

**Networking your Way to Success
2025 S-STEM Scholar's Meeting**



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Part of discovering who you can be is understanding what paths are available to you. One way to do this, and start networking in your field at the same time, is to do **informational interviews**. An informational interview allows you to understand a professional's path. Informational interview will give you a greater sense of *your* possibilities, and can lead to perspectives, mentorship, or career insights that can last beyond the interview.

Additionally, the informational interview will also be valued by your interviewee. Your interviewee wants to share their wisdom with you and give back to their field and the next generation of professionals.

Your informational interview will follow a specific structure outlined in the book *The 20-Minute Networking Meeting* by Marcia Ballinger and Nathan Perez. The structure is:

- Thank your interviewee and note how you are connected (1 minute)
- Remind them what you hope to accomplish, and that you will only take 20 minutes of their time (1 minute)
- Introduce yourself (2-3 minutes)
- Ask questions about their work experiences that interest you (12-15 minutes)
- Wrap up the interview (1 minute)

The rest of this worksheet is to prepare you to do a satisfying and informative informational interview.

Part 1. Plan how you want to introduce yourself.

Imagine that you are a professional and a college student asks to talk to you. You want to tell them about your work, and your path to that position. What do you want to know about this student so that you can shape your story?

With this in mind, write a description of yourself, using the questions below if they are helpful, with less than one page of text:

- How do you tell your story so a professional will relate to you and your experiences?
- How and why did you choose your field of study?
- What else would be helpful for the interviewee to know about you?

Part 2. Research the person you will interview

During your informational interview, you will want to prepare good questions about your interviewee's work and preparation for their profession. Look up information about your interviewee on LinkedIn and on their workplace website. What did you learn about this person?

- Schooling:
- Information about their company:
- Job title, what someone with that job does, and how long they have been at that company:
- Professional affiliations like organizations, clubs, boards, etc.:
- Other information from LinkedIn or a Google search, like previous employers and job titles, professional interests, strengths, areas of interests, etc.:

Part 3. Planning your informational interview

You requested this informational interview, so you will run the interview. Write out your notes below about how you will conduct your 20-minute informational interview.

1. Thank them and note how you were connected (1 minute):
2. Remind them what you hope to accomplish (getting their perspective on their work), and that you will only take 20 minutes of their time (1 minute):
3. Share your introduction from Part 1 (2-3 minutes). Remember to keep it short – the interview is about them and their experiences.

4. Prepare questions about their work experiences that most interest you (12-15 minutes). Some questions to consider are at the end of this document. This part of the interview should not go over 15 minutes, so ask your most important questions first. When possible, frame your questions with information that you already know. For example, “Your job title is Research Manager. What do you do in a typical day or week?” or “It looks like you’ve been at this company for 6 years. What are the most and least satisfying aspects of your work?”
5. Wrap up the informational interview (1 minute) with something like, “Those were my questions. Thank you again, I am grateful for your time. I learned a lot talking to you” or “My time is up! Thanks for talking to me. I learned quite a bit talking to you today.”
 - Ask if you could get back in touch if you had more questions: “If I had more questions, would it be OK to reach out again?”
 - Ask if you could connect on LinkedIn
 - Thank them again for their time.
6. Write them a follow-up email IMMEDIATELY to thank them for meeting with you, and mention anything they offered to do for you (like an invitation to visit their workplace, to talk again in the future, to let you know about internships, etc.).

Since you have offered to talk for only 20 minutes, it is important to be faithful to that invitation. However, if your interviewee *sincerely* invites a longer conversation and you are sure the invitation is genuine, you can talk longer. However, it is better to ask to talk again in the future than to talk more than around 30 minutes.

What to Ask in an Informational Interview

From: University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts, "Informational Interviews," <https://cla.umn.edu/undergraduate-students/career-services/getting-job-or-internship/informational-interviews>

Personal information

- How did you become interested in this field?
- What are the most and least satisfying aspects of your work?
- What experiences in your background have contributed to your success in this career? What would you have done differently?
- If this job or field were to become obsolete, in what other kinds of jobs could you apply your skills?

Questions about the organization/company

- How would you characterize the culture of this organization and/or your department? For example, would you describe your position as closely supervised? Is this a high-pressure organization?
- What does your company look for when recruiting people?
- What other types of internships and jobs are available in your company/organization?
- How has the company/organization grown, and what are its strategies for future growth?
- What is the dress code here?
- What is turnover like in this organization? Why do you think people stay or leave?

Questions about the field or position

- What background is necessary or helpful for this position? For example, are there any particular educational or training programs required or recommended for this position?
- What are the best ways to enter this field? What are the best ways to learn about specific job openings?
- What are the five most important competencies or traits for a person going into this field?
- What are some of the most current trends or changes in this field? What about challenges or controversies?
- What are your job responsibilities? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What is the employment outlook for this field, nationally and locally? Is demand increasing or decreasing?
- What are the typical career paths for people in this field?
- Does this type of position typically involve a lot of team projects, or do people work independently?

Additional contacts

- Can you suggest other people I might meet with to gain additional perspectives about this career, or about future job or internship opportunities?