

40 Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview

Knowing networking is critical to their search, most job hunters work hard to arrange face-to-face meetings with contacts.



But setting up appointments with all the friends, professional acquaintances and corporate executives you can is just the first step. More important is knowing what to say once you arrive. Wasting contacts' time is unacceptable, so you should prepare an agenda before each meeting. Decide what you would like to find out and prepare questions to elicit that information.

To simplify the query-writing process, review the following list of questions. Pick those that are most appropriate and tailor them to fit your situation and speaking style. Form some of your own as well, but don't try to squeeze in too many questions. It's better to leave contacts wanting more than to wear out your welcome.

What Work is Like

1. Could you describe one of your typical workdays?
2. What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?
3. What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
4. What do find most enjoyable?
5. Are there any negatives to your job?
6. How many hours do you work in a typical week?
7. Which seasons of the year are toughest in your job?
8. How would you describe the corporate culture?

Use information you know about the company or industry within your questions to show your knowledge base and seriousness.

For example, to make No. 7 more relevant: "As an accountant at a medium-sized local firm, your busiest season probably revolve around your clients' fiscal-year ends, which can vary. What would you say would be the most demanding times of the year for your firm's accountants?"

State of the Industry

9. Is this field growing enough so that there's room for someone like me?
10. Are too many or too few people entering this profession?
11. What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
12. This industry has changed dramatically in the past five years. What have you seen from inside your company? Where do you think the changes will happen in the next five years?
13. How frequently do layoffs occur? How does it affect employees' morale?
14. Why do people leave this field or company?
15. Who are the most important people in the industry today?
16. Which companies have the best track record for promoting women and minorities?
17. Are there opportunities for self-employment in your field? Where?

An example of how to make No. 11 more relevant: "I've noticed that the state and federal governments have devoted a great deal of funding to the biotech industry in Western New York. What effects have you, as a salesperson for Life Technologies, seen from this extra funding, and how do you anticipate the industry and your company expanding due to this revenue?"

Money and Advancement

18. What would be a reasonable salary range to expect if I entered this field? What is the long-term potential?
19. What is the advancement potential in the field? What is a typical path?
20. How did you get your job?

Quick Links

- Career Blueprint
- Career Checklists
- Career Tools
 - Résumé
 - Cover Letter
 - Interview
 - Thank You
- Events
- International Tools
- Job Market Research Tools
 - Concentration Resources
 - Salary Resources
- Report My Job
- Workshops

21. If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way? Why?
22. How long does it take for managers to rise to the top?
23. What is the background of most senior-level executives?

An example of how to make No. 19 more relevant: "From the alumni database, I see you graduated from the MBA program just four years ago and are already a vice president at the bank. That's impressive. Please share with me the typical path from entry level to VP in the banking environment, and what people can do to move fast within that process."

Skills and Experience

24. What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
25. What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
26. How do most people enter this profession?
27. Which of my skills are strong compared to other job hunters in this field?
28. What do you think of the experience I've had so far? For what types of positions would it qualify me?
29. Can you recommend any courses I should take before proceeding further with my job search?
30. What companies or industries do you think I should target?

An example of how to make No. 25 more relevant: "I read through some of the job descriptions on the HR section of your website in preparation for our meeting today. Most jobs I'd be interested in listed communication, teamwork and decision-making skills as necessities. Can you tell me how those skills are used in this profession? Also, what other skills do managers look for that are not written in the typical job descriptions?"

Fitting In

31. Do you think my objective is clearly stated, realistic and achievable?
32. Considering my background, how well do you think I would fit in this company and/or profession?
33. How does your company compare with others we've discussed?
34. Would the work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business entertaining?
35. Considering all the people you've met in your field, what personal attributes are essential for success?
36. Taking into account my skills, education and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?

An internship-focused alternative to No. 36 might be: "Thinking about the most successful interns you have had, what was it about their character, work ethic, abilities and performance that made them exemplary?"

More Information

37. Where can I write to get up-to-date information on salaries, employers and industry issues?
38. What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
39. Is there anything else you think I need to know?
40. Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I call, may I use your name?

Remember to express your appreciation and to follow up with a thank you letter or email. If you are referred to another professional for assistance, make sure you let the original contact know the result of your outreach to that new referral.