

Tips for the Informational Interview

- Be flexible. Work around your contact’s busy schedule when arranging a date and time to meet
- Research the occupation/organization ahead of time, so you can develop thoughtful questions
- Dress professionally. Formal clothes aren’t necessary (like suit, tie, dress), but avoid jeans, shorts, tennis shoes, etc.
- Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early
- Bring a list of questions you want to ask and something with which to take notes
- Ask for names of additional people you can contact and permission to use contact’s name as a referral
- Before you leave, be sure to ask for the person’s business card, so that you have accurate name, title, and address information

It may be appropriate to bring your résumé to the informational interview for feedback or to pass along to others when appropriate. You may also send your résumé along with your thank-you note after the interview. *Ex.:* “I’ve included my résumé in case opportunities come up in the future.” Tailor your résumé to the specific company as much as possible.

Maintaining a Professional Relationship

Send a thank-you note after meeting a new contact. A handwritten thank-you card or formal email is appropriate. Your message should include something specific you learned during the meeting, rather than a generic note. Ideally this message should be sent within 24 hours of your meeting.

Connect on LinkedIn. You can do this immediately after a meeting with a **personalized** invitation request. Once you are connected, you will be updated if the person gets promoted or changes organizations, which can prompt your follow-up with that person.

Follow up with your contact. It may not be possible to re-engage with all contacts regularly, but it is important to keep in touch genuinely by reaching out to them on a regular basis, every 3-6 months.

You can follow up with a contact if you:

- Followed the person’s advice
- Are sending an article of interest
- Updated your résumé, experience, or personal situation
- Read or heard something about the person or the person’s company or industry
- Simply want to touch base and meet again
- Are offering something, such as volunteering on a project, access to your university databases, student perspective, etc.

LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional network with more than 250,000 U of M alumni with whom you can connect and more than 425 million members in 200 countries and territories around the globe. You can use the site for free at linkedin.com.

Most of us network all the time without realizing it. When you talk to someone about interests you both share, you’re already networking. You’re networking when you:

- Talk to friends, or friends of friends
- Chat with your neighbors
- Volunteer somewhere
- Stay in contact with professors, instructors, advisors, etc.
- Talk to the person next to you on the bus or in class

Don’t Be Intimidated by Networking

Networking becomes relatively easy after a little effort and time. If you’re shy, or if you’re uncomfortable contacting people you don’t know, that’s understandable. But keep in mind the worst response you’re likely to get is someone saying they’re too busy to talk (or no response). Most of the time, people will be happy to share information about their work, company, or profession.

“I learned it was just about trying and putting yourself out there, and not about saying the right things exactly, or having a ton of experience.”

(Recent grad who found their job through networking)

Networking Resources

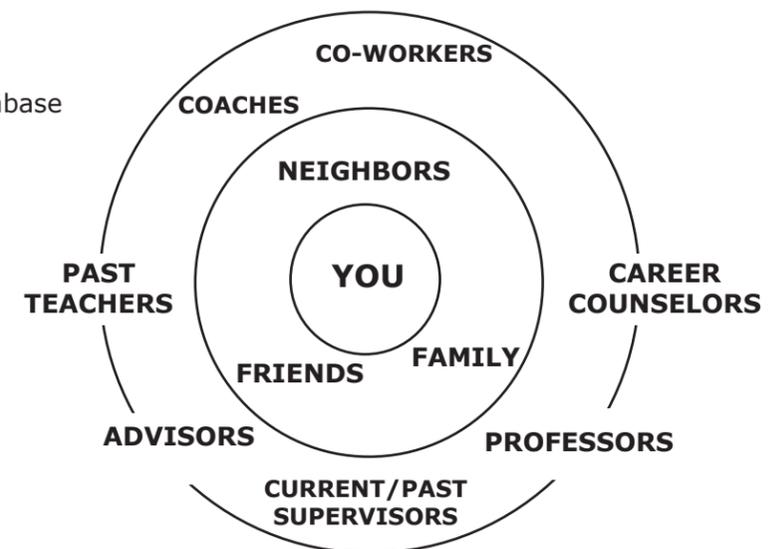
- Join the UMC Student/Alumni LinkedIn group and other UMC student organizations
- Attend career events (refer to www.crk.umn.edu/units/career-development for upcoming events.)
- Consider attending meetings of professional associations in areas that interest you
- Utilize the professional networking tab on GoldPASS

Contacting People

In addition to networking with people you know, you can network with complete strangers. It’s very common in the world of working professionals, and there are many ways to find people to contact. Start by thinking about who is currently in your network who could help find contacts for networking meetings/informational interviews.

