

Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing is a way of finding out information about your future career. It can assist you to find the kind of job you want and where you'd like to work. It can also help to build the contacts necessary to find employment when you're ready to look.

Purposes

Informational interviews may be used for any of the following:

- Clarifying your employment and career objectives
- Obtaining information about work in a particular industry or organisation
- Confirming your choice of career pathway
- Finding out the day-to-day activities involved in a job
- Shortlisting organisations where you'd like to work
- Building confidence in your ability to speak with employers
- Making contacts to obtain work experience.

Getting started

In considering an area you would like to investigate, consider a job title, a field, or an industry area; any of these will make useful starting points. In seeking people to interview, you could start with or be referred by:

- One of your teaching staff (some have good professional contacts you could be referred to)
- People you already know in the field (eg, friends, friends of the family, people known to your friends, workmates and colleagues of your parents or partner)
- People you meet socially (eg, at the gym, in a sports team, in a club)
- People in your professional association
- Your Industry Mentor, as part of the [Industry Mentoring Program](#)
- LinkedIn. Use the **LinkedIn Alumni tool** to find recent graduates of Griffith University within your degree and research Company Names and Job Titles along with roles and responsibilities.

An equally effective way is to make the contacts yourself. Making your contacts means seeking an interview un-referred, with someone previously unknown to you. As you gain more confidence, you may find this is easiest, though you should also be prepared to accept "knock-backs" from some of the people you contact.

But wait!

If you attend the interview without any knowledge of the job or the field of work, you probably won't know enough to ask sensible questions. Ideally you should know something about

- the field, and/or
- the nature of the work undertaken, and/or
- the business of the organisation or the industry.

The aim of the workplace interview then, is to supplement the information you have, and enhance it - by getting a view from someone in the job or field.

Arranging an interview

Arranging an interview could involve:

- just turning up in-person and asking to speak to a nominated person (quick and easy, but without a high chance of success)

- phoning the person you want to interview and seeking an appointment (better than the first option, and reasonably quick)
- Email first, then phoning and seeking an appointment (may or may not respond to your email).
- By way of a LinkedIn request (the best way) inviting them to connect.

LinkedIn is the best way that business people will respond to your request. Start with recent Griffith Graduates within your degree (search 'Griffith University' under Schools and then click alumni) an example message might look like:

Making contact

Whether you write first or simply phone, indicate clearly your current circumstances and that you are seeking information and advice. You may be asked when you phone just what kind of information you're seeking, so be ready to give some details. If you email, make sure you indicate you will phone in a week to follow up your letter. Be clear about the time you are seeking - 15 to 20 minutes is reasonable, but anything longer could be imposing on your contact's time.

During the interview

Here are some quick points that might assist the progress of your workplace interview. They are meant as a guide only.

- Thank your contact for agreeing to see you for 15 minutes (confirm duration so that he / she knows you are working to the agreed time)
- Briefly review where you are at present - stage of degree, and state of career exploration
- Commence with open questions - *Can you tell me how ...?; Can you tell me about ...?; Can you describe...?*
- Jot down notes if important, but only from time to time
- Wind up as the time allocated approaches; don't go overtime unless the time is renegotiated (but be wary of seeking extra time).

Referral

You could conclude by asking your contact for a referral to another contact he / she thinks might be useful for you. This is a practical way of making other contacts and getting another perspective, but needs to be handled carefully. You don't want to give this contact the impression the information given wasn't helpful. You could ask:

- Could you refer me to someone else who could give another perspective / who works within a larger/smaller organisation?
- Could I use your name in making the contact(s) you've given me?
- Could I get back in touch with you at some time in the future if I need additional information?

After the interview

Immediately review what you learned and note down important details including the name and contact details of your interviewee, the date of this discussion, useful information and the names of other contacts.

It's important to write a short email thanking your contact for the time spent with you. It would be helpful to include a couple of lines on what you found of most interest.

Conclusion

Informational Interviewing can be initially daunting but is a highly profitable activity, well-suited to students in any year of study. It is one of the best ways of investigating where you would like to work. It expands your network of contacts, important now and throughout your career as a means of extending your career horizons and employment prospects.

Questions you might ask

Here are some sample questions to stimulate your thinking about the kind of information that might enhance your employment and career awareness.

Qualification and entry level issues

- What degree is most appropriate to enter this field?
- Are there 'entry level' positions in this field/organisation suitable for graduates?
- How appropriate is my current degree & how would I best supplement it academically?
- Are there many degree qualified staff here?
- Does the current trend favour the recruitment of graduates or non graduates?
- Do you have a graduate program, vacation program or work experience opportunities?
- Could you describe your graduate induction program?
- Are there specific career steps that graduates follow that are different to steps followed by other staff?
- If you were recruiting someone to an entry level position, which would you regard as most important - education, experience, personal attributes, or particular skills?
- What emphasis do you place on high grades in recruiting entry level graduate staff?
- Is previous experience important in this role or field and if so what kind?
- Could you describe the typical working day of entry level (or other staff) in this organisation?

