

Informational Interviewing

An informational interview is a meeting that you arrange with a person who currently does the job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge of an occupation or career field of interest. This person will usually be able to provide up-to-date information on his/her occupation and industry trends, and may be able to direct you to the person who has hiring power within the organization. An informational interview is a low stress situation where you have the opportunity to gather the data you need to make a realistic career choice while gaining advice on how to conduct your job search.



How An Informational Interview Can Help You

- Informational interviewing allows you to collect information on a particular position, industry, or company. It helps you focus your career choice and job search.
- You can discover the skill sets that are required for certain jobs and match them with your own abilities and strengths.
- Finding out how people feel about their work or the culture of their company can help you to assess whether a similar position would be right for you.
- Informational interviewing can give you a competitive edge in an interview by providing you with an understanding of current issues and knowledge that you can use in an actual interview.
- The professionals with whom you interview can serve as valuable job contacts in the future. By asking for names of those who are doing similar work, you can begin to establish a list of professional resources, which you can use to develop your network of contacts.
- You will develop self-confidence in the art of interviewing, while learning the process of taking comfortable, assertive control in job hunting and interview settings.

Whom Should You Contact?

Identifying whom to contact is often a difficult step in the job search process. Look for people who:

- Work in settings you like (i.e. hospitals, politics, big business, airlines, etc.)
- Work in careers of interest to you (i.e. counseling psychologist, market researcher, criminal lawyer, etc.)
- Work in specific organizations that interest you (State Street, Citi Group, Gold Bank, etc.)

- Talk with business colleagues, friends, family, neighbors, faculty, Career Services Staff (anyone you know...see the handout on Networking for more details), and ask them if they know anyone who can help you find information about the career field or position in which you are interested.
- Remember, people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. In fact, you may have ideas that would be of interest to them. Be prepared so you do not waste their time or yours.



Be Prepared

Before you contact anyone to request an informational interview, know exactly what kind of information you want. Generally, don't ask for routine information that is readily available somewhere else. First, check out the materials at the Career Development Resource Center. Know your own interests, skills and values, and be ready to describe them if asked.

Phone calls are the best ways to schedule interviews; letters seldom work unless they include a personal referral and follow-up by telephone.

Prepare a general outline of what you want to say to the person when you call them. If someone has personally referred you to this contact, mention him/her when you introduce yourself.

Be prepared to answer questions about what type of information you are seeking in case they want to talk more in-depth over the phone.

Here are some examples of how to make the initial contact:

"Hello, my name is _____. Jill Banes suggested that I call you. I am considering a career in urban planning (or 'working with children' or 'in a hospital setting') and would be interested in any information or advice you could share with me. Could we set up a time, for about 20 minutes, to talk about this?"

-or-

"Ms. Darcy, I am _____, a former pilot. I am very interested in the oil and gas industry, but need more specific information about it. I understand from your personnel director that you are an expert in the areas of oil and gas land lease contract negotiation. I would be interested in your personal perspective about careers in the oil and gas industry. Could we arrange an appointment time next week?"

Informational Interview Tips

- Have an agenda for the meeting, including a list of questions. Be prepared to ask questions and take the initiative. Seek information, ideas, advice, feedback, and referrals to other contacts.
- Be open to suggestions or a new way of looking at things-the informational interview may help you to reevaluate, refocus and discover new opportunities.
- Make your contact aware of your objectives and background.
- Keep in mind that the purpose of the meeting is not to ask for a job. Your purpose is to gain information from your contact - not to sell yourself.
- Arrive early and dress for an interview. Make a lasting impression by being punctual, professional and properly attired.
- Informational meetings sometimes develop into job interviews. Be sensitive to your contact's actions and words, and be prepared to answer questions about yourself. Bring a resume with you, just in case.
- Bring a notepad and, if it seems appropriate, jot down notes during the meeting or immediately following while your memory is fresh.
- At the appropriate time, near the end of the interview, ask if the person can suggest someone else you might contact. This could be someone at the same firm or someone at another company. The next person will be more receptive, if you have been referred by a colleague.
- Remain sensitive to your contact's time constraints.
- Get a business card so that you have a name, title, and address for follow-up.
- If you schedule a phone interview instead of a face-to-face informational interview, be sure to call back at the appointed time. Be well prepared. The conversation should not last longer than 15 minutes unless the individual chooses to extend the conversation.

Follow-Up

Follow-up is imperative! A successful meeting can quickly turn unsuccessful if you do not follow-up.

- Send a thank you note regardless of whether or not the interview was helpful. In your note, reiterate information that you found particularly interesting or helpful.
- Send the thank you note the same day as the meeting or the next day. It shows that you are conscientious and professional when you send a note immediately following an interview.

At a later date, you may want to send a letter expressing interest in employment. If so, you can mention your informational interview in your cover letter. Keep a copy of your thank you note, along with a record of names, dates, comments and referrals. The copy of the thank you note will help you maintain a record of your contacts for future use.



Informational Questions



You may want to include some of the following questions in your informational interview.

- What functions are performed by the industry you work in, and what functions does your firm perform within your industry?
- What are your responsibilities? Whom do you supervise and to whom do you report?
- What is your typical day and week like?
- How is your time divided between working with people, data and things?
- How much of your time is spent writing, reading, telephoning, reporting, researching, supervising others, etc.?
- How many hours do you work each week?
- What are the toughest decision and problems which you must handle?
- What skills and talents are especially useful and necessary for this position?
- What type of educational degrees and licenses, if any, are required of someone who presently wishes to enter a position such as your own?
- What would you recommend are the best places for someone to get training for this field?
- Could you give me some rough estimates of annual salary levels that are presently being paid in your field for starting salary and top of the ladder?
- How fast can one get to the top of the ladder in this industry or in your company?
- How did you get to where you are now?
- How secure is employment in your career field in general?
- How much work-related travel is generally associated with your type of work? Do the travel obligations diminish or increase as your career progresses?
- Are there certain times of the year in your career field that are much busier than other times?
- How much work, if any, do you bring home each day or week?
- In your estimation, what are the skills and personality traits that are most likely to generate success and fulfillment in your field?
- In your estimation, how good are the future career opportunities within your field? Do you foresee any big changes or developments occurring in the future?
- At present, is there an oversupply or undersupply of people entering your field?
- Could you give me the names and phone numbers of some other people whom you know are working in a field similar to yours?
- May I call you if I have other questions?