

What is informational interviewing?

Informational interviewing is a specialized form of networking in which you take 20 to 30 minutes to speak with a professional in a practice area or career in which you are interested.

Informational interviews give you an opportunity to learn more about specific jobs and career paths, current developments in the industry, and other useful contacts.

The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information and make contacts, not to interview for a specific position.

Why should I conduct an informational interview?

Informational interviewing is the key to getting the information you need to make your best job choice and to make valuable connections in your chosen field. These types of interviews are especially helpful for students who are not sure what type of law they'd like to practice and those who are looking for alternative career paths.



How do I get started?

STEP 1: Prepare a networking strategy

In order to set up an informational interview, you need to meet people with information and contacts. First, make a list of all the *people you already know*. Ask your contacts if they themselves have any information in a particular field of interest to you or if they know of people who are already established in your particular field. Make sure you tell people that you are interested in getting advice and information and that you are not looking to them to provide you with a job.

Second, make a list of *people you would like to know*. This may include:

- Attorneys in the news (national and regional legal media, local newspapers).
- Alumni practicing in a firm or organization of interest to you.
- Attorneys who specialize in an area of law you would like to learn more about.
- People who have used their law degrees in non-traditional legal careers.

Step 2: Set up the interview

Once you have identified a person you'd like to talk with, you must set up an interview. Make sure to introduce yourself briefly and explain the reason for your call or e-mail. If a mutual acquaintance recommended the contact, you should always begin your conversation with that information. Similarly, if you read about the individual in the *New York Times*, be sure to mention that as well.

Example: "Hello, my name is Chris Brauch. I was given your name and number by Professor Parker, who suggested I contact you because you have expertise in the area of intellectual property law. I am a first-year student at _____ Law School and am researching career options in this area of law. I am not calling to ask for a job, but

instead to see if you would have 20 minutes or so to discuss:

- Your area of law, your job, and your organization.
- Any legal trends you have noticed in this area.
- The nature of the legal market in your field/city.
- Career planning advice during law school.

It is best to conduct your informational interview at the individual's office; however, be aware that some people will want to talk right then. So that you are not caught off guard, have 15 to 20 minutes available and your list of questions on hand when you make your initial phone call.

Step 3: Prepare for your interview

Make a list of questions you would like to ask at the interview. Since you are conducting the interview, you need to be prepared. Do some research on the individual's career and his or her firm or company. Think of some thoughtful questions you'd like to ask. Following is a list of sample questions.

- How did you obtain your job? What career track did you follow — including summer jobs and internships? Are there other ways one could break into this field?
- What type of training is necessary to enter this area of law? Are there any law school courses you found to be particularly helpful?
- What types of interesting projects have you worked on lately? What is a typical day/week/month/year like for you?
- What type of person/résumé/skills set does your office look for when hiring someone in this field?

Step 3, continued

- What professional associations would you recommend that I join?
- Do you have any advice on the best way to position myself to enter the field?
- Do you know of others in this field whom I could contact?

Step 4: The interview

Arrive on time and dress professionally. Begin the interview by introducing yourself and again mentioning the person who referred you and your reason for setting up the meeting. Give a brief overview of yourself and talk about why you are interested in finding out more about this type of career. Then ask your questions and remember that this is not a job interview, so you should be doing most of the listening!

Step 5: Follow-up

Send a thank you note immediately after your interview. In addition to thanking the interviewee for his or her time, mention something you found particularly useful or helpful from the meeting. Note whether you have already or are going to follow up with other contacts recommended.

Also, make sure to keep a thorough record of your meeting, including the contact information for your interviewee and any other contacts that were suggested so that you can follow up again in the future.



About NALP

Founded in 1971 as the National Association for Law Placement, NALP is a nonprofit education association of ABA-accredited law schools and more than 900 legal employers. NALP's member representatives number more than 1,700 and include legal recruitment and professional development administrators from law firms, government agencies, corporations, and public interest organizations as well as career services professionals from law schools.

For an online directory of legal employers and information on their hiring criteria, visit www.nalpdirectory.com. For information on public service opportunities for law students and lawyers, visit the site of NALP's Public Service Law Network Worldwide (PSLawNet) at www.pslawnet.org. For information on hiring trends and an online bookstore featuring job search resources, visit www.nalp.org.

NALP thanks the University of Cincinnati College of Law Center for Professional Development for generously sharing their brochure on informational interviewing with their career services colleagues by allowing NALP to publish this adaptation.

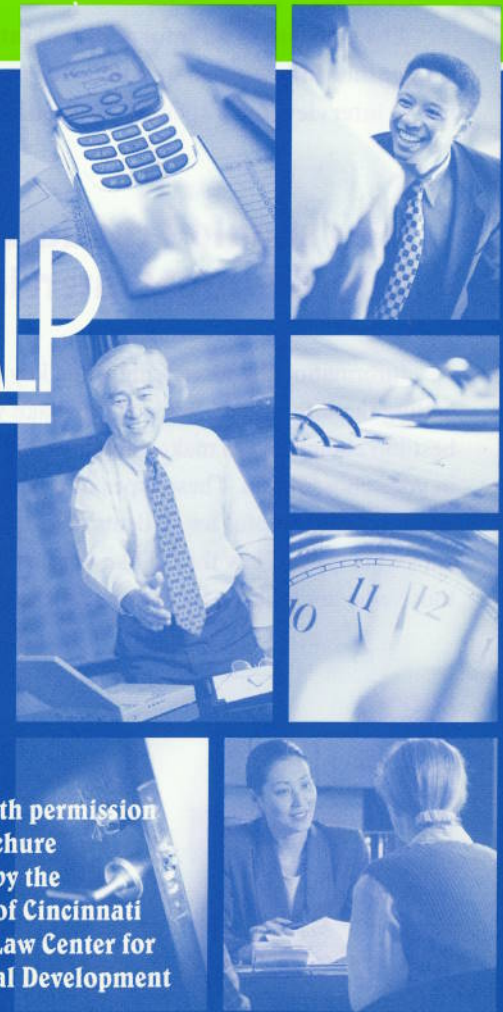


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The How-Tos of Informational Interviewing

A Step-by-Step Guide



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