

career contessa

15 QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

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Before we get started, let's get something straight: an informational interview is not a job interview.

Even if you're not currently job searching, **requesting an informational interview** with someone you admire (or with someone whose job you admire) means you're willing to meet with them to hear their story *without* pressing your own on them.

Informational interviews are an incredible way to get a clear visual of an industry, company, or position to determine if it's right for you. When done right, they also help you expand your professional network (and yes, many people have **received job offers because of an informational interview** they did). So we're talking a win-win situation here.

But once you've gotten someone to agree to meet you for a coffee, what questions should you ask in an informational interview? Here are 15 of our favorites, along with some tips on writing personalized questions for each meeting.

15 QUESTIONS TO ASK IN EVERY INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

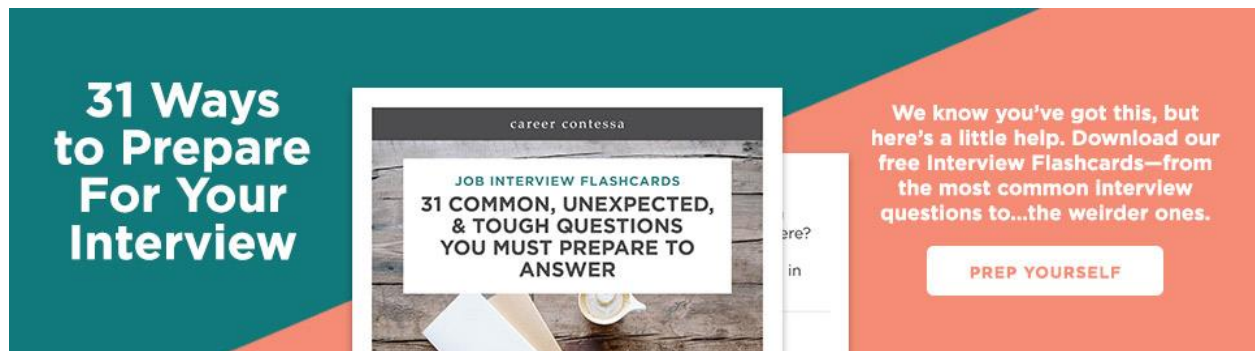
Here are some general questions that should work well regardless of industry or the person's professional background. Just make sure that they're relevant to the person by doing thorough research on their work in advance.

Informational Interview Question 1: Can you tell me a bit about your career path and what led you to the role you're in today?

An informational interview is about them, not you, so this is always the best place to start.

Informational Interview Question 2: What were some of your early roles in the field?

You'll also want to include the follow-up question: what did you learn there that helps you today? This question is meant to help you get an idea of where you'll need to start if you're new to the field, but it's also a good way to learn more about how linear (or not) this person's career path was.



Informational Interview Question 3: What does a work day look like for you?

This is the best chance you'll have to see what every day is like for the role you're interested in. If she says she's working 14 hour days and you're not interested, you can start looking into other roles.

Informational Interview Question 4: What are some big projects you're working on now or that you've finished up in the last few months?

Projects are likely what will keep the job interesting, so you want to know what he or she has been working on. Plus, it gives you a good sense of the priorities of the role and company.

Informational Interview Question 5: What do you enjoy most about the work you do? / What are you most excited about right now?

While this question is similar to #4, the answer's may not be. What this person enjoys about her work could be completely unexpected. It's a great way to get her to open up more.

Informational Interview Question 6: What do you enjoy the least? Or, is there something that surprised you about the role when you first started?

Sometimes, you'll get someone who is willing to get candid about the downsides of their job. An informational interview is, after all, a fairly informal conversation. Still, if the person starts to balk about talking about their least favorite element ("I really like everything I do"), you can shift the question to what surprised them instead. Most people have an answer for this.

Informational Interview Question 7: What skills do you think are most important for someone interested in a job like yours?

Take careful note of these, especially the ones you don't technically have. You'll want to use this information to fill gaps in your skill set before applying for similar jobs.



Informational Interview Question 8: Do you think there's a personality type that's not well-suited for this kind of career?

As he or she is answering, try to be honest with yourself. If the role requires an "absolutely Type A" personality and you're a dreamer with a capital D, it might not be the right role for you.

Informational Interview Question 9: What are some of the biggest challenges you face day-to-day?

As you listen, do these challenges excite you? Or do they sound horrible?

Informational Interview Question 10: What about the biggest rewards?

The answer here might vary from emotional to monetary—so listen carefully and see if the answer gives you a "feel good" vibe.

