

# Informational Interviews: Still Feeling Awkward? Tips for Making Connections for a Successful Job Search

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# Job Search Basics

Find job



Submit job documents

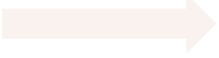


Invited for an  
interview

Is it that simple?

# If so, great! Likely not due to “hidden job market”

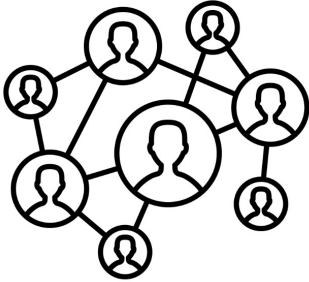
Find job



Submit job documents



Networking



Informational Interviews



Ultimate goal: invited for an interview

Help you navigate this hidden job market

# No matter your career path, informational interviewing can be helpful

Can be particularly helpful for graduate students who want to pursue the non-academic route



**Pro-tip:** After all, most jobs are found informationally and/or via networking

# What are informational interviews?

- A strategy to help you decide what career you want
  - Knowing your career options can give you an advantage in the job hunt
- **1:1** chat with someone about their work – easy way to network, especially for introverted people
- Even if you know what you want to do, informational interviewing can still help you with these skills:
  1. Learning about the day-to-day work of people with similar degree holders
  2. Practicing an essential “soft-skill”: **communication**
  3. Develop your own professional narrative

An informational interview is **NOT:**  
A job interview nor a chance to ask for a job

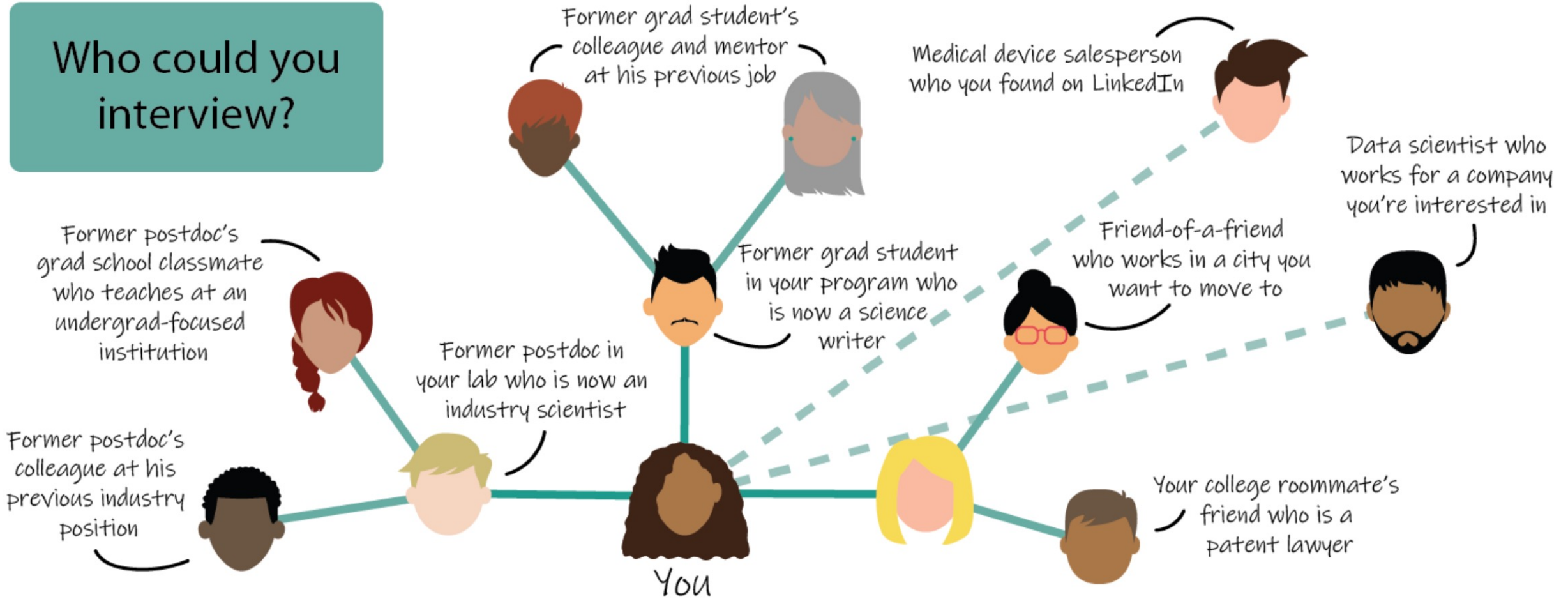
# What if you already know what you want to do?

