

# A Guide to Informational Interviews

Learn how to prepare and conduct informational interviews



# A GUIDE TO: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Brought to you by your Engineering Peer Academic Advisors

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## What are Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are an informal way for two individuals to meet and discuss shared topics of interest. As a student, this is a casual way to converse with someone who you would like to know more about their professional journey and endeavors. Topics of interest may include their career path, work experience, your interest in a role or position, insights on their industry or company, and any knowledge that can help you grow as a future professional and make a better, informed decision for your future career.

## Reasons to Request an Informational Interviews

- Interest in joining a research lab
  - Learning more about a job or internship role or position
  - Learning more about a company and their values
  - Questions about graduate school
    - i.e. life as a graduate student, fellowships, research, work experience, etc.
  - Wanting to know more about the individual's career journey, research passions, etc.
    - Can be professors, guest speakers, alumni, etc.
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## Where to begin?

### Step 1. Find an individual who you would like to meet

This individual can be a professor, working professional, alumni, dean, a family friend, a neighbor – the possibilities are endless.

Resources to pinpoint a person of contact:



- Take advantage of their filter system in order to target individuals of interest
  - Bonus points if you both have something in common!

- **UCI** The Anteater Network
- [Engineering Student Organizations](#)' Alumni Contact List
- [Engineering Student Organizations](#)' National Networks
- Your Professors
- Community Members and Neighbors
- Your Personal Network
- Your Peers' Networks
- ★ Tip: Individuals will be more inclined to reply and set up a meeting with you if you can connect with them over something you have in common (i.e. both attended UCI, interest in biomedical devices, both members of specific national societies, etc.)

## Step 2. Before reaching out to the individual...

### I. Understand who they are and their background. Do your research!

If you are contacting this individual because of your interest in:

- Their research lab
  - Do your best to:
    - Know their research interest
    - Know their educational background
    - Be familiar with their current projects
      - Can typically be found on their faculty website
    - Read and understand some of their papers
      - Try to comprehend the language, but know that simply taking the time to read through their past publications shows your passion, interest, and commitment
      - If you don't understand, bring some of your questions to the informational interview
- Their current role or position:
  - Do your best to:
    - Be familiar with the position's responsibilities
    - Understand the mission statement of the company or organization
    - Understand the experience or requirements listed for the position/role
    - If you are unfamiliar with this role or position, try to research similar roles in other fields or specialities
    - If you still have questions or doubts, bring some of your questions to the informational interview
- Their experience in graduate school:
  - Do your best to:
    - Understand the program of study they are currently enrolled in

- Understand the program of study you would like to pursue
- Keep track of aspects of graduate school you are still unfamiliar with (i.e. work life balance, student social life, research topics, funding and fellowships, housing, application process, faculty advisors, Ph.D versus M.S. track)

## II. Create a goal for the meeting

- What do you hope to get out of this meeting?
  - Be specific and intentional with your meeting goal

## Step 3. Setting up the meeting

### I. Send an email introducing yourself and requesting an informational interview.

Please use your UCI email to prove your affiliation and avoid being seen as spam.

Topics to include in your email:

- Brief introduction of who you are and your interest
- How did you hear about them? How do you know them?
- Are you both affiliated with similar organizations (i.e. UCI, engineering student organization, national society)?
- Why are you reaching out to them?
- 3 days and time that work with your schedule?
  - Feel free to use a website like Calendly to facilitate setting up the meeting
  - Keep the meetings 30 - 60 min long
- Describe what you would like to cover during the meeting
- Describe how you would like to meet
  - Virtual through Zoom or Google Meets
  - In person over coffee or a smoothie
- Attach your resume and LinkedIn if you are in search for a potential research position

Here is a sample email you can send to your person of interest:

Hello Dr. Engineering,

My name is Clarity N. Calculus and I am a third year Mechanical Engineering student at UC Irvine. I was fortunate enough to hear your talk on “How to Improve your Confidence in Engineering” hosted through the Society of Women Engineers at UC Irvine. I was truly inspired by your message and **would love to hear more about your confidence in engineering journey over coffee for 30 minutes.**

I am free to meet during the following times and dates:

- January 15th at 11am PST
- January 17th at 9am PST
- January 18th from 9am-12pm PST

Feel free to let me know if any of these times and days work with your schedule. If they don't, feel free to let me know 3 days and times that work better for you.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Best Regards,  
Clarity N. Calculus (she/her/hers)  
B.S. Mechanical Engineering || Class of 2052  
University of California, Irvine  
LinkedIn || [clarityncalculus@uci.edu](mailto:clarityncalculus@uci.edu)

Feel free to bold your request in order to draw attention to it and help the receiver, who may be skimming your email, grasp the purpose of your email easily. Make sure that it is apparent that your intention is just to learn more about them and from them. Also be cautious of time zones when scheduling with individuals outside of Pacific Standard Time (PST).

