

Informational Interviews

What is an informational interview?

An informational interview gives you the opportunity to talk to a person currently working in your field of interest, and to gain a better understanding of the industry and career field.

Why is it important?

- Allows you to explore careers
- Brings focus to your personal career goals
- Identifies current market trends in the industry
- Builds your network of contacts
- Allows you to practice your interview skills
- Strengthens your communication skills and increases your confidence!

Where to Start

Identify an occupation

- Come up with one or more occupations you would be interested in within your chosen career field
- Take into consideration your interests, skills and abilities
- Find out all you can about the industry before you interview
- Decide what information you hope to gain by conducting the interview
- Make a list of potential people to interview
 - o Start with people you know – your existing network
 - o Check into professional organizations
 - o Look in the yellow pages, on the internet, etc.
 - o Research top companies in your area of interest
 - o Visit Career Services!

Contact the company/companies of interest; typically you will start with the Human Resources Department.

- Introduce yourself and the reason for your call
- Narrow down your career area of focus so that you have a department and/or job titles in mind to better help HR with your placement
- Most companies are very familiar with informational interviewing, but some do not offer them. If they do not offer them, politely thank them for their time and move to the next contact.

If you are contacting someone you already know or have been referred to by a mutual friend/acquaintance, introduce yourself and explain the reason for your call. Then ask if they would be willing to meet with you and if there is a time that is convenient for them.

Tips to Consider

- Do as much research before the interview as possible
- Confirm your appointment
- Remember: you aren't asking for a job!
- Prepare a list of questions to ask them



- Dress appropriately
- Treat this as you would a job interview – prepare and behave in the same professional manner
- Always send a thank you note after the interview
- Try to keep in contact with this person and add them to your professional network

Questions to ask in an Information Interview

Below are some sample questions that could be used in an informational interview. Be sure to prepare a list of questions ahead of time. Try to customize your questions to what you hope to learn during the interview, as well as to the company/individual in which you are interviewing.

You may bring a portfolio/briefcase with you to the interview and have your questions with you. You may also take notes during the meeting, but do so in a professional manner. You may also want to have some open ended questions, or offer them the opportunity to openly share about the company, their position, etc. If you are interested you may also ask if it would be possible to take a tour or set-up a tour at another time.

- What is your job like?
 - A typical day?
 - What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
 - What kinds of problems do you deal with?
 - What kinds of decisions do you make?
 - What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
 - How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- What things did you do before you entered this occupation?
 - Which have been most helpful?
 - What other jobs can you get with the same background?
- What are the various jobs in this field or organization?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- What do you like most about this company?
- Do you find your job exciting or boring? Why?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- Why do customers choose this company?
- Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?



- How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web page, video conferencing, etc.)
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
 - What is the best way to enter this occupation?
 - What are the advancement opportunities?
 - What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What were the keys to your career advancement? How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
- What obligations does your employer place have on you outside of the ordinary work week? What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
 - Are there organizations you are expected to join?
 - Are there other things you are expected to do outside work hours?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What is the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?



- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- How do you think my university's reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How do you think graduation from a private (or public) university is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
- Who is the department head or supervisor for this job? Where do you and your supervisor fit into the organizational structure?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
- Do you have any special word of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- These are my strongest assets (skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits and values): _____. Where would they fit in this field? Where would they be helpful in this organization? Where might they fit in other fields? Where might they be helpful in other organizations?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- [If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate:] Would you mind taking a look at my resume?

The whole interview could be spent finding answers to the dozen or so questions you decide to ask. But as you practice and move further toward your target, questions will probably pop into your head spontaneously based on what you need to know.

Pay careful attention to what's said by the person you interview. Ask questions if something isn't clear. People are often happy to discuss their positions and willing to provide you with a wealth of information.

Try to keep the conversation friendly, brief, and focused on the contact person's job and career field.

Thank them for their time with a follow-up call, email, or note.