- Informational interviewing can still help you with these skills:
  1. Learning about the day-to-day work of people with similar degree holders
  2. Practicing an essential “soft-skill”: **communication**
  3. Learn various skills that are needed for particular roles – could be opportunities to gain some of these skills during graduate school
  4. Develop your own professional narrative
  5. Learn the language and vocabulary for certain career fields

# So now you're convinced to ask someone for an informational interview, what next?

- Approach 1: Find someone with a job that you want
- Approach 2: Find a company/organization you want to work for and search for employees
- **How to find people?**
- LinkedIn (search function), alumni networks, faculty contacts, friends of friends

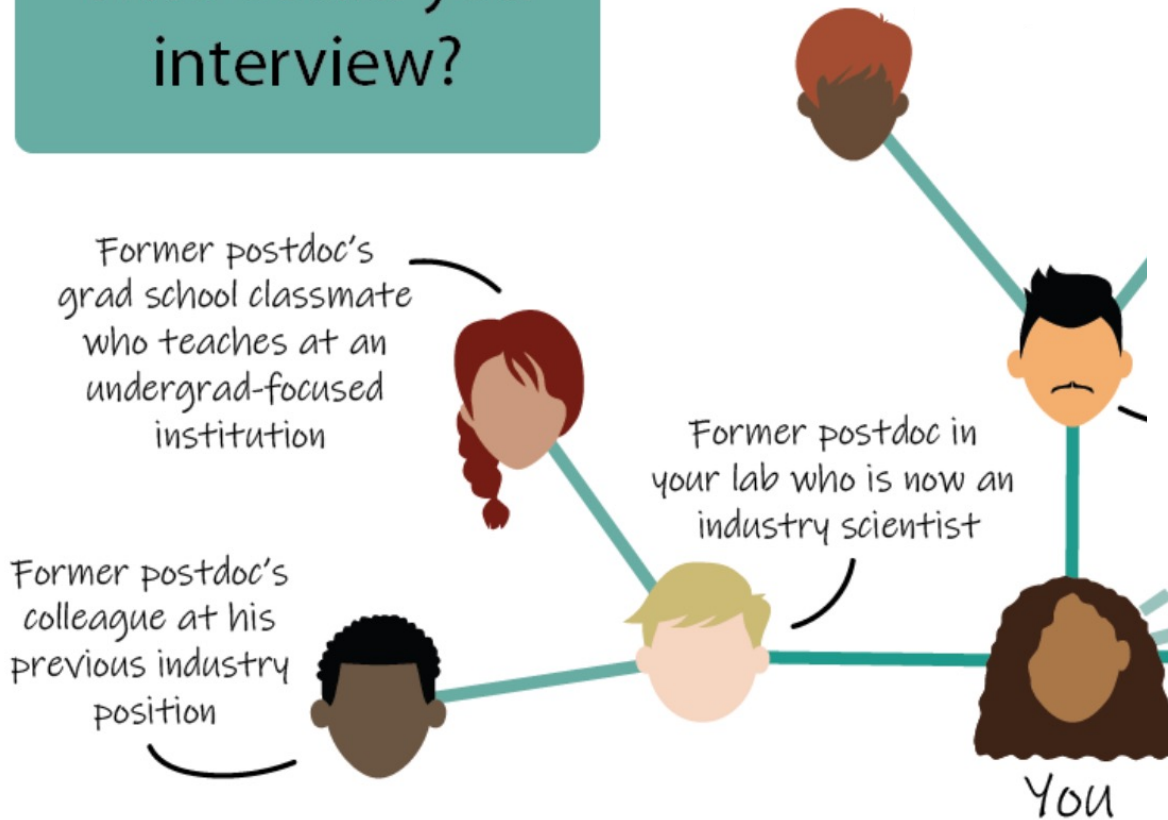
# Who could you interview?



