

# **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

THE BIGGEST GIFT FOR  
YOUR CAREER

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# ABOUT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are *not* job interviews - they are short conversations with people whose careers you admire. **Informational interviews are the single best thing you can do for your burgeoning career.**

If they are so important, why do people avoid them? Because they're scary. It's uncomfortable to contact strangers and put yourself out there. Your brain doesn't like it and tries to keep you from doing it.

But you've got to push through it! If you take my *Career Development in the Arts* course (FA 520), you will conduct informational interviews as an assignment. I've seen hundreds of informational interviews and students inevitably tell me, "This was the assignment I dreaded the most and I am so glad I did it."

## HOW TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

### STEP 1: FIND PEOPLE TO CONTACT

Talk with people whose careers you admire or work at companies of interest.

1. Visit LinkedIn, and enter the type of job that interests you in the search bar. Click on "People" and the "All Filters" button to search by school, location, and industry.
2. Contact alumni. Start with BU's alumni board then move on to LinkedIn.
  - a. Visit LinkedIn, enter "Boston University" in the search bar, and click "View Page." Click on "Alumni" and enter keywords in the search bar such as job title or location.

### STEP 2: FIND CONTACT INFORMATION

Here's how to find someone's contact information:

1. If you are following them on social media, send a direct message.
2. If they have a website, contact them through the site.
3. If they have written any articles online, search their bio for contact information.
4. Check LinkedIn to see if their email address is listed in "contact information." If not, send them a message on LinkedIn:
  - If you see "Connect" as an option, click "Connect," "Add a note."
  - If you see "Follow" as an option, click "More," "Connect," "Add a note."
5. Use an email lookup tool. I recommend the free tools from Hunter.io and RocketReach.

### STEP 3: WRITE YOUR REQUEST

Please note - keep this message short, don't overwhelm them. As you'll see in the sample at the end of this document, you can convey a lot of information in a short amount of text:

1. **Write a compelling subject line.** Use their name, something you have in common and/or compliment them, then make your request.
2. **Share something you have in common.** Perhaps you have a mutual connection, went to the same school, live in the same city, or are interested in the same industry.
3. **Compliment their career.** Illustrate you did your homework.
4. **Share something personal about your life.** Your career goals, your background and experience, your education and qualifications. Talk about why you're interested in the industry and the reason you're requesting an interview: "*I have a background in \_\_\_\_\_ and I am considering a career in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry.*"
5. **Be specific about your request.** Provide details:
  - Suggest how you're going to meet - over Zoom/phone, or if possible, meet in person.
  - Emphasize the meeting will be short, 20 minutes. (This makes it accessible for them.)
  - Offer two general times to meet and a link to your calendar. (Use Calendly.) **DO NOT** say, "I can meet whenever is convenient for you" - that is too overwhelming for them.
6. **Include your website, LinkedIn, social media links.**

## STEP 4: FOLLOW UP

You might not hear back right away and that's ok. People are busy. Send them a follow-up 5-7 days after each message and reiterate your previous messages. See the follow-up samples at the end of this document.

## STEP 5: PREPARE FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

**Research the person:** Read their social media, website, LinkedIn profile, company info, and any articles they've written ... just do a Google deep dive on them, more than that first page.

**Prepare 5-7 questions to ask, listed in order of priority.** Sample questions might include:

- "How did you get started in this job/your career? What steps did you take?"
- "What's the most challenging and satisfying part of your job?"
- "What's a day-in-the-life like at your job?" Could you envision yourself enjoying this?
- "What do I need to do to break into the industry/get this type of job?"
- "What's the company culture like here? How's the work/life balance?"
- "How do your bosses measure your performance?" (This gives you insight into how the company operates, it's values, and how the management handles itself)
- "I would love to work at a company like this. Would you mind taking a look at my resume? Do you think it would get me an interview? What's missing?"
- "After reviewing my resume do you see me fitting into this industry? What type of position should I be seeking? Would you recommend other jobs or industries?"

