about this career field. Would you be willing to meet with me **[via zoom]** for 10-30 minutes so I could ask you a few questions about your career in **[hospital administration]** and how best to prepare for this type of career?

I would be happy to schedule a time that works best for your schedule. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**[student’s name]**”

If you do not know the person’s email address (or get no response to your email message) try telephoning with the same sort of approach.

Remember to mention the 10-30-minute limit – a contact is more likely to say “yes” if you ask for a short amount of time. If you try to reach someone twice with no response, look for someone else to contact.

# Prepare

* Plan your questions ahead so you appear professional and prepared
* Write down your questions and take them to the meeting. Make them open-ended questions

that require more than a “yes or no” answer.

* Plan to dress as you would for a job interview
* Know how to get to the interview and plan to arrive 5-10 minutes early

# The Interview

* Try to relax and enjoy yourself, but always behave professionally
* Introduce yourself
* Reiterate how long you have planned for the information interview
* Ask your questions but try to make it a conversation rather than an interrogation
* Take brief notes
* When you have reached the end of your scheduled time, offer to stop. Your interviewee may say it is OK to continue, but if he or she indicates that your time is up, say thank you and express your appreciation for their time

# Follow Up

Within 24 hours, send a thank-you email. Express your appreciation for the time spent with you and mention your plan to follow through on any suggestions offered in the interview.

* Reference the Informational Interview date/time
* Summarize the information you found particularly interesting
* Express appreciation for their time

# Follow Up Thank You Email Example:

For example, here is a thank you email to the Director of Operations at XYZ Medical Center:

“Dear **[First Name]:**

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me **[December 07 at 11 AM]** to talk about your experience in **[hospital administration].** I appreciated learning more about the **[certifications you found particularly useful in your career development].** I also appreciated learning more **about [your leadership philosophy and how this influences how your decision making].**

I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to connect with me.

Sincerely,

**[student’s name]**

**[phone number]”**