About person / his or her career

- What was your career path into this work / field / organisation?
- Reflecting on your own career in this field, are there things you would do differently with the benefit of hindsight?
- If you knew you would be in this field / occupation, would you have completed the same qualifications?
- Could you describe your typical working day.
- Does this field of work / occupation / industry place demands on your personal life?
- How many hours each day do you spend at work (or how many hours in a working week)?

Career and job prospects

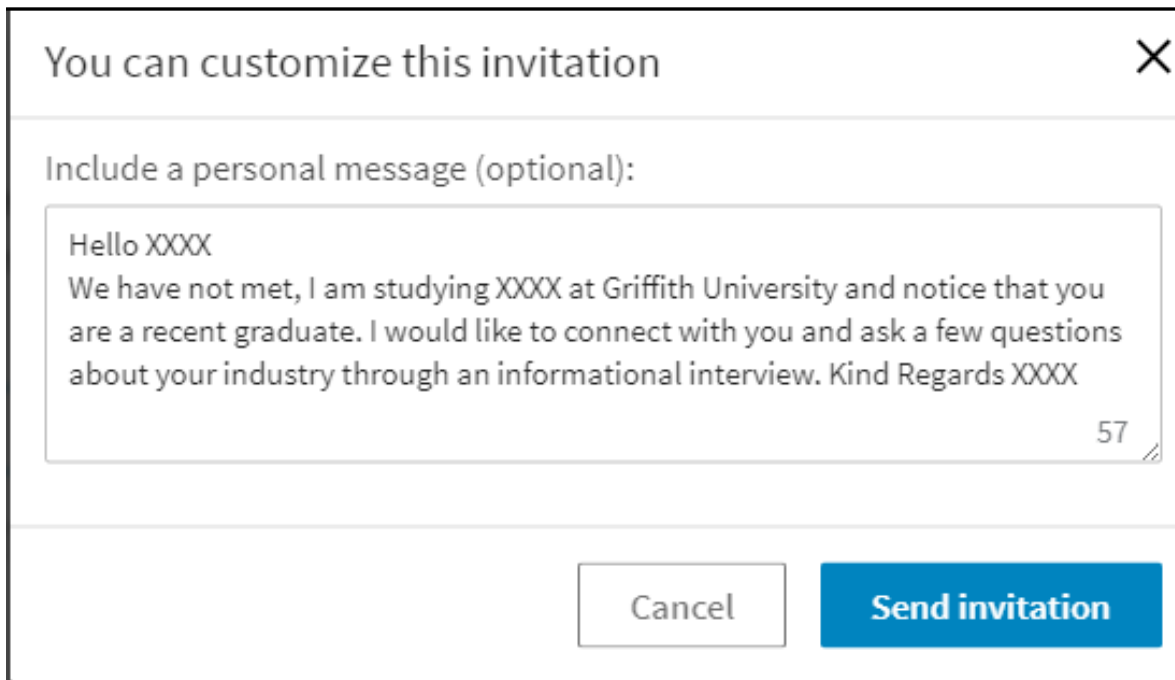
- What skills are most required to be successful in this field / occupation?
- What is the normal pattern of promotion (are there particular routes)?
- Do you need to move elsewhere (within Queensland / interstate) for advancement in this field?
- How are vacancies filled in this field (advertised / filled internally)?

This organisation / work undertaken

- How big is this organisation / department / unit?
- Could you describe its structure (hierarchies / teams / working groups)?
- How are work objectives achieved (short or long projects / seminars / client contacts)?
- Is the work continually high pressure / "peak and trough" / quality driven?
- What is the business / main activity of the organisation?
- Is there a high staff turnover - how long do employees usually stay?
- What are the training opportunities offered by the organisation?
- How are people assessed for promotion?
- How can one transfer between sections of the organisation?
- On average after how long does it take new employees to obtain promotion?
- To what extent is responsibility given to new graduates?

Sample email 1— seeking an information interview

When using LinkedIn to send connect with a graduate or contact it is helpful to note that you only have 300 characters to work with. A sample connection message has been listed below:



The screenshot shows a dialog box titled "You can customize this invitation" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. Below the title is the text "Include a personal message (optional):". A text input field contains the following message: "Hello XXXX", "We have not met, I am studying XXXX at Griffith University and notice that you are a recent graduate. I would like to connect with you and ask a few questions about your industry through an informational interview. Kind Regards XXXX". A character count "57" is visible in the bottom right corner of the text field. At the bottom of the dialog box are two buttons: "Cancel" and "Send invitation".

Once connected, you can send a longer LinkedIn message as outlined below:

Hello XXXX

Thank you for accepting my connection request, I am a student in the first year of a _____degree at Griffith University. I was referred to you by _____ from whom I understand you know as a result of your involvement with the _____.

I am seeking information about the work of _____with a view to expanding my knowledge of the range of options in this field. I was wondering if it would be possible to meet with you for a short time to seek answers to some questions I have about this area of professional practice.

I will phone you early next week to establish whether you are able to meet with me, and if possible to arrange a time that would be suitable to you.

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely