



YALI Network

How to Have a Successful
Informational Interview

An informational interview is a meeting in which an individual requests insight or advice on their career path from someone who has relevant experience. Unlike a job interview, the objective of an informational interview is not to obtain a specific job; it serves instead as a means to gather information and help build a professional network.

Though an informational interview is typically a casual conversation, it is important that the interviewer (you) be adequately prepared. Use the following checklist of steps to complete before, during, and after an informational interview to ensure a productive and successful meeting.



Before

Do your research.

Find out as much as you can about your interviewee (i.e., their background and experience), your interviewee's company, the industry, and anything else that may be relevant to your conversation.

Compile a list of questions.

Don't rely solely on memory; write your interview questions down and bring them to the meeting. Keep your list in order of importance, so that your most pertinent questions can be discussed first.

Prepare a short overview of yourself.

Spend some time practicing a short (15- to 30-second) verbal overview of your background, making sure to provide context for the meeting. For more information on preparing to speak about yourself, check out the YALI Network Public Speaking Advice and Checklist.

During

Demonstrate respect.

Dress neatly and professionally, as you might for a job interview. Arrive at the meeting on time or a few minutes early, and be sure to address your interviewee by their title (such as Dr., Mr., or Ms.).

Share your intention.

Besides giving the verbal overview you prepared, reiterate why you reached out to the interviewee and what you hope to gain from the meeting. Because it is an informational interview, and not a job interview, you should underscore that you are seeking advice and insight.

Listen.

Because you are technically the interviewer, you should encourage your interviewee to do most of the talking. Show sincere interest in what your interviewee has to say.

Be cognizant of time.

Keep the meeting within the previously agreed upon timeframe.

After

Follow up with a thank you note.

Always send a note of thanks 1-2 days after an informational interview, expressing your gratitude for your interviewee's time and counsel.

Keep in touch.

An informational interview is an opportunity to forge a connection with someone important in your desired professional field. Continue to build the relationship by thinking about how you can be helpful to them, such as offering to make an introduction, passing along a relevant article, or sending well wishes after a career milestone.