Meghan Turner, Berkely Science Review



## Who could you interview?



Meghan Turner, Berkely Science Review

### Pro-tips:

1. Don't be afraid to cast a wide net – you may never know where it may lead!
2. Most people are flattered that you want to learn about what they do!
3. Set goals and don't give up! People are busy. If they don't respond, don't take offense, just move to the next contact

# When should you consider doing informational interviews?

- At any point during your graduate career
- Earlier the better – will help you explore different career options and build your professional network
  - It's always easier to reconnect with someone you have already spoken to
  - Example of professional relationship building: you spoke to someone early on in graduate school and then want to reconnect towards the end of your degree
- But also! It's important to wait for the right time. If you're overextended and don't have time to research the person/organization, then it's probably best to wait

**Pro-tip:** People will be more comfortable openly speaking with you if they know there is no pressure on them to help you land a job

# How do you find someone and how to ask?

- 1. Pre-existing contact** – Use LinkedIn to your advantage here. Check out your contacts– are any of them connected to someone you want to speak to? If so, ask them if they are willing to introduce you
- 2. The dreaded cold contact** – Don't be scared and don't give up. Point out a similarity with the person you are trying to contact. ( “We both went to URI undergrad....”)
- 3. Your request should be brief** (3-5 sentences): Make sure to spell check and edit. This is about *them* and *not you* so do not go on and on about what you do
- 4. Requested time commitment should be minimal** – the people you reach out to are likely very successful (and BUSY). Aim for 20-30 minutes

# Example of request

**Pro-tip:** The interviewee is doing you a favor – make sure the time and “location” is convenient for them.

Dear Dr. Fish,

I hope this message finds you well. I'm currently a PhD Student at URI studying Oceanography and came across your impressive profile on LinkedIn. I'm interested in pursuing a career in research and data analysis and I am curious to learn more about your accomplishments as a research analyst in the non-profit, private, and startup industries. Would you be willing to meet with me over coffee for 20 minutes or if it would be better for you, we could we arrange a brief phone call? I would be so grateful for the opportunity to connect and learn more about your career path.

Thank you,  
Josie

# Now you've landed a time slot, what next?

Break it up into three sections:

1. Preparation
2. Interview itself
3. Follow-up

# 1. Preparation

**Pro-tip:** Be prepared to talk about yourself in relation to the interests of the interviewee and/or their organization

- Create a list of open-ended questions
- Research the person and the organization they work at so you can make a good impression
  - This will also help make the conversation more of a 2-way street
- Think about (and practice) how to introduce yourself in a succinct way
- Dress professionally

**Pro-tip:** Be curious! Keep an open mind when having the conversation

## 2. During the interview

- First make sure to thank them for their time
- Use your practiced pitch to re-introduce yourself and why you reached out to them (what do they have that you want to learn more about?)
- Have your conversation – listen carefully and take notes
- Be sure to stick to the agreed upon time – if the time is coming to a close, remind them of this and let them be the one to continue if they'd like
- End by asking: “Is there anyone else you think I should talk to?”

**Pro-tip:** try to maintain the relationship

## 3. Follow-up

- Send a personalized thank you: either e-mail or handwritten
- How to meaningfully stay in contact?
  - Connecting on LinkedIn is important but can go beyond
- Stay in contact via common interests
- Mutual connection – you never know when you could help the interviewee!
- Offer to connect them with others
- Can also follow up months later with any professional updates



# Example Questions to Ask

**Pro-tip:** Write down a list of questions for your first informational interview

1. Can you tell me how you got to this position?
2. What do you like most about what you do, and what would you change if you could?
3. How do people break into this field?
4. What are the types of jobs that exist where you work and in the industry in general?
5. Where would you suggest a person investigate if the person were particularly skilled at (fill in the blank — quantitative thinking, communications, writing, advocacy)?
6. What does a typical career path look like in your industry?

[Marci Alboher, Mastering the Informational Interview](#)

# Example Questions to Ask cont'd

7. What are some of the biggest challenges facing your company and your industry today?
8. Are there any professional or trade associations I should connect with?
9. What do you read — in print and online — to keep up with developments in your field?
10. How do you see your industry changing in the next 10 years?
11. If you were just getting involved now, where would you put yourself?
12. What's a typical day like for you?
13. What's unique or differentiating about your company?
14. How has writing a book (starting a blog, running a company, etc.) differed from your expectations? What have been the greatest moments and biggest challenges?

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# Two Golden Questions

If you were in my position with an interest in \_\_\_\_\_, what steps would you take today?

Based on my interest in \_\_\_\_\_, who else should I talk to? Would you mind introducing them to me?

# Questions to



- How much money do you make?
- What do you hate about your job?
- Does your company have a job/internship opening I could apply to right now?
- Can you get me in touch with your company's hiring manager for a position?
- Can you recommend me for a position at your company?

