



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

To paraphrase Merriam-Webster, networking is the development and fostering of personal relationships for employment or business. Building a professional network permits you to:

- Gain advice about a career field, an industry, or an organization
- Connect with more people who are doing the things you want to do
- Learn about possible job opportunities (not necessarily immediately)
- Develop mutually beneficial relationships with other professionals

An informational interview is a great way to learn about possible career paths.

An informational interview is a conversation (in person or over the phone) with a professional in a field that interests you. The conversation is driven by you, so you should prepare questions, and bring a pen and paper to take notes.

You should not ask a new contact for a job.

Instead, your goal is to learn what skills and experiences are valuable in this career.

WHOM SHOULD I ASK?

WHOM DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

Do you have family, friends, friends-of-family, neighbors, classmates or colleagues that work in companies or industries that interest you? You'll be surprised how word-of-mouth can help.

UNIVERSITY SPONSORED EVENTS

Campus events such as Career Fairs, Employer Information Sessions, and Resume Clinics (where employers critique students' resumes)

USE YOUR ALUMNI NETWORK

The University of Maryland recently launched a portal for current students to connect with alumni, called [Terrapins Connect](#). You can also meet alumni at local events (including social events!), professional meetings, and through LinkedIn.

SMALL TALK/CHANCE MEETINGS

Never underestimate the power of "chance!" Perhaps one weekend your roommate's cousin comes for a visit and you find out that she is a mechanical engineer working at a company that interests you.

LINKEDIN

Over 300 million people in more than 200 countries use [LinkedIn](#) as a professional networking site. It is a more acceptable way to connect with people in the professional setting than using Facebook or other social media platforms.

CONFERENCES & PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

Whether you are presenting or not, don't be afraid to speak up and talk to colleagues from around the world that attend conferences in your industry or academic field.

PREPARING FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

BEFORE YOU REACH OUT TO A NEW CONTACT

- **Research basic information** about the career you wish to explore (through books, Internet, classes).
 - **Determine what you want** from the people you contact. Advice? Information about their industry or company?
 - **Know yourself:** Be ready to talk about your engineering skills, interests, and experiences.
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REQUESTING A MEETING

Practice what you want to say, even record yourself, before you call a new contact. Have one script ready for voicemail and another for actually speaking to the person. If emailing, make sure you proofread your message before you hit “Send.”

Describe who are you, who referred you, and why you are contacting this person:

“Hello Ms. Taylor, my name is Jennifer Woodford. I was referred to you by my former co-op supervisor, Mark Richards, in the Integrated Circuit Design office at Annapolis Microsystems.
“Mr. Richards recommended that I speak with you about your work at the National Security Agency. I am graduating from University of Maryland next May with a Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering, and I am interested in continuing my work in circuit development.”

Then, ask for a meeting:

“I would like to set up a time to speak with you further about your organization and your experience in electrical engineering. Are you available for about 30 minutes sometime next week?”

...

“Thank you so much for your assistance, Ms. Taylor. I will look forward to our meeting next Tuesday at 10 a.m.”

Be patient yet persistent:

Things may take a while to develop, and you will sometimes hear “No.” Be prepared to respond to a less than warm reception, in case your contact says:

“Well, we’re not really hiring any computer engineers at this time.”

“I understand. However, my goal in arranging a meeting with you is not to discuss a specific job, but rather to talk to you about information and/or advice on entering the field of computer engineering. I was hoping to talk to you more about your perspective on what I can do to prepare myself for a career in computer engineering.”

...Or...

“Unfortunately I really don’t have time to meet with you.”

“I understand that you are unavailable to speak with me about entering the field of biological resources engineering; can you recommend someone else in your organization that might be willing to talk with me about their experiences?”

Know when to move on. If you are not able to set up a meeting with that person or someone in their company, you may need to let it go, and identify someone else in the same or a different company.

