Informational Interviewing

When you reach out to a potential contact, communicate these three things:

1. Why you are reaching out: What would you like to learn about them? Be brief in your explanation.
2. Why THEY are the best person for you to learn from: What makes them unique in their field? What about their career story intrigues you?
3. What you are asking for: How much time will you need? Do you want to meet in person, or through Skype, or by phone? Offer times to meet, but indicate that you can adjust to their schedule. Ask for 20-30 minutes of their time.

Sample Informational Interview Request (Email)

Dear Mr. Duke,

During a recent search of the Duke MEMP LinkedIn group, I learned you are a graduate of the Master of Engineering Management program here at Duke University. LinkedIn also indicates you completed an internship with Bank of America in their Business Analyst program, which you now work for full-time. I am currently a MEMP student and am excited about the way in which the MEM program allows me to combine my passion for IT with the business skills I have developed. I am looking forward to a career that will allow me to pair these skills.

I have specifically considered the Business Analyst Program with Bank of America and I wanted to ask if you would offer fifteen minutes of your time to discuss your career path and experiences after graduating from the MEM program. I believe it is important for me to gain a practical, real world perspective about the field of financial services and specifically an IT role within that field.

I will follow this email with a phone call next Monday at which we can set up an appointment if you are willing to meet or discuss your career over the phone.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Engineering
jengineering@duke.edu

Sample Thank You Note (Follow-Up)

Dear Mr. Duke,

Thank you for the opportunity last week to learn about your experiences in the MEM program and also with Bank of America. I found our discussion about career paths to be extremely insightful as I set out on my own career search. Your detailed information concerning the Business Analyst Program at Bank of America was very helpful and I plan to apply for the position when it opens next month.

I appreciate the time you gave to meet with me. As discussed, I have attached my resume for your review. Thank you for offering to review it and provide comments.

Kind Regards,
Jennifer Engineering
Sample Informational Interview Questions

Biographical Information
• How did you get started in this field?
• What was your educational background?

Career Exploration
• What are your major responsibilities?
• What is the most/least rewarding aspect of your job?
• Would you choose this career again?
• What is a typical day like, or what does an average work week involve?
• What is the most common career path?
• What obligations does your work put on you outside of the actual job?
• What are some lifestyle considerations for this career field?
• What are some common entry-level positions in the field of _____?
• What kind of salary range and benefits could an entry level position expect to receive?
• What kind of individual (skills/personality) would be best suited for these entry-level positions?
• What types of people typically do well in this field?
• What are the most important factors used when hiring?
• What is the best educational preparation for a career in this field?
• Which classes and experience would be most helpful to obtain while still in college?
• How high is turnover?
• How does one move or advance within the organization?

Job Search and Industry Knowledge
• How do people find out about open positions in this field?
• What types of skills and experience should I emphasize on my CV or resume?
• What is the future outlook for this career?
• What are areas for potential growth/decline?
• How do you see jobs changing in the future?
• Which professional journals/organizations would be most helpful in evaluating the field?
• Who else do you recommend I talk with, and may I have permission to use your name?
• Can you recommend other types of organizations I might investigate or contact?

TIP: If you have done research in preparation of this interview, demonstrate that by the quality and relevance of the questions you ask.