## **II. Upon receiving confirmation about the meeting...**

- Send the individual a calendar invite using Google Calendar or a similar service (like Outlook) to ensure it is penciled into their calendar
  - Note: With the Outlook calendar website, you can prepare a reminder to email and schedule it to send a day or even hours before the meeting.

## **III. If you do not receive a reply within 5-7 business days...**

- Feel free to send a follow up email
- ★ Please be aware that not all people of interest may have the availability or ability to meet with you.
  - In the case that they are not available, you can ask if they can connect you to someone who they think will be just as valuable to speak to with regards to your topic of interest (i.e. an outreach and recruitment officer, their lab or research assistant, a colleague in their department).
  - In addition, sometimes the individual may only be able to respond through email. If they are open to you sending them your questions, that can be an alternative to a formal information interview.

## Step 4. Preparing for the meeting

Remember, YOU are the interviewer. Come prepared by having a refined goal for the meeting. Each meeting should be uniquely tailored to the individual and your meeting's goal.

- How do you create a meeting goal?
  - Create a list of questions you'd like to ask them during the meeting
  - Utilize your goal to create subcategories for your topics of conversation
    - You can use this as a way to categorize your questions and to help your conversation flow during the meeting
    - This may spark other questions during the conversation as well, and will help you keep notes for each category
    - This method ensures that you are prepared for the meeting and are tailoring your questions to topics you are interested in
  - Try to have at least 5-10 questions on hand for the meeting

## Step 5. During the meeting

- Write down information that they are providing and responses to your questions
  - If you are meeting in person, bring a notebook with your questions and leave space between them to write down answers or bullet points of the main ideas that were addressed
  - If you are meeting virtually, keep the document where you have your questions open and write the relevant information under the question you asked
- Show interest and engagement
  - Ask follow-up questions
  - Be aware of your body language
  - Pay attention to their responses
- Be courteous of their time
  - Stick to the time limit you had originally decided on (i.e. 30 min or 60 min)
  - If you foresee the meeting lasting longer, feel free to ask if they are okay staying 5 minutes longer. But be aware that they are busy people!

## Step 6. After the meeting...

- Send a thank you email for their time and invaluable information
  - Make sure to include a small detail they mentioned in order to prove that you took something from the conversation
- Write down your impressions on the topics discussed
  - Write down if anything they said resonated with you
  - Analyze whether you enjoyed the impression they created about their role/company/position

- Did this meeting reach its conversational goal?
  - Use this to determine your next steps

Keep in mind, with conversation, you might be redirected to various resources and individuals. This single informational interview may lead to another informational interview with someone else in their network (i.e. one of their colleagues, students, or coworkers).

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## Suggested Questions

1. How did you get into this field?
    - a. What motivated you to pursue this career?
  2. How did you learn about your position?
    - a. How did you hear about your current position?
  3. What is a typical day like in this role?
  4. What are your job responsibilities?
  5. What advice would you give someone entering your field today?
  6. What advice would you give on applying for graduate school?
  7. Are there any other sources of information you might suggest to learn more about this field?
  8. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
  9. How do you feel your field is changing?
  10. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?
  11. Which courses did you find most challenging? Which courses did you find most useful in your current, post-graduation position?
  12. Do you have any contacts I might benefit from talking with?
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## Other Resources

- [UC Irvine - Informational Interviews Infographic](#)
- [UC Davis - Information Interviews Video](#)
- [UC Berkeley - Informational Interviews Website](#)
- [University of North Carolina Wilmington - Informational Interviews Website](#)
- [Emory - Information Interview Guide](#)
- [YouTube - Informational Interview: Best Questions to Ask](#)
- [YouTube - 5 Informational Interview Mistakes to Avoid!](#)
- [Jeff Su - Professional Development Resources](#)

- There are lots of good information out on various campus career centers and Youtube that are public – feel free to do a quick search if you would like more information or examples