



Do you want to know what it takes to land your dream job? Are you looking for insights on how to break into a particular industry or trying to decide if a graduate degree is right for you?

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS CAN HELP YOU:

- Discover the diverse range of careers connected to your interests.
- Develop a better understanding of what it is like to work in a given occupation or industry.
- Determine if a company/career path/graduate program is a good fit for you.
- Decide whether grad school or work experience is more advantageous at this point in your career.
- Identify what you can do to be a stronger candidate for employment or grad school.
- Make strategic connections for future networking/job search.
- Build your confidence in your ability to engage with professionals in your field of interest.

An informational interview is similar to an interview a journalist or researcher might conduct. It should be used *strategically* to supplement knowledge gathered from readily available (i.e. web or print) sources with more personalized, first-hand insights.

Keep in mind that the people you reach out to have their own work, school and personal commitments. Don't expect an immediate reply; it could be a week or more before they reply, and you may not hear back from everyone.

Preparing for the Interview

Identify your learning goals for the informational interview.

- What do you hope to learn from the interview?
- Are you trying to identify careers that fit your skills and interests?
- What would help you decide if a career path is right for you?
- What information might help you choose between different career paths? Between grad school and a job?

Locate contacts.

Contacts through BDP

The BDP website profiles alumni, many of whom have offered to share their experiences with current students. Contact the BDP office to connect with these alumni. If you have not already done so, we strongly encourage you to join the BDP LinkedIn group, *UT Bridging Disciplines Programs Network*. These individuals will be especially well equipped to offer insights into how BDP coursework and Connecting Experiences have shaped their career paths.

Contacts through LinkedIn

You can also connect with over 250,000 UT alumni via LinkedIn. Simply log in, then enter www.linkedin.com/alumni in the search bar. You will have several options to help you narrow the field of potential subjects. Start with most relevant parameters, such as where they work, what they do, etc. *Note: To access the alumni network you will have to have UT listed in the education section of your profile.

Do your homework and draft your questions.

Research your interviewee and the career/industry/degree program of interest. Gather general background info to help you select thoughtful questions. Use the program/company website or LinkedIn page to determine what information is available online and what additional insights you hope to garner from the interview. Research will help you make a positive impression and make the most of your time with your interviewee.

Draft a list of 5-6 questions (see sample questions below).

You may not have time to ask every question but it is a good idea to have a few extras just in case. On the other hand, you won't want to ask too many questions to be respectful of your interviewee's time.

Prep for a positive first impression.

From the moment you make contact, you should be ready to conduct the interview or respond to messages from your interviewee. Create a professional voicemail message in case the interviewee calls. Know your availability 2 weeks out and the specific questions you wish to ask. Refresh your resume; potential interviewees may request a copy to get a better sense of your skills and experience.

Initiating Contact

Use email or LinkedIn to reach out to potential interviewees. As a general rule, email is best unless you already have a personal connection.

Be professional – Briefly introduce yourself in 1-2 sentences. Explain your connection (UT student or alumni, BDP student) and shared interest (career field, employer, or cause). Example: “My BDP advisor, (name), recommended I contact you based on my interest or our shared interest in _____”

Be clear about your purpose – What question are you trying to answer? What topic are you trying to learn more about? *Emphasize that you are looking for advice, not a job or internship.*

Example: “I would greatly appreciate any insights or advice you have to offer new professionals pursuing your career path/considering graduate school...”

Be brief – Your initial email should be concise and the actual interview should not take more than 15 to 30 minutes.

Be flexible – Offer to accommodate the interviewee’s schedule and provide options for mode of communication. Note: Phone may be the most convenient, but Skype and face-to-face may facilitate a more memorable interaction.

Example: “Would you be willing to take 15-30 minutes to speak or meet with me about ____? If so, please let me know your availability. Alternately, please let me know if you would be open to answering questions via email.”

Conducting the Interview

- For in-person interviews, follow the same protocols as for a job interview (dress professionally, be on time).
- For phone/Skype interviews, find a quiet, distraction-free location and make sure your phone or computer is charged.
- Begin and end by thanking the interviewee for his/her time and generosity in sharing insights and advice.
- Take notes. If you wish to record the interview, ask for permission first.

Immediately after the interview

Send a thank-you note, preferably hand-written. Highlight a general or specific piece of advice that was particularly helpful and offer your assistance if they should ever need it.

Record key take-ways & suggestions for action steps. Choose 2-3 action steps you will take as a result of the interview.

Sample Questions

Career Exploration

What do you need to know to determine if this job/career path might be a good fit for you?

- How did you get into this field?
- What advice do you have for someone considering a career in this profession/field?
- What do you wish you knew when you were in my position?
- What are the most important skills/characteristics one needs to be successful in this profession/field?
- What excites you about this work? What aspects do you find frustrating? What’s your average day like?

If I decided to pursue this as a career...

- What would an entry-level position look like for someone with my education/experience?
- What are the most common mistakes you see young professionals make early in their careers?
- What do I need to know that they don’t teach in college?
- What do you wish someone had told you while you were starting your career?
- What do you look for in entry-level candidates?

Action Steps

- Any recommendations for other professionals, organizations, or Linked groups I should connect with?
- What are some important keywords to include in my resume?
- What hard skills/soft skills/experiences would make me a stronger candidate for jobs in this field?
- What industry blogs or publications do you read, and who do you follow on social media?

Graduate School Exploration

- What made you choose this university over comparable programs at other universities?
- What could I do as an undergrad, to be better prepared/a stronger applicant for grad school?
- What faculty members are you most interested in working with and why?
- What are the most important skills/characteristics one needs to be successful in graduate school?
- What’s your average day like as a graduate student?
- What do you wish someone had told you while you were starting your graduate studies?