INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE
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Informational interviews are extremely valuable both as a research tool and as a networking technique. It is an opportunity for a candidate to learn more about a company, function and career paths within a particular organization. It is also an opportunity for a candidate to build advocates within an organization or industry. Informational interviewing is not an opportunity to ask for a job, but it is a chance to make a strong first impression that may lead to future contacts and opportunities. To get the most out of an informational interview, it is helpful to prepare ahead of time. The following steps will assist candidates as they set-up and conduct informational interviews. In addition, below is a sample list of questions that can be asked during an informational interview.

Step 1: Setting up the Meeting

Informational interviews may be conducted in person or over the phone. In setting up the meeting, both email and phone are appropriate; however, if you are contacting alumni listed in the Yale SOM Alumni Directory use the contact method they list as “preferred”. The initial outreach should be concise and professional, briefly introducing yourself and why you are reaching out. Below is an example of an initial outreach to a Yale SOM alumna:

Dear Ms. Barker,

I am a second year student at the Yale School of Management interested in transitioning to a Brand Management role with a major CPG. I found your profile in the Yale SOM Alumni Directory, and notice that you have had great success in the Marketing space. I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences at Yale SOM and your career path post-MBA. Do you have 15 – 20 minutes to speak over the next week or two? If so, please let me know what works best for your schedule.

I look forward to connecting with you.

Best,
Todd

When the person is not returning e-mails

This does NOT mean that the contact isn’t interested in helping you. Typically, it is safe to assume the person is busy and you are not their top priority. You should assume the contact is interested until they tell you they are not.

- Don’t leave the responsibility for follow-up with the person you’re trying to reach – that responsibility belongs solely to you. Since you are the one seeking information and assistance, it’s up to you to make the connection happen. In your e-mail, provide your contact information in case they would like to reach out to you, but also let them know when you will be contacting them again next.
- If you do not hear back from someone in three days, it may be time to reach out to a different contact at that organization. If you do not hear back from the original contact in seven days, send a follow up note. You may want to set reminders in Outlook and maintain an Excel spreadsheet to track your contacts – this will help keep you organized throughout this process.

Adapted from Yale Law School Conducting an Informational Interview Guide
Step 2: Conducting the Meeting

Start by introducing yourself and talk a bit about your background
It is important to keep in mind that for the most part you will run this meeting, so start by explaining who you are, who referred you (or how you obtained their contact information), and why you have requested the meeting. This is an opportunity for you to present your story.

Ask engaging and insightful questions
Your goal is to learn more about the industry, the company, and career paths within the organization. Keep your questions professional, but this is an opportune forum to ask about daily responsibilities, work-life balance, and new trends that may exist in the industry.

It is OK to show them your resume
It is appropriate to explain that you have put together a resume and would appreciate his/her feedback as an expert. Do not feel you need to respond to the feedback, instead just listen and say “thank you.” You don’t have to act on every piece of feedback, as you will receive plenty of it. While it is OK to present your resume for feedback, it is not appropriate to ask a contact to pass along your resume. Remember, you are asking for information, not a job. If they offer to refer you or ask you to send them your resume, you may do so at that time.

Step 3: Closing the meeting

Use your best judgment, intuition and emotional intelligence to read how the discussion went and how inclined the person is to assist you.

Discussion went extremely well … contact is an active advocate
MAKE THE ASK! At the end of the meeting, if the contact is in a position to hire, let him/her know you are interested and ask about next steps for the job or internship. If the contact is not in a position to hire, ask him/her to facilitate an introduction to the hiring manager or HR Leader. Thank the individual for his/her time, let the contact know you’ll continue to keep them updated on your search process and ask them to let you know as opportunities surface. Stay in contact on a regular basis.

Discussion went well … contact is a passive advocate
MAKE THE ASK! At the end of the meeting, ask if the contact can connect you to the hiring manager or HR Leader. Be sure to thank the individual for his/her time, and ask if you can keep him/her posted on your progress. For example, “Thank you for your time today. I’d love to stay in touch, what’s the best way to stay connected and update you on my search process?” Stay in contact on a semi-regular basis.

Discussion did not go well … contact is not an advocate
MAKE THE ASK! At the end of the meeting, ask for recommendations as to next steps as you further your exploration in the field and contacts he/she recommend you speak with. Be sure to thank the individual for his/her time.

Step 4: Follow up after the meeting

It is IMPERATIVE that you send a thank you note within 24 hours after every meeting, coffee chat, phone call, etc. Make the note personal and professional, and include any details from your discussion. Even if a second year helps you, it would be fantastic to write that thank you note!! So many people don’t thank

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their peers, they only thank alumni, but remember; second years interned at the firms you are interested in last summer! Besides, it is just polite.

The thank you note is one of the many reasons why it is so important to take notes on what you talked about or any advice that was given in the meeting. That way, you can tailor the note to what was discussed.

