

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a meeting arranged with a select individual to obtain “inside” information about an industry, occupation, organization, or program. This can lead you to valuable career insight that would not be available through online or print information.

Informational interviews are often easier to come by than a job interview, since there is no pressure on the person being interviewed to have a job opening. Unlike a job interview, the informational interview requires you to make the initial contact with an employer and schedule the appointment. Friends, professors, and former employers, as well as family and the Career Development Center can help you locate appropriate contacts. Trade and professional organizations can also be a helpful resource. When contacting the interviewee, be sure to mention that you are conducting career research on specific occupations that are of interest to you.

You may be surprised at how willing professionals are to discuss and share information about their work. A key thing to remember, however, is that informational interviews are *not* job interviews; they are opportunities for you to learn more about specific career paths, and to develop contacts and possible leads within your industry of interest. To arrange for the informational interview, email or call the person you want to meet and request a brief meeting at their convenience. They may prefer to have a telephone discussion as opposed to a face-to-face meeting. Don't be surprised if the employer or their receptionist questions your motives as they may assume you are just hunting for a job.

Informational Interviews: Career Exploration

Identifying interview prospects:

- List the people you know who either work in your area of interest, or might know someone who does. Ask friends, relatives, teachers, and acquaintances to suggest people to contact. Visit [LinkedIn](#) for mentors, industry professionals, alumni and others you might reach out to.
- Identify organizations and the relevant departments that employ people to do the kind of work you are investigating, as well as any related professional associations.

Arranging the interview:

The following applies whether you approach someone in person, phone, email or online.

- Introduce yourself, and state how you learned the person's name. If the contact is a referral, mention the name of the person who referred you.
- Begin by explaining the purpose of the contact. Preparing what you want to say beforehand can make this part easier. Explain that you are investigating (state your area of interest), and that you are trying to get an insider's view. You have read literature on the field, and would now like to interview someone to get a more personal perspective. Be clear that you are not looking for a job; rather, you are seeking information that will help you make a career decision.
- Request to meet the person at his/her place of work, at a time convenient for him/her. If they are not in the local area, request a phone interview. Indicate that the interview will not take long.
- If they cannot meet with you, ask him/her if the name of another individual who might be willing to talk to you can be provided to you.

Conducting the interview:

- Prior to the interview, think about what you are looking for in a career or occupation.
- Ask your contact for his or her experiences on and opinions about the job. Remember that their feelings about an individual employer may differ from their feelings about the nature of the work.

- Confirm salary levels in the field.
- Stay alert to your surroundings; would you like to work in that environment?
- Focus on the topic.
- Make sure you explore the negatives as well as the positives.
- It is okay to take notes, but do not copy verbatim what the contact says, and do not use a tape recorder.
- At the close of the interview, ask your contact if he/she can suggest others who might be willing to provide additional information or insight.
- Always remember to send a thank you note. You never know when you will need to talk to your contact again. Hand written thank you cards are still appreciated.
- After the interview, you can compare what you learned with what you are looking for in a career.

Reminders:

- Read about your area of interest before the interview; this will enable you to ask insightful questions and to acquire more useful information.
- Many people enjoy talking about their work, and will be happy to share some time with you; do not hesitate to call -- you are not imposing.
- Arrange at least three interviews in order to get a balanced perspective.
- Dress for the informational interview as you would for a job interview.
- Respect your contact's time; 20 to 30 minutes is long enough.
- You are interviewing your contacts about their jobs, not for a job.

Questions To Consider During Career Exploration

Getting Started

- What academic training is most appropriate for someone entering this field?
- What skills are required to enter this field?
- How does one get started in this type of work?
- What factors are hiring decisions in this field based on?
- What personality traits/ characters are valued by employers in this field?
- What are the typical entry-level positions?
- What are typical entry-level salaries?
- What professional associations are connected to this field?
- How does one find out about job openings?
- In which regions are the best opportunities for employment?

The Nature of the Work

- What are the typical responsibilities of workers in this occupation?
- What is an average day on the job like?
- What is the typical work environment like?
- What are the major frustrations in this line of work?
- What are the greatest rewards in this field?
- Are there many opportunities to work independently?
- Will it be necessary to supervise other workers?

Lifestyle Considerations

- Is travel or relocation common in this field?
- How much flexibility is there regarding dress, hours, vacation, etc.?
- Is evening or weekend work often required?

Future Considerations

- What are the opportunities for in-service training/professional development?

- What are the opportunities for advancement within this field?
- What is the employment outlook for the field?
- What is the income potential for this field?

In Closing

- What other resources/people can I consult for more information?

Informational Interviews: Networking

Prior to the informational interview, ask yourself the following:

- What are your greatest accomplishments? What are the skills you used, how these skills would serve you in the workplace?
- What interests you professionally and personally? What courses and activities do you enjoy? What courses or activities do you not want to revisit?
- What are your values? Are you looking to help others? Do you need to be in a creative environment? Do you prefer to work on a team or independently? Is the main drive salary?

As you prepare to meet with an employer/contact, be sure you secure answers to the questions above. Write down your questions for the meeting, regardless of how simple they may seem

Before you go for the informational interview do the following:

- Research the career field to the best of your ability and have specific questions written down. Understand how your abilities, skills and values fit with this particular field.
- Bring a few copies of your resume, on bond paper, so your contact will have a clear picture of your experience, should the opportunity present itself. You may be asked to leave a copy for a fellow colleague.
- Dress professionally, if it is a corporate setting, business attire is may be most appropriate. If it is a creative business environment wear, a simple "business casual" outfit. You can only make a first impression once, even if YOU aren't being interviewed.

Questions to ask at the informational interview:

- General questions related to the field of work - job availability, employment outlook, what skills are needed, how does one break into the field?
- Employer specific questions - what types of services are provided, what areas of the company seem to have the most growth potential, are there training programs offered?
- Specific questions for your contact person- what does someone with your specific job do, what has been your career path, are there other related fields to look into?
- Office Culture and Organizational questions - what type of atmosphere is this organization-formal or more casual, what values are most treasured, what is the employers vision or mission statement?
- Ask for referrals to others in similar fields, or organizations.

Within 24 hours of your meeting write a [Thank You Letter](#) to the interviewer. Let them know you appreciate their time, and remind them of one or two topics that you discussed in the informational interview. If they gave you a name of another contact, thank them and let them know later what happens with that connection.