

Having career conversations

(also called informational interviews)

A good way to get to know a job field and make more connections in an industry is to ask if you can have a career conversation/chat with someone in the organization to learn more about the industry and general career advice.

These conversations can help you to become more knowledgeable about the field and talking 1:1 with someone in person, over Zoom/video chat, or even via email or LinkedIn messaging can provide you with valuable insight into industry news, what the industry looks for in its employees, typical career paths, what it's like to work in the field, and other topics.

[Harvard Business Review's 5 Questions to Ask During an "Informational Interview"](#) is helpful for navigating what the author calls "career conversations" (a more approachable term than informational interview). Here are some thoughts for getting started:

- Connect with the person/small talk about their day and thank them for their time.
- Share a short overview of who you are and why you are interested in speaking with them. Touch on the highlights of your education, work and/or internships, and be open about any current decisions or uncertainty you're facing.
- Ask questions:
 - What did your career path look like? What were you involved in during college? Did you have any experiences before your professional career started that helped you get there?
 - I understand you [share what you know about their job duties]. Can you provide more details about what your typical day/week looks like?
 - (If you don't understand their role after researching, ask a question to clarify.) In my research, it was hard for me to tell what a [job title] does. Would you be able to describe what being a [job title] has been like for you?
 - What part of your job do you find the most interesting, as well as the most challenging?
 - Which skills are most important for a job like yours?
 - What skills do you think will be especially useful in the next five years for a student like me entering the field?
 - What do you think is the best way to earn an internship (or job) in this industry (or company)?
 - I'm really interested in speaking with people [in X field / in Y role / at Z company]. Who else would you recommend that I connect with?
 - Ask a question based on your interests – don't be afraid to stray from your list if you need clarification or if you are curious about an area that you didn't anticipate.

Take the initiative and make the outreach

Once you know who you want to reach out to and what you want to ask, it's time to make the outreach. Depending on your research, you may have found that it's best to make phone calls to some places and send emails or LinkedIn messages to others. This is your judgment call. Below is a sample of what the verbiage for this outreach could look like (either written or verbal). Feel free to personalize or shorten as you see fit.

"Hi [insert name]. I'm a [insert your class year at or graduation year from] SUNY Cortland and I'm exploring my career options in [insert specific industries or areas]. I noticed you work in the industry and am reaching out to request a short, 15-20-minute conversation so I can learn more about your role and how you got here. Your experience and advice would really help me make more informed choices as I start my career. Please let me know if you'd be interested. I'm happy to speak at a time convenient to you."

The first few calls or emails may feel rusty, but the more you practice, the more comfortable you will feel. Remember not to be too discouraged if you don't hear back or by a "no" response. Many people are overworked and overwhelmed, and they may not have the capacity for more – that is not a reflection of you or your qualifications. Try to keep in perspective that the answer is always "no" if you never ask/never even started this process, so remember, you are looking for the rare "yeses" and opportunities for conversation here.

Make sure your resume and LinkedIn are updated

[Update your resume](#) and have it looked over by a few people who know you well. Make sure you have it reviewed by the professionals in Career Services (during [drop-in hours](#) 1 to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday throughout the semester or outside of those times by appointment) to make sure it is in the best shape possible before sending it out to any employers. You won't need your resume for the first outreach, but if an employer responds to you, they may ask for a resume, and you will want to be prepared. Once your resume is good to go, you can copy and paste it into LinkedIn and upload to Handshake – that way, if you are doing any outreach via LinkedIn and Handshake, or the employer is tech savvy, it is already there for them to see.

Final thoughts

This guide is just the start – you will learn more about networking and connecting with others as you go through this process, and you will hopefully be surprised by how gracious many people are with their time and energy. And remember, the answer is always no if you don't ask. Take the initiative, be bold, and get connecting!

Information adapted from Harvard Business Review Ascend's [5 Questions to Ask During an "Informational Interview."](#)