Here are a few tips:

- Be brief
- Thank the individual for their time (and consideration, information, referral, etc.)
- Comment on a part of your conversation that you particularly enjoyed or found helpful
- Emails and hand-written notes are both acceptable; but always use email to ensure it arrives within 24 hours. Additional hand-written notes may be suitable for particularly meaningful encounters.
- Consider sending occasional updates to individuals who are especially helpful to you, keeping them apprised of your search – this is an excellent way to maintain relationships with new members of your network.

Below is an example of a thank you note:


Dear Ms. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me this morning about your experience working in the Supply Chain department at Whole Foods. My interest in the company has grown after our conversation about the highly innovative ways in which your team is overcoming the challenges of increasing transportation costs. I am confident that my experience as an Operations Analyst at UPS, as well as my success in increasing profits through better inventory management at our campus eatery “Food for Thought,” has prepared me well to intern in this field over the summer. I have taken your advice and both applied online and reached out to your department lead, Ms. Jones. I will follow up with you over the next two weeks to update you on the process and let you know how my conversation went with her.

I look forward to the next steps in the application process and hope to hear from you in the near future.

Sincerely, John Doe

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SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Personal
- How have you navigated your career post business school?
- What has been the best lesson or most valuable experience you have had post-MBA?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known when you were an MBA candidate?
- What publications, blogs, websites do you use to keep abreast of what’s happening in the industry?

The Organization and the State of the Industry
- What characteristics does a successful X have at this organization?
- What are the current trends/changes you have seen over the past couple of years?
- What developments on the horizon do you see affecting the industry in the future?
- How is the industry changing and how do you see your organization adapting to those changes?
- What specialized technologies does the organization use?
- What future industry trends do you project will affect your organization?
- How does the organization differ from its competitors?
- What are the organization’s goals and objectives for the coming years?
- What are the organization’s policies regarding X, Y, Z?

Internal Atmosphere
- How is the organization structured?
- What is management’s philosophy?
- What kind of atmosphere do they strive to create?
- What is the corporate culture?
- How are project teams organized?
- Are there formal training programs in the organization?
- Are there rotational opportunities in the organization?
- What are the typical jobs to which people leaving the firm have entered?
- How is performance measured?
- Is there a regulated exchange of feedback?

Career Fields/Positions
- What are the major responsibilities and skills required of this position?
- What is a typical day like?
- What do you find most satisfying about the job? The least satisfying?
- What types of decisions are made at your level?
- What part of the job do you find most challenging?

Skills and Experience
- What experiences or other activities should I consider to prepare me for a role at this firm?
- What are the skills you look for when hiring an X?
- Which of my skills set me apart from others in the field?
- Do you think my experiences thus far make me competitive for an X role?
- Taking into account my skills, education, and experience, what other areas would you suggest I explore?
Sample Questions using TIARA framework – Steve Dalton – 2-Hour Job Search

Trend Questions - (get them talking about their views, their perspective, themselves)
- What trends are most impacting your business right now?
- How has your business changed most since you started?
- How do you think the business will change most dramatically in the next several years?
- During my research I've learned increased energy costs are causing CPG companies to redesign their distribution strategies to reduce shipping costs. Are you seeing a similar trend or are other trends having a greater impact on your business right now? Note: adapt question based on industry.

Insight Questions - (more personal than trend questions)
- What surprises you most about your employer?
- What is the best lesson you have learned on the job?
- What has been your most valuable experience?
- If you had to attribute your success at the employer to one skill or behavior, what would it be?

Advice Questions - (take notes - will be key to your follow-up – be sure to do what they advise)
- What can I be doing right now to prepare myself for a career in this field?
- If I were hired, what should I be thinking about in the first 30, 60, 90 days to ensure that I get off to a fast start?
- What do you know now that you wish you knew as a recent MBA grad or professional in my position?
- If you were me, what would you be doing right now to break into this industry or function?

Resources Questions - (with about 5 minutes remaining) - Pivot question - purposely vague - (you are not asking for contacts but you may get them!)
- What resources should I be sure to look into next?
- What next steps would you recommend for someone in my situation?

Expected answers
- If he/she offers contacts and use of their name without specifically asking - bingo
  - Remember you will need to thank or follow up with him/her after you reach out (or meet) with their contact.
  - "Thank you so much I will reach out to xxxx and I will get back to you in a couple of weeks to let you know how it went and how I am progressing."
  - Initiate the outreach to the new contact.
  - Set a reminder for two weeks to follow up with him/her regardless of whether you have connected with the new contact.
- Non-contact based answer
  - If he or she asks - "what type of resources are you thinking?"
    - Advice - deflect it away from contacts because you told them you were not there for a job.
      - Response - "what websites, blogs, or magazines do you regularly read to keep current on the industry?"
      - Response - "what is the most important ten minutes of research you do each day to stay on top of the trends impacting your business?"

Assignment Questions - (prepare yourself for the question - "We’re not sure we could use someone of your qualifications - what sort of work would you be able to do for us?")
- Have any projects increased in popularity recently at your organization?
- Have you had interns or contractors in the past? If so, what sort of projects have they done?