

Ask, Listen, Learn: The Informational Interview

Work-Based Learning Benchmark:

Participate in work site tours, job shadowing, and informational interviews at community businesses. (Partial)

Obtain first-hand knowledge of work settings and employer expectations.

Note to those providing service:

These activities are developed in a way that allows the learner to gradually build upon their skills. Each student has different foundational skills so some students may need more support or instruction than others. With that being said, you can choose what activity you start with based on your learner's strengths and needs.



Extend Pathways

Students who are interested or enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) or postsecondary education, regardless of disability (remember to presume competence!), may or may not need some of the information that seems introductory in nature. Take as much or little time as needed based on student knowledge. More specific activities related to CTE and postsecondary education are identified as extended activities and pathways.

Preparation and Materials Needed:

- Using the network connections identified in the student's completed [My Network Worksheet](#) from [Lesson 1: Expanding Your Opportunities Through Networking \(Activities 2 and 3\)](#) help schedule an informational interview aligned with their interest as part of this lesson. Refer to the [Work-Based Learning Checklist for Instructors](#) for additional guidance and resources.
- Prepare needed assistive technologies and/or accommodations (ex: communication supports (visual, objects, pictures, voice output devices, etc.), physical supports/space access needs, vision supports, hearing supports, sensory needs/supports).
- Computer to access videos. Print materials in advance if necessary.
- Review materials from Click and Explore section of Activity 2. You may consider printing some in advance.



Print

- [Work-Based Learning Checklist for Instructors](#)
- [My Network](#)
- [Pick Your Questions](#)
- [Create Your Own Questions](#)
- [Elevator Speech Social Script](#)
- [Graphic Organizer for Your Elevator Speech](#)
- [Career Learning Note Catcher](#)
- [Future Planning](#)

Activities to Meet Benchmarks:

Activity 1: What is an Informational Interview?

This activity aims to help students learn what an informational interview is.

Note to Instructors: *Instructors will need to gauge how much support an individual needs to set up an informational interview to complete Activity 4 of this lesson. Some students may be able to set it up on their own, others may need you to reach out and schedule it. Ideally, the informational interview should be in the process of being scheduled before starting Activity 2 of this lesson. Students knowing who they will interview can help them tailor their questions more effectively. You may be working with students 1:1 or in a group. Depending on the group size, your students' interests, and time available, you will want to consider if each student will have a 1:1 informational interview or if the group will complete an informational interview together with one person. Keep students informed of the plan and practice how to ask questions based on the anticipated structure of the informational interview. Planning this in advance will help keep the activities in this lesson organized.*



Discuss: Have you ever heard of an informational interview? What do you think an informational interview is? [Note to Instructors: Allow time for students to share their ideas and answer.] An informational interview is setting up time to have a conversation where you ask someone about their job, career path, and the industry they work in. It's a great way to learn more about a career you're interested in and gather advice. It is different from a job interview and you're not going to an informational interview looking for a job. It is just a useful tool to help you make decisions about your future. This is something that may help you confirm a career interest or even the opposite, it may help you see that something you were interested in may not be a good fit for you. Now we are going to watch a video about what an informational interview is and how to set it up. While we watch this video, let's think about these questions.

- How is an informational interview different than a job interview?
- What is the purpose of an informational interview?
- Who is someone from your network that you would want to talk to about their job?



Watch: [Informational Interviews \(3:18\)](#). After watching, review the above questions with students.

Activity 2: Preparing for the Informational Interview

This activity aims to prepare students for an informational interview.



Discuss: It is important to prepare for our informational interview. Preparing includes figuring out who we want to interview, knowing the questions we want to ask, and practicing! Let's start with figuring out who you want to interview.

If you remember from [Lesson 1: Expanding Your Opportunities Through Networking](#), you completed a [My Network](#) worksheet. Between your network and your instructor's network think about who the best person might be to talk to for an informational interview. Start by looking at your list and ask yourself a few questions:

- Who has a job you're interested in?
- Who could give you advice or connect you with someone else?
- Who is friendly and would probably be willing to help?

It could be someone you already know, like a family member, teacher, or neighbor, or someone they could introduce you to. Pick someone whose job you're curious about and remember—it's just a conversation to learn more. It's okay to ask!

[Note to Instructors: You will need to gauge how much support an individual needs to set up an informational interview. Some may be able to set it up on their own, others may need you to reach out and schedule it. Depending on the group size, your students' interests, and time available, you will want to consider if each student will have a 1:1 informational interview or if the group will complete an informational interview together with one person.]



Resource: Once you know who you will interview, what questions do you want to ask them? What do you want to know about their workday or what they do? Use one of these worksheets to come up with at least five questions. Here are two different worksheet options to choose from.


Option 1: [Pick Your Questions](#). In this worksheet, students can circle a question from a list of questions they would like to ask in the informational interview.

Option 2: [Create Your Own Questions](#). In this worksheet, students can research and write their own questions.

Regardless of which option you choose, use the [Career Learning Note Catcher](#) tool to take notes.



Click and Explore: If students would like more examples of questions, below are a list of resources that give examples of questions you can ask in an informational interview to help get started.

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- [Interview Tips: Informational Interviews | Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities](#)
 - Contains a link for the Guide to Informational Interviewing which provides information about preparing, setting-up, interviewing, and follow-up. It provides sample scripts for reaching through a phone call or email. Several links are included with informational interviewing questions.
 - [Informational Interviews | Community Life Guide – Employment First](#)
 - Here you can download and print a two-page list of questions to write in answers.
 - [Informational Interviews | Career OneStop](#)
 - This link includes ways to prepare for an introduction along with a list of sample questions to ask.
 - [Informational Interviewing | University of Dayton](#)
 - Includes a simple checklist for preparing along with a list of questions.
 - [Sample Networking Questions | Hiatt Career Center](#)
 - Printable list of questions broken down in questions related to exploration, exploring internship or job opportunities, and learning more about the organization.