Start slow: To gain confidence, approach familiar people and less desired organizations first. But, don’t be afraid to initiate contact with people you don’t know.

DURING YOUR MEETING

Take notes. Bring a pen and notebook to your meeting, with prepared questions and space to write.

Put away your phone or other distractions. Make sure that 100% of your attention is on your current conversation.

Ask for clarification if you don't understand something. The goal of an informational interview is for you to learn.

Demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in the other person's experience and advice and have researched their company. See sample questions below. Avoid asking for any favors (like a referral or a job).

Remember that how you speak is just as important as what you say:

- Be aware of how fast or how slow and the volume at which you are speaking , especially if you are having a phone meeting.
- Listen, and then respond to what the other person is saying.
- Watch for fillers/slang (*um, like, cool, ya know...*)

AFTER YOUR MEETING

Your work is not done once you've finished speaking with a new professional contact – it has just begun!

Sending a thank-you note is always a good start.

- When writing the email, refer to the date and location of your meeting
- Proofread your note carefully. There should be no errors (in spelling, grammar, capitalization or punctuation).
- See an email template below.

Thank you Email

Subject: Thank you for the career advice

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

Thank your new contact for taking the time to meet with you. Include the location and date of your meeting.

Mention something specific you discussed, for example, a skill the professional mentioned would be helpful for you to learn or a professional event or organization you might attend or join. Indicate an action that you plan to take related to the professional's advice.

Indicate that you will inform them of any new developments in your career. Thank the person again.

Sincerely,

Your name

Maintaining Contact with your Growing Professional Network

There are many ways you can keep in touch with your networking contacts. For instance, you can:

- Request to connect on LinkedIn. Remember to personalize your request.
- Send a short note about how the discussion helped you in a given situation
- Seek out your contacts at professional meetings or conferences
- Invite your contact to speak at an event for your student group on campus
- Advise a contact of the results of a referral
- Let a contact know when you get a job

Skillful networking is a planned, structured, and time-consuming campaign that usually starts with family, friends, and acquaintances, but rapidly moves onto conversations or meetings with people you don't know, who refer you to still more people you don't know. **Think of networking as a long-term investment in your career.**

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You can use this list as a guide when preparing your own questions.

Work Environment

How would you describe your work environment?
How would you describe a typical day/week/month/cycle – regular duties, projects, etc.?
What do you like most about your job? What would you change if you could?
What is the most rewarding part of your job? Least rewarding?
How much flexibility are you allowed in your job (hours, vacations, dress, etc.)?
Does the organization have a mission? If so, how does it fulfill that mission?
How much autonomy do you have on the job?
How are you made aware of supervisory expectations?
What portion of your job involves interacting with others, including co-workers & clients?
What does the organization do to ensure all employees feel included?
How does the company foster an inclusive and diverse workplace?

Job Requirements and Experience

What college courses have been most helpful to you in your position?
Is there special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job?
What personal qualities do you see as important for success in this job?
How much outside or overtime work is required? Nights? Weekends?
Is much travel involved in your job? If so, how much and what type?
What are the toughest problems you deal with?
Are there other industries, sectors, or roles to which you think my skills and abilities would transfer readily?
Describe a typical day/week that you experience in the role of an _____.
How do most people enter this field?
What type of position in this field might I reasonably target given my background?

Advice/Leads

If you were in charge of hiring someone to assist you in your work, what criteria would you use to make your selection?
Are there any professional groups or associations in the field that you would recommend I join?
Do you know of any co-op or summer opportunities that would benefit me?
Have you heard of any events or developments in _____ (an area that matches your interests or qualifications)?
Are there any particular companies or employers are doing important work in (field/ industry)?
Can you think of anyone else I might talk to who has _____ experience or who has done a lot of _____ work?
Of the people you know who have moved from staff jobs to management, who do you think might be most receptive to a request for a networking meeting/informational interview?
What was the best advice you received when you started in this field?