# Now the interview is over, or is it? Follow up.

- If you said you'd send an article or some other material, send it
- Do you want to continue to stay in touch? Or was there no chemistry? Follow-up depends on the answer but **always always always** thank them for their time
  - Politeness goes a long way no matter what the circumstance
  - You can thank them in either an e-email or handwritten note

# Peer Success Story #1

Student wanted to apply for a fellowship, decided to look at non-academic institutions so they browsed grants awarded to small companies through the National Institute Environmental Health Sciences

- Saw a company that looked interesting to them and relevant to their research, cold-emailed them, they did an informational interview which resulted in a summer internship for the student



# Peer Success Story #2

Student saw a job for company from listserv ad the company was right up their alley

- So the student decided to cold-message two people who worked for the company on LinkedIn. Didn't hear anything back. Mustered up the courage for a 3<sup>rd</sup> contact, they did an informal interview. Interviewee asked for student's resume, resume was forwarded to Director of Research who passed it along to people in company. An employee reached out needing help on a project. Student helped out for a few hours here and there, but then Director of Research reached out again asked for help with a different project that resulted in part-time summer internship



# Have more questions about informational interviews?

Book an appointment with the career office to talk about your questions and general job search strategies

**URI:** meet with Graduate Assistant, Diana Fontaine [here](#) (she can help you prepare or practice!)

**UCONN:** schedule meeting [here](#)



**UCONN** | UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

**Center for Career Development**



- Respect your contact's time. Everyone's time is a commodity, even when someone is excited to connect with you. Consequently, you should keep your initial conversation to 30 minutes. Keeping tabs on the clock and wrapping up your conversation within this timeframe will demonstrate respect for your contact's time. This could also make your contacts more willing to schedule follow-up conversations with you and/or refer you to other contacts of theirs. Listen twice as much as you talk. Be attentive during the conversation and practice active listening. Give your undivided attention to your contact; refrain from having your phone or laptop out during the conversation in order to cut down on distractions. Ask open-ended questions to get the conversation going and ask clarifying questions when needed. Seek to understand, not to judge, what the other person is saying. Stay positive. Communicating a positive attitude through both your words and your body language is essential to making a good impression. When telling a story about a challenging situation from your past, be sure to frame it in a positive way and wrap it up with what you learned from it. Re-frame sensitive questions. For example, if you are genuinely curious about the tough parts of someone's job, instead of asking: "What do you hate about your job?", ask: "What are some common challenges you face in your role?"

**PHASE 4: MANAGE THE RELATIONSHIP** Track your process Any process can become overwhelming if not well organized. A simple spreadsheet can serve as a useful tool. You can design your network tracking system however works best for you, but usually you'll want to capture the following information: your contacts' names; contact information; current positions and companies; dates of your conversations with them; notes/takeaways from these conversations; and followup steps you've taken or plan to take afterwards. You can find an example of a tracker here: <https://bit.ly/309qqnQ>. Follow-up and say "Thank you" Sending a thank you email after each conversation takes only a few moments of your time and leaves your contacts with a strong impression of you as a courteous professional. Take the time to personalize your thank-you note; refer to specific topics or takeaways from the conversation that were particularly impactful to you or about which you plan to follow up. Subject line: Thank you! Dear Inge, Thank you very much for taking time to connect with me and share your wisdom and experience as a journalist. I especially enjoyed hearing about your adventures abroad, as well as the many interesting places you have lived throughout your career. Thank you also for referring me to your colleague Hector. I look forward to hopefully connecting with him soon. Many thanks again! Sincerely, Theo Tiger Strategize if & how to keep in touch

- If you get along well, you both may be interested in staying in touch and possibly developing a mentor or professional relationship. In this case, you may end up communicating regularly.
- If you ever have a negative experience, don't give up on your networking efforts. Conversations \ that don't go well could be due to differences in personality or someone having a bad day. It's always best to send a thank-you email and move forward to other things. You can use the network tracking system to stay in touch in ways that don't feel forced or fake. Record takeaways or follow-up items from your conversations. Then, use them as segues for keeping in touch and updating your contacts over time. Examples could include:
- If a contact suggests that you contact one of their colleagues, check back in with them once you've done so. You can discuss what you learned from their colleague, ask other questions that arose and thank them for their help.
- Ask if your contact would be open to sharing their thoughts about your resume and experience.
- Add people on LinkedIn following your informational interviews with them.
- If your contacts mention a milestone in their lives, reach out to congratulate them.
- If something you discussed with a contact comes up in a class, the news, a publication or a project you're working on, tell them about it.
- Use transitions in the year (e.g. holidays, the start of new semesters) as excuses to reach out to contacts

- Company culture –ask as many questions about boss' working style and what does he look for, etc– are they a good fit for you to work with? .. How many do you work a week
- Means that there's no role, but could bring up what you could o