Activity 3: Practicing for the Informational Interview

This activity aims to practice for an informational interview.



Discuss: A final piece of preparing for an informational interview is practicing! This means practicing how you introduce yourself, asking your questions, and listening to the answers. Something else that is really important to prepare for in an informational interview is being present also known as active listening. When we are actively listening, we are thinking about what the other person is saying and not just our own thoughts. This helps make for good conversation and to help you get the most out of your informational interview experience.



Watch: [Active Listening \(1:27\)](#). Have you ever found yourself daydreaming? Or thinking of other things when someone is talking to you? We have all done it before. It can be hard to focus and actively listen sometimes.

- What did this video share about what to do if you find yourself daydreaming or being distracted?
- How can people tell if you are actively listening? How can someone tell if you're distracted?
- Sometimes it can be hard to make eye contact or sit still. What strategies do you use or can you use that help you? [Note to Instructors: Strategies can include: looking near someone's eyes, like their forehead or the space between their eyes; using a fidget if it's difficult to be still; or planning movement breaks.]



Interactive Opportunity: Most have heard the saying "practice makes perfect" but what if we think about it as "practice makes it easier" instead. The more we practice something, usually the easier it becomes. This is true for playing an instrument, a sport, even practicing conversation. Practicing also helps our confidence and helps us get better at something. We are going to practice together. I will be the interviewee, and you will be the interviewer. Let's practice these steps and when you're ready we can start!

- Start by introducing yourself. You can use your script to introduce yourself. [Elevator Speech Social Script](#) or [Graphic Organizer for Your Elevator Speech](#).
- Prepare to ask some of the questions you wrote down.
- You can practice saying these out loud several times until you feel comfortable.
- Be ready to actively listen and take notes.



Resource: [Elevator Speech Social Script](#) and [Graphic Organizer for Your Elevator Speech](#).

[Note for Instructors: Complete an informational interview with the students. As the instructor, you will act as the interviewee and answer questions about your job and career. If holding this activity in a school, you can also have a teacher, school administrator, professor, or other school personnel participate act as the interviewee. If holding this activity in the community like a library, you can invite a coworker or supervisor from your agency, or ask library administrator to act as the interviewee. Allow time for feedback as well. It is important to note that some students may feel nervous or anxious about speaking up and asking questions. Validate these concerns, practice how to ask questions, and support the student to step out of their comfort zone.]

Extending the Conversation

If you are interested in setting up your own informational interview you can reach out to that person. You can send an email, text, or ask in person. Keep it simple: explain who you are, why you're interested in their work, and ask if they'd be willing to chat for 15–20 minutes.

Before the interview, prepare your questions. Focus on things you really want to know, like what their job is like, how they got started, or what advice they have for someone like you. You can work with your instructor on what dates and times work best prior to scheduling.

- Check out the below resources if needing support with script for a cold call or cold email.
- It's ok if someone says no. Not everyone may have the time. If someone says no, you can thank them for taking the time to consider your ask. You can also ask if they know of anyone that would have the time to meet with you.



Resource: [Elevator Speech Social Script](#) and [Graphic Organizer for Your Elevator Speech](#).

Activity 4: Complete an Informational Interview

This activity aims to have students complete an informational interview.

Note to Instructors: Students should have their introduction and questions ready from their [Pick Your Questions](#) or [Create Your Own Questions](#). Students can use this [Career Learning Note Catcher](#) to take notes during the informational interview. Here is a checklist and resources as a reminder [Work-Based Learning Checklist for Instructors](#).



Discuss: You've worked hard to prepare for your informational interview by learning about the process, picking someone to talk to, and planning your questions. Now it's time to put it all into action! This is your chance to have a conversation, learn about their job, and get advice for your future!

[Note to Instructors: Introduce the guest speaker (on-site or virtually). If virtual, ensure all the students can see the guest and that the guest can see all the students. This may vary depending on if the informational interview is being done as a group. Have the student(s) introduce themselves, their grade, and school they attend.]

As the conversation ends, thank the guest for their time or any additional advice for the students. After the guest leaves students can share their thoughts.]



Resource: Students can use their materials to begin asking questions of the guest speaker. Support and prompt students as needed to ask their questions and allow them to take notes. [Career Learning Note Catcher](#) can help students keep notes organized from the questions asked.



Extended Pathways

Activity: Future Planning

This activity aims to help students develop a future plan based on their informational interview.



Discuss: Now that you've completed your informational interview, let's think about how you can use what you learned to take the next steps in your career journey.



Reflect: Think about advice or insights the interviewee shared. Were there any skills, qualifications, or experiences they mentioned that you could start working on? For example, you might research training programs, certifications, or volunteer or internship opportunities that could help you develop those skills. Explore related jobs or companies. If you found their career or industry interesting, you could look into similar roles or workplaces to learn more about your options. How can you expand your network? Are there other professionals you'd like to talk to or areas you want to explore further? You could use what you've learned to plan another informational interview. Take a few minutes to write down at least three specific next steps you can take based on what you learned in this experience.



Resource: You can take notes on the [Future Planning](#) worksheet. Feel free to share this with others who support you in your education and career journey.



Wrap-Up

Informational interviews give you a chance to learn directly from people in the field and explore careers in a deeper way. Preparing for these conversations ensures you'll make the most of the opportunity. This is a valuable way to learn what you do and don't like before you start your career path. Take time to think about what you've learned and consider how you can use this to guide your next steps. Keep building and using these skills because they will be helpful throughout your career journey.