# Informational Interviews & Coffee Chats

## What is an informational interview and what is a coffee chat?

**Informational interview:** An informational interview is a conversation you initiate with someone to learn more about their career, role, or industry. The primary goal is to gather insights and advice to guide your own career decisions, rather than seeking a job.

**Coffee chat:** A coffee chat is a more casual version of an informational interview. While it may occur in a similar setting, such as over coffee or virtually, it is typically less structured. Coffee chats are important opportunities to build rapport and gain advice in a relaxed environment. At Cornell, many clubs organize coffee chats before recruiting new members.

"Informational interview" and "coffee chat" are sometimes used interchangeably.

## How do I secure an information interview?

- You can reach out to people to request an informational interview through many ways, including but not limited to:
  - Sending messages on LinkedIn or CUeLinks;
  - Sending cold emails to people on relevant company or event websites;
  - If appropriate, a professor or mentor can make the initial introduction.
- When requesting for an informational interview, please keep in mind:
  - Your request message should be professional and formal.
  - Introduce yourself and share why you are interested in speaking with them.
  - Explain your connection to the person or how you found their contact information.
  - Provide dates and times you are available, how long you are looking to speak (typically 15-30 minutes), and whether you wish to meet in person or online.
    - Make sure to specify your time zone if you are arranging a meeting online!
  - Your interviewee will typically suggest a location, but you are welcome to offer options. Usually, it would be a coffee shop or a quiet public space near them.

## Preparing questions for an informational interview

Always do your research about the company/organization as well as the person you will network with. Then, bring plenty of questions, thoughts, and topics you want to pick your interviewee's brain about. Here are some example topics and questions:

**If you are at an early stage of exploring a career field:**

- What preparation is necessary for entry-level jobs in this field?
- How do your education and experience relate to what you are doing now?
- How important is graduate school in this field?
- What are some recommended courses to take?
- How can I stay up to date in this field? What professional journals, books, newspapers, and publications do people in your field generally read?
- Are any professional organizations particularly influential?

**If you are interested in the job satisfaction of a certain job:**

- What major satisfaction do you derive from working in this field?
- What are some issues or problems that you must deal with in your work?
- Could you tell me a little about the management style here? How are promotions decided?
- What does one need to be successful in this field?

**If you are curious about the job outlook and job search techniques:**

- Do you anticipate employment in this field to grow, decrease, or remain stable?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? Is there a high turnover rate and if so, why?
- What types of employers hire people in your line of work?
- How difficult would it be to transition into this field from another career path?
- What different organizations and jobs are available in this field?
- What has been the most surprising or challenging part of your work or the work in this field?
- What strategies would you use if you were searching for a position in this field?
- What types of questions should I expect when interviewing for a job in this field?
- Would you mind reviewing my resume and giving me feedback on it?

**If you are interested in the lifestyle of a certain job:**

- How many hours do you work in a typical week? Do you take work home at night?
- Is travel involved in your job and if so, how often do you travel?
- Do you need to dress in a particular way?
- Has your work experience differed very much from what you imagined it would be?

## Tips for the Meeting

- Dress as if you are going to a job interview or as how professionals in your field would dress.
- Stick to the agreed-upon length of time and be aware of signals it is time to wrap up (looking at the clock, winding down the conversation, etc.)
- Remember, you want the conversation to be organic. Try not to ask one question after the next the entire time - engage with your interviewee's responses by reflecting and adding your thoughts.
- Pay attention to your own thoughts, body signals, and reactions. If you feel energetic and excited, this atmosphere may suit you. If you feel bored, perhaps this career is not the best match. Regardless, make sure you stay engaged and show interest during the conversation.
- You can also ask your interviewee for names of more people to contact, and whether it is okay to use your interviewee's name when your each out to the new contacts.
- Do not book too many informational interviews back-to-back. Allow flexibility in case your contact chooses to spend more time with you or introduce you to others. Also, leave some time after each meeting to reflect and follow-up.

## After the Meeting

- Follow up with a thank you email within 24 hours. It should express gratitude, summarize your conversation and key takeaways, and outline any future steps you would like to take.
- If this was a valuable connection, keep in touch! You can check in every few months and let your interviewee know about updates in your professional life.