# Example

- 1. Can you tell me how you got to this position?
  2. What do you like most about what you do, and what would you change if you could?
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- Some students find it most helpful to talk to someone who's about 5 years ahead of them in their career path. Talking to people further along in their careers - such as CEOs, directors, or senior managers - can be a great way to learn about the ins and outs of an industry. But sometimes, someone closer to your current position might be able to provide more time-relevant insights you might find useful (e.g. what the current labour market trend might look like in your field or tips on searching for an entry level role in that industry).
- While informational interviews are great for learning about someone's career journey and to gather insight and advice, they're also an opportunity to share some of your own interests, skills, and experiences (nothing that you don't feel comfortable sharing, of course). Remember that relationships are two-way streets, by sharing a little bit about yourself, you start to build a stronger relationship and will help them consider insights opportunities that they feel might be more tailored for you.
- While informational interviews can sometimes feel like a great fact-finding mission, it's important to remember that you're talking to another human being. Always be considerate of their time and don't ask any questions that you would be uncomfortable answering or be offended by if someone asked you.

# Why or HOW?

- Apart from learning about different careers, informational interviews are also a great way to start meeting people in the industries you're excited about. Because networking in career fairs, conferences, and other large events can often feel stressful and challenging, many students find informational interviews a better way to build longer lasting relationships that feel more genuine and authentic. The people you talk to can become friends, mentors, or even future colleagues.
- Over time, this can help you tap into what's commonly referred to as the "hidden job market." Sometimes employment opportunities aren't advertised and are instead filled by word-of-mouth and referrals. By meeting new people in companies you're interested in, you can increase your chances of learning about unadvertised or poorly advertised job openings.
- Setting up these conversations can also help you polish your interview skills and learn the "lingo" inside your industry of interest. By building confidence talking to strangers and pitching your value proposition, many students start to feel more comfortable talking to people in an actual job interview or larger networking events.
- Apart from being great for career-mapping and networking, informational interviews can also be an invaluable life skill. Labour markets and industry trends change rapidly and often in unpredictable ways - for instance, think of the impact COVID-19 has had on job markets globally. Informational interviews can help you learn how to cope with changes in job markets and how to pivot your career to adjust to those changes and explore new careers that might emerge as a result.

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- Once you have an idea of the types of careers or industries you'd like to target, there are many ways you can approach finding someone there to talk to.
- **Friends, Family, Peers, Colleagues:** Talk to the people around you and let them know what you're looking for. Word-of-mouth is a great way to get introduced to new people for informational interviews. You never know who someone might know!
- **LinkedIn:** For those who prefer social-media, LinkedIn can be a great way to connect with others virtually. You can use filters to search for people based on keywords, job titles, companies, or schools. Many students find that reaching out to alumni is a great way to get started. Because you've both attended the same school you immediately have something in common. When you've found someone you're interested in meeting, send them a short message introducing yourself and ask if they'd be interested in meeting you for an informational interview.

LinkedIn also indicates whether you have any mutual connections. If it's more comfortable, you can always reach out to your existing connections to ask if they can introduce you.

- **University Career Days and Events:** Schools and institutions often host career related events. These are great opportunities to meet new people because everyone there is essentially hoping to do the same thing. To make it easier, you can always attend with a friend and make new connections together.
- **Student and Professional Associations:** Joining a relevant association can be a great way to meet like-minded people. Similar to universities, associations also often organize similar career or networking events.
- **From the Person You Just Met:** A great way to get connected with more and more people as you conduct information interviews is to ask the person you're meeting if there's anyone else they would recommend you talk to. Building new connections this way is exactly what networking is all about.
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# How to prepare for an informational interview?

- Having a script or a list of questions isn't needed for an informational interview. But for those who are nervous or attending an informational interview for the first time, preparing a list of questions or topics you'd like to talk about can act as a good safety net.
- Questions can center around a variety of different topics::
- **Personal:** How might you fit in a particular role or company? Does that position or company align with your goals, values, and passion?
- **Qualifications:** These can be regarding education, training, or other certification requirements. But you can also ask about skills and personality traits relevant to the role, this can help you get a sense of whether certain careers are a good fit for you.
- **Career Landscape:** Is the industry growing and how might it change in a couple years? What sort of entry-level opportunities are available and how might you find them?
- **Building Leads:** Once you've built a strong relationship with your interviewee they'll likely become invested and want to see you succeed. After a couple meetings, they may be able to provide you with opportunities or new connections in areas that you're interested in.