Additionally, you can find people through:

- GoldPASS Professional Networking Database
- Conferences / Workshops
- Company websites
- Student clubs
- Professional associations
- Industry directories
- Service organizations
- College career offices
- Alumni groups
- Social media sites (Facebook/LinkedIn)



Benefits of Networking

As a Job Seeker	As a Professional Being Contacted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about jobs that aren't posted or advertised • Get insider information about your field • Get insight from a working professional to determine career fit • Make contacts who could lead to even more valuable contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with someone interested in their field • Get to know a potential job candidate more personally • Possibly find a new employee without having to advertise or go through the hiring process

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a brief, face-to-face meeting with a person in a position or field you want to explore or pursue. An informational interview allows you to:

- Explore a specific industry, field, organization and/or position and assess personal fit
- Network and gather more information about that field/organization.
- Observe and feel out different work environments
- Connect with professionals who may have tips about future job or internship opportunities
- Develop the social skills for professional interactions

Requesting an Informational Interview

After you've found someone with whom you want to talk, contact that person to request a brief interview. You can call or send an email. Usually you'll ask to meet for 20 to 30 minutes. Include:

- Your first and last name
- How you got the person's name
- A brief summary about yourself (2 or 3 sentences is plenty)
- The fact that you're contacting the person for an informational interview
- Your phone number and email address (if you leave a message, speak slowly)

Remember that you shouldn't use an informational interview as a way to apply for a specific job or internship opening. You can ask about overall opportunities in that organization or profession, but don't *ask for a job*. This approach may cause the other person to ignore your request for information.

If you aren't able to have a face-to-face interview, you can also do an informational interview by phone or by email, but this isn't ideal. You'll miss out on seeing the organization first-hand and networking in person.

Sample scripts

If the interview is for career exploration

Hello, Gabriela Olmos. My name is Lee Douglas and I'm a student at the University of Minnesota majoring in _____. I received your name from Professor Chris Jones. I'm doing some career research in the field of advertising, which I'm thinking about pursuing after school. I'm hoping you could meet with me for 20 or 30 minutes for an informational interview to discuss the field. If that would be possible, please let me know when that might be convenient for you. Again my name is Lee Douglas and I can be reached at 612-123-4567 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

If the interview is to network for job opportunities

Hello, Gabriela Olmos. My name is Lee Douglas and I'm a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in _____. I am beginning my job search and I'm hoping to conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field of advertising. My goals in meeting with you would be to gain your perspectives about the field and perhaps referrals to others in your network to learn more. If you could meet with me for 20 to 30 minutes, please let me know when that might be convenient for you. Again my name is Lee Douglas and I can be reached at 612-123-4567 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

Below are a few sample questions you may prepare in advance. Don't forget to bring your list of questions with you. Having questions prepared will help you to feel more confident, but you may not need them if the conversation flows naturally.

Questions about the organization/company

- How would you summarize what your organization does? How is it unique from your competitors?
- How would you characterize the culture of this organization and/or your department?
- What does your company look for when recruiting people?

Questions about the field or position

- What background is necessary or helpful for this position?
- What are the best ways to enter this field?
- What are the five most important skills or traits for a person going into this field?
- What are your job responsibilities? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What is a typical salary range for this position?
- What are typical career paths for people in this field?

Personal information

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

Additional contacts

- Can you suggest other companies where I might want to contact people?
- Can you suggest other people I might meet to gain additional perspectives about this career, or about future job or internship opportunities?
- Would you be willing to provide an email introduction to these other contacts?