Informational Interview Question 11: What do you wish you'd known when you were starting out in this career/role?

Yeah, you want to know this.

Informational Interview Question 12: Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?

You know how people say something like "if you can't see yourself in your boss's role, you should quit"? You want this answer to align with your own goals. If you're hoping to stay long-term at a big company, you'll want to hear that they have the same plan. If you'd like to wind up working for yourself someday, it would be good to hear if that's something that they can see themselves doing as well.

Informational Interview Question 13: Do you have any recommendations for other people I should talk to or other resources I should explore?

If you're lucky, they'll introduce you to another contact. But it's also great to just hear what sites you should be reading or newsletters you should subscribe to. The goal is to have some ideas of what to read/do/try next.

Informational Interview Question 14: Are there any questions I'm not asking that I should be?

Love this question. Sometimes you've missed a big element of the work simply because you didn't ask in *quite* the right way. See what they say here.

Informational Interview Question 15: Would it be alright for us to stay in touch?

Whether that's through LinkedIn or through an occasional email, it's always nice to turn an informational interview into an ongoing networking connection or (ideal scenario) a potential mentor.

ALSO, INCLUDE 3-5 QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE PERSON AND COMPANY

We can't stress this enough: beyond the standard informational interview questions, you're going to want to thoroughly research the person you're meeting as well as his or her company.

Head to the company website but also LinkedIn, so you can plan specific questions on current projects or on the person's professional background. Researching is also a great way to find overlaps in interests—maybe you're both Ohio State alums or you have a former colleague in common.

How to Personalize Your Informational Interview Questions

Some topics and ideas to consider, although obviously, you should think of the questions that are the most useful to you:

- Ask them about their earliest internships or roles ("I saw on LinkedIn that you interned at Google before graduating—did you find that internship helpful for finding jobs later?")
- Ask about volunteer work or professional organizations ("I noticed you are a member of AIGA—have you found that helpful?")
- Somewhat personal questions are OK as long as you tread lightly ("I hope you don't mind me asking, but I know you're a working mom. I'd like to have children as well someday. How have you found that navigating a career in this field as a mom?")

DON'T FORGET: WIND DOWN IN A TIMELY FASHION

Pick and choose the questions that are most important to you, and keep an eye on time. Informational interviews are meant to be no longer than 20-25 minutes, so you'll want to find a logical place to cut yourself off if you notice you're running long. Thank them when you're through—and we mean twice. Say thank you as you say goodbye, but you'll also want to write them a [follow-up thank-you note](#) as well.

And make sure to stay in touch if you asked if you could! It's good to set a calendar notification on your phone for one or three months, so you don't forget.

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Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview

- + Can you tell me a bit about your career path and what led you to the role you're in today?
- + What were some of your early roles in the field?
- + What does a work day look like for you?
- + What are some big projects you're working on now or that you've finished up in the last few months?
- + What do you enjoy most about the work you do? / What are you most excited about right now?
- + What do you enjoy the least? Or, is there something that surprised you about the role when you first started?
- + What skills do you think are most important for someone interested in a job like yours?
- + Do you think there's a personality type that's not well-suited for this kind of career?
- + What are some of the biggest challenges you face day-to-day?
- + What about the biggest rewards?
- + What do you wish you'd known when you were starting out in this career/role?
- + Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?
- + Do you have any recommendations for other people I should talk to or other resources I should explore?
- + Are there any questions I'm not asking that I should be?
- + Would it be alright for us to stay in touch?

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A teal-colored notebook with several yellow pencils resting on its surface. A white rectangular box is centered on the notebook, containing the text 'ABOUT US'.

ABOUT US

Career Contessa is the only career site built exclusively for women.

We believe that job searches, career growth, and professional discovery are deeply personal but that every woman, no matter the stage of her career, benefits from a supportive community and straightforward guidance. That's why we built a platform that engages our readers throughout their careers and evolves with them as they grow.

We help women cultivate successful careers through expert advice, interviews, and videos, one-on-one mentoring, online skills-based courses and resources, and a curated job board that speaks to our audience. Everything we do comes straight from the best kind of experts—real women who've been there and successfully done that.

We believe in a holistic approach to improving women's careers so we also work in reverse, partnering with savvy companies to help them engage, hire, and retain top female talent through on-site talent development programs, educational marketing opportunities, and in-depth company profiles. Because career paths are no longer linear, supporting professional development is more important than ever in company cultures. Our programs help bridge the divide between employer and employee and build lasting relationships.

By helping women and the companies that support them, we're here to build a better workforce for the future.

Connect with us!

