

# How to Use Informational Interviews to Land Your Dream Job

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**Informational Interviews** differ from traditional interviews in two ways. First, you interview a company, instead of a company interviewing you. Second, you are seeking information, not direct employment. Consider informational interviews an important part of researching whether a specific career is right for you. Let's face it, it's hard to know if you'll like being a financial analyst until you know what a financial analyst job entails. Informational Interviews allow you to determine the ins and outs of any job risk free. By interviewing someone who works as a financial analyst you easily find out the nitty gritty. As a bonus, you've just made a **POWERFUL** connection with someone who has access to the jobs you want. And guess what? There's a good chance this person will become your ambassador to help you get in the door and land a really cool job!

**So how does a student go from having a decent understanding of the job they are interested in to setting up an informational interview to actually going through with it?**

## **Step 1: Determine Who You Want to Connect With**

Find the email address or phone number of a person in a leadership role who is working in the career field you want to investigate (preferably at a company you would love to work at). Although this may seem like the least exciting step in the process, it is the most important. Who you meet with will determine how valuable the information is you gather and the likelihood of it leading to future opportunities. Be creative—information is always available to those who are creative about finding it.

## **Step 2: Make Contact and Set Up an Interview**

Get in touch either through email or over the phone and ask if you could treat the person to coffee or lunch to get his or her advice and insights. It is always better to talk to the person over the phone if you can, although this is not always possible. If using email, send a sincere (but not too long) email explaining your curiosity for this line of work and your interest in learning how the person became successful in the industry.

### **Three things to include in your short and sweet email:**

1. **A great subject line**—this will cause them to read the email in the first place. Your goal in the subject is to intrigue them. (ex. “The best analyst on Wall Street” or “A coffee that could change someone's life”)
2. **A compelling reason why they should want to help you**—you can do this by feeding their ego (ex. you are the best in the industry and I would be honored to learn from you...) or by appealing to their greater good (ex. I am ambitious young student looking to learn...)

3. **Call to action**—where do they go from there. If you talk to them on the phone you can set up a time to meet on the call. In an email you should suggest a few days/times that might work. (ex. would you be open to meeting for a short coffee next Wednesday or Thursday at 11am?...)

### **Step 3: The Informational Interview**

Meet with this individual and get him or her talking about what they love. Arrive prepared with a few intelligent questions so you can steer the conversation and keep things moving. People like talking about themselves and giving advice to young ambitious people like you. It is your job to provide them the opportunity to share their successes and their passion for their work. A great question to get things started is, “Did you have any idea what career you wanted to pursue while you were my age? I’d love to get your advice on how you discovered this industry was a good fit.” If you do a good job of bringing them back to a time when they were young and inexperienced then they will relate to your position and be excited to answer all of your questions.

Although this is an informational interview and you are in command, don’t overlook the fact that the other person is also evaluating you. Everything from how well you dress to how you articulate questions is being observed. The degree to which this person will want to help you will be a direct reflection of how worthy they feel you are of their time and assistance. Be at your best!

### **Step 4: Build the Relationship**

In the first few minutes of the interview you start getting a better understanding of whether or not this industry interests you. If you find yourself sitting on the edge of your seat intrigued by their job, then you should focus on building the relationship further. If things are going well, start asking questions like, “What are things I should be doing now?” “Are internships really the best way to get my foot in the door?” “Where should I look?” By asking these questions at a point in the interview where the other person has developed rapport with you and is keen to help you further, they will be more likely to offer you opportunities. If you play your cards right, there is a good chance they will put you in touch with someone who is looking for an intern, offer to talk to the HR department on your behalf, or offer you a job directly.

Before the interview comes to a close (remember you are running the interview) ask these magic questions to drastically improve your chances of being offered a job opportunity and at the very least another informational interview:

*“What would you suggest I do next? If you wouldn’t mind, could you recommend someone I could meet with to get another perspective?”* If you feel it’s appropriate you may want to add:

*“Is there a project or two I could help you with over the next 2 months. I’d love to get my feet wet sooner than later?”*

After the interview is over follow-up with a thank-you card. Whether or not you like the industry after the interview doesn’t matter. This person has

generously taken the time to meet with you and despite the outcome of the meeting you are now closer to your dream job—whether you hear from them again or not. Thank them for what you learned and continue on your quest.