**Prepare questions for the end of the meeting:**

- "It's been almost twenty minutes and I want to respect your time. Do you mind if I ask you two more questions?" (FYI, most info interviews last 30-60 minutes.)
- "Based on what we have discussed, what do you recommend my next steps should be?"
- "Do you know other people who might help me learn more about [this job/industry]? Can you connect me with them?"
- "May I follow up if I have additional questions?"

**TAKE NOTES DURING THE MEETING** - It illustrates that you're paying attention!

## STEP 6: AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

**Connect on LinkedIn:** *"Hi Laura! Thanks for talking with me on Tuesday, I really enjoyed it and appreciate your insight."*

**Send a thank you note (see a sample at the end of this document):**

- *"Thank you for meeting with me. I really enjoyed our conversation and value your advice."*
- Then mention something specific from the meeting
- If they committed to doing something, like introducing you to someone else, mention it
- Close with something personal they mentioned during the meeting
- Offer assistance: *"Thank you for your time, and if there is any way I can help you in the future, please let me know."*

**If someone else connected you for the interview, follow up and let them know how it went:**

*"Thank you, Emily, for connecting me with Laura. We met on Tuesday and had a wonderful chat, she had valuable insight. Thank you so much for connecting us! If you think of anyone else I should talk to, please let me know."*

# SAMPLE MESSAGES

## SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST

*Hi Laura! My name is Jane Smith (I'm also from Boston!) and I'm thinking about starting my own photography business. Your photography is striking and I appreciate your advice to entrepreneurs - I especially enjoyed your post, "10 Things Every Freelance Photographer Must Know" - what valuable advice! You have such an interesting career, I'd love to learn more about it.*

*I know you're very busy, but do you have 20 minutes to talk over Zoom on Tuesday, June 6, or Thursday, June 8? If those dates don't work for you, [here's a link to my Calendly](#). I can work around your schedule too. Your perspective would be so helpful as I launch my business. Thank you!*

## SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP EMAILS

REPLY TO YOUR PREVIOUS MESSAGE WITH A FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE

WAIT 5-7 DAYS BEFORE SENDING EACH FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE

**Follow-up #1:** *"Hi Laura! I'm following up on my previous message in case you didn't see it. I want to open my own photography business and I admire your business acumen and photography skills. Your headshot portraits are particularly beautiful, I'd love to learn more about them. Do you have 20 minutes to chat on the phone or Zoom on Tuesday, June 20, or Thursday, June 22? If those dates don't work for you, [here's a link to my Calendly](#). I can work around your schedule too. Your insight would be so helpful when I launch my business. Thank you!"*

**Follow-up #2:** *"Hi Laura! I'm following up on my previous messages in case you didn't see them. I'm an aspiring photographer from Boston and I've been following your career path. It sounds so interesting, I'd love to learn more about it. Do you have 20 minutes to chat on the phone or Zoom on Wednesday, July 5, or Thursday, July 6? If those dates don't work for you, [here's a link to my Calendly](#). I would love to hear your valuable insight, but if you are too busy to chat, I understand. If you can't meet, can you suggest someone else to talk to who would have advice about breaking into the photography business?"* (Adding that last sentence gives them an option to help you without committing to talking with you.)

**Follow-up #3:** If you really want to talk with this person, and they are important for your career development, you can send a third follow up message, (sent five days after your previous message): *"Hi Emily! I wanted to write to you one last time in case my messages aren't going through. I admire your career very much and I'd love to learn more about it. Do you have 20 minutes available to talk over the phone or Zoom on Tuesday, July 18, or Wednesday, July 19? If those dates don't work for you, [here's a link to my Calendly](#). I can work around your schedule too. Thank you for your consideration!"*

## SAMPLE "THANK YOU" MESSAGE

SEND WITHIN 24 HOURS OF YOUR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

*"Thank you for meeting with me. I really enjoyed our conversation and value your advice. Your observations about work/life balance were very insightful. I'm really looking forward to meeting Jane, thank you in advance for connecting us. I hope you have a nice vacation with the family next week. Thanks again for your time, and if there is any way I can help you in the future, please let me know."*