

# USC Viterbi

School of Engineering

*Career Connections*

## Informational Interview Guide

What better way to learn about your potential future career than talking to someone in a position you would want to obtain in the future? Conduct an informational interview with a professional to try to learn what inspired her/him to enter their particular career. This process will allow you to gain perspective, learn more about a profession, and help you solidify whether or not this is the right career path for you.

### What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is a one-on-one meeting with a professional who has a job you might like, who works within an industry you might want to enter, or someone employed by a specific company that you are interested in learning about. During this interview, you will try to learn what inspired her/him to enter this field and gain insight into the organization.

### Why are Informational Interviews important?

- Meeting with a professional in a one-on-one setting to develop professional contacts for the future.
- This interview can give you an inside perspective of the day-to-day life, responsibilities and work culture into your potential future career.
- It will provide you a chance to really articulate your strengths and interests in a safe-setting.
- This meeting will provide you an opportunity to develop your interview skills in front of a professional in your field.
- You can learn what skills you are lacking and how to improve your chances in obtaining a career in their industry.

### Locating Prospective Professionals:

- Speak with people within your inner circle such as friends, family members, and LinkedIn connections to locate appropriate sources.
- You can also ask multiple staff, professors or any other people that could possibly give you a contact name.
- Try to contact a suggested person through email, telephone, mail or networking opportunities.
- You can also utilize Viterbi Link (<https://viterbicareers.usc.edu/viterbilink/>) and the [LinkedIn Alumni Tool](#) to find professionals that are connected to USC who might be willing to help.

### Scheduling the Interview

- When sending your request, make sure to be clear about your motivation, explaining your situation and interest.
- Inform them how much you would appreciate their expertise knowledge, skill and experience in their industry.
- Most informational interviews are about 30 minutes long. Be prepared with dates and times that you are available to meet with this person before you arrange your meeting.
- Allow a minimum of 2-3 weeks to schedule your phone or in-person interview (please do not make last minute requests expecting professionals to alter their schedules because you failed to plan).
- If your contact person is unable to meet you, ask them if they could refer you to someone else.
- Keep in mind that you are asking for a favor, making the scheduling process as easy as possible for the professional is the best way to get them to agree to meet with you.

### Script:

Hi, \_\_\_\_\_ I am currently a student at USC Viterbi School of Engineering, pursuing a degree in \_\_\_\_\_. I am in the process of researching professions and learning more about your position as a \_\_\_\_\_. My career counselor suggested I reach out to a professional such as yourself, and I would really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and learn more about (organization) \_\_\_\_\_. Would it be possible to schedule a 20-30 minute phone or in-person appointment to ask you a few questions to learn more about your position and organization?

### **Prepare for the Interview**

- Prepare in advance at least 10-15 questions you would like to ask about their career pathway, industry tips, or specific questions about their company culture. Create more questions than needed, but end early if they are busy.
- Treat this meeting similar to a job interview, arriving on time with a note pad and pen.
- You do not want to show up poorly dressed and unprepared even though this is not a formal job interview.
- It is very possible that the person you are interviewing may ask you some questions about yourself and your goals, so be prepared to answer questions such as “Why did you want to interview me?” What interests you about my company?

### **Conducting the Interview**

- Make sure you arrive 15-minutes early if you are meeting in person.
- Do not just ask the questions that you bring with you, it should only serve as a guide to the interview process.
- If they answer with something that strikes an interest, continue to ask additional questions.
- Ask some icebreaker questions at the very beginning and a few follow-up advice questions at the end.
- The purpose of the interview is to provide a learning opportunity, not a strategy to obtain a job or internship.
- Focus on asking for advice and information on how to enter that specific job type or industry.
- Whether you are on the phone or in-person take detailed notes of their answers.
- At the end of the interview, thank the professional for their time and reiterate how much you appreciate them for taking time out of their day to talk with you.

### **After the Interview**

- Add detailed notes after your discussion and review the answers to decide what additional information or research you need to develop your action plans.
- **Send a thank you note within one day. Email is fine.**
- Take advantage of any referrals you received and request that you stay connected by email, LinkedIn or both.
- If they provided you a referral, contact them within the next week (do not wait too long to contact).

**USC Viterbi School of Engineering- Career Connections**

<https://viterbicareers.usc.edu/>

Ronald Tutor Hall 218 • [vcareers@usc.edu](mailto:vcareers@usc.edu) • 213-740-9677

## Sample Questions

### **Icebreaker questions:**

How are you today?

How long have you worked for \_\_\_\_\_?

### **Standard questions:**

Could you tell me how you started on your career path?

What about this position/industry do you enjoy most?

What skills or experience prepared you the most for this job?

What degree or license did you obtain in college?

What got you interested in this type of work?

What type of person is best suited for this type of work?

How do you stay current in terms of professional development?

What qualities are employers looking for in your field of work?

What is the best way to find out about job opportunities in this field?

What do you think I should make sure to add on my resume or what are the main skills to develop?

How much has this industry grown since you have started this job?

Do you expect to be in demand for as long as you work?

How secure is employment in this industry?

Does the salary increase much with more education or training or a specific skill? *\*Do not ask what salary the person you are interviewing receives.*

What is the dress code at your organization?

How much time do you usually spend getting to know or collaborating with your co-workers?

How much time do you spend working outside of office hours?

Do you believe your organization provides work/life balance when it comes to vacations?

Do you belong to any professional organizations?

How long is your average workday?

What tasks do you accomplish in a typical day?

What type of people do you work with on a daily basis?

Do you consider this job rewarding?

What makes it worth it for you to come in every day?

Are some rewards monetary or promotional?

What are some of the drawbacks of this occupation?

What are improvements you would like to see in this field?

What is the biggest challenge you face in the course of your work?

What is the career ladder for this position?

What are the future trends for this field?

Which organizations do you think are your toughest competitors, and how do they differ from your company?

### **Follow-Up questions:**

Is there a similar industry that I may want to look into?

Can I contact you again if I have any other questions?

Can you recommend anyone else for me to speak with?

Can you suggest other resources with valuable information? Newsletters?

### **Advice questions:**

What advice would you give to someone like me, now entering your field?

What advice did you wish you had before entering this field?

What skills or experience do you think would make a candidate stand out in your profession?

**USC Viterbi School of Engineering- Career Connections**

<https://viterbicareers.usc.edu/>

Ronald Tutor Hall 218 • [vcareers@usc.edu](mailto:vcareers@usc.edu) • 213-740-9677