### **CAUTION!**

One big caution with informational interviews: don't let it appear that your agenda is to get an internship or a job, because it shouldn't be. The person on the other side of the table will smell your insincerity within seconds. Asking questions about internships shouldn't be done until you've built rapport with the person you are interviewing. Rapport is built by asking genuine 'information seeking' questions during the bulk of the interview. If something like a job offer or an amazing contact comes out of the meeting—great! Although it is likely to happen, take it as a bonus as it shouldn't come across as your goal.

Out of all the job hunting methods available, this is our favorite. Even if the interview doesn't lead to a job, you will have developed a new contact in the industry and have a better understanding of what you really want. That is why you win with every informational interview you do. Be creative in your search, act in integrity and you will be well on your way to securing your dream job!

### **BONUS – 3 Ways to connect with someone working your dream job:**

1. Send a mass email to everyone you know asking them to connect you with anyone they might happen to know in the industry you are interested in. Let them know that you simply want to buy these people coffee and pick their brains for 15 minutes to LEARN more about the industry (don't mention you are just job hunting because this shouldn't be your goal). You will be pleased by the response of your friends and family who want to help and might even be surprised by just how many people they know who can help you.

\* for a pre-scripted email template you can send to your family and friends, visit the The Focus Zone section of [www.focusedstudent.com](http://www.focusedstudent.com)

2. Directly search for the names of the people working your dream job. Be creative. You may need to do a Google search for their job title and company name or contact the receptionist and ask them where you can find a company directory. Once you know their name, do what you can to track down their phone number or at the very least get their email address. Another strategy we've seen students have success with is starting with the email address of anyone who works at the company. Suppose you find John Doe in Accounting and his email is [j.doe@xyz.com](mailto:j.doe@xyz.com). If you are looking for the contact information of Suzie Brown in Marketing then it is very likely her email address will follow the same structure

of first initial.last [name@companyname.com](mailto:name@companyname.com). You would then send an email to [s.brown@xyz.com](mailto:s.brown@xyz.com) and cross your fingers that it doesn't bounce back.

3. If you are having a hard time getting in touch with people working your dream job, ask someone who is in a junior position below them. It will be much easier to get in touch with these people and they will likely be honored that you are asking them for advice. Once the informational interview is complete, ask them the magic questions: "What would you suggest I do next? If you wouldn't mind, could you recommend someone I could meet with to get another perspective?" You can't lose in an informational interview no matter who you meet with.

## Action Step: The Power of Informational Interviews

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### *Invest in Informational Interviews*

Purpose: Find out more information about your dream job and build a relationship with a key contact in the industry.

Tip: There are no limitations on what your dream job can be. Despite how unique your dream job there is someone somewhere doing it or doing something close to it. Getting in touch with that person through an informational interview is the single best way to build contacts in the industry and confirm your passion for your dream job.

#### ACTION

List three dream jobs of yours. If you don't know the specific job title then write down the company name or industry you would love to work for or in.

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

Circle the job that sounds the most exciting and that you want to know more about.

#### **4 Steps for Executing a Successful Informational Interview**

Step 1: Determine who you want to connect with

Step 2: Make contact and set up an interview

Step 3: The informational interview

Step 4: Build the relationship

Now it's time to track down someone who is working your dream job. What are two specific actions you can take to track down someone working that job? (ex. Search online, ask a friend or professor)

Specific Action 1:

.....  
.....

Specific Action 2:

.....  
.....  
Make a list of all the people you have found who are working your dream job:

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

Pick the top two. What specific action will you take to get in touch with each person to set up an informational interview? What date will you get in touch with this person by?

Name: .....

Specific Action: .....

.....

Date: .....

Name: .....

Specific Action: .....

.....

Date: .....

Make a list of 5 good questions you will ask them on the interview:

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....