

Informational Interviewing

Why Interview for Information?

- To learn firsthand about what it is like to do a particular kind of work in a particular organization.
- To help you prepare for a job interview by becoming better informed about a specific job and its responsibilities
- To get information about what the opportunities are in a given field or organization.
- To develop contacts in key positions with people who hire or who make recommendations to those who do.
- To find out about jobs and career paths you did not know existed.
- To promote your skills and abilities in a low-threat, open-ended situation.
- To begin to build, or expand, your network of professional contacts.
- To build confidence for your job interviews

Benefits:

- You will gain much confidence after completing several information interviews! Confidence gains are the single most reliable result of information interview, regardless of the student or desired field of work.
- The people you interview will sometimes recommend you to others, thereby obtaining you additional information interviews.
- You will gain valuable information and insights which you need to decide among career or job possibilities.
- You may even hear about some job openings while you are information interviewing, because the word-of-mouth network is always strong, and some people will try to help you with tips about jobs vacancies.

Who to Contact:

Friends, friends of friends, relatives, co-workers of yours or your friends; members of professional associations related to your field; people gleaned from directories of companies, associations, outstanding individuals and alumni; people who are doing work that interests you, who are with an organization that you would like to know more about, who might know someone in any of these other categories; people you admire or respect; people mentioned in the newspaper, magazines or other media; people who would know other leaders in a field, organization or community.

How to Approach Your Contacts

You are in the process of making some decisions about your career, and you want to learn more about the opportunities in a given field for someone with your skills and experience. There is a lot at stake in terms of your future so you want the best information you can get. That is why you would like to meet with this person.

Be prepared for a response such as? "I think our Personnel Director can probably be of more help?" A possible response on your part might be? "I'm sure that would be true if I were just looking for a job. I'd like to talk with you because from what _____ said about you, I could respect your advice and I would like to get your personal perspective."

Your basic question will probably be a variation of: "Here is what I can do. Where do you feel the best opportunities are for someone with my skills and experience?" Additional questions to help you get the information you need are suggested below.

How to Prepare for the Interview

Prior to setting-up informational interviews it is essential that you do some preliminary research on the companies, jobs, professions or industries that interest you. The information you obtain from your research will form the basis for the questions you ask during the interview, and your interviewing contact will be invaluable for supplementing your research with a "real world" perspective.

Guidelines for The Interview

- When you seek an information interview, make it clear that you are not looking for a job. If the person believes you are trying to get a job interview in a sneaky way, he/she will be reluctant to talk with you.
- Do not use the information interview as an opportunity to push your resume onto someone.
- The information interview is an opportunity for a pleasant, informal conversation in which the person acquaints you with his/her field of work and specific job responsibilities. It is also a chance for you to ask for advice about the best ways to enter this field.

The guidelines above may seem obvious, but they are necessary, because sometimes people misuse or even abuse the concept of an information interview. People in the working world are familiar with information interviewing by now, so they expect you to be prepared, respectful of their time, and honest in your intentions. As long as you follow these guidelines, you will have a lot of useful conversations and will make some contacts along the way.

- Get as much information as you can about the field or job from printed materials BEFORE you seek an information interview. Ask only those questions that you have not had answered from printed materials.
- Know the specific questions that you want to ask. Have these questions written down, so you can locate them easily (it is OK to have notes with you).
- You are not asking this person for a job. You are gathering information on which to base some decisions. Make sure friends and relatives understand this.
- Have your first information interviews with people who are easy to contact, either because you know them or because they are easily available. This will help you get accustomed to the process, so that you can approach less familiar people later.
- Always make an appointment; this puts the meeting on a business-like basis and helps eliminate interruptions.
- Do not assume that people will take a lot of time to talk with you. Be respectful of their time.
- Do not bring your resume to the interview unless your contact has agreed in advance to give you feedback on how you are presenting yourself. A resume can make an informational interview suddenly feel like a job interview, which is not what you want. If you want your contact to have a copy of your resume, send one after the interview. This will give you the opportunity to make any appropriate changes in the document based on what you learned during the session.
- Listen attentively. Do not interrupt even when a different question occurs to you while he/she is talking. Ask only those questions which are most important to you.
- Keep your eyes open for clues about what kinds of problems or challenges the organization/industry/career field may have, and how you might present yourself as the solution.
- Towards closure, always ask whom else you should talk with. This is the key to developing more contacts and building your network. Ask for referrals to other people and/or materials that can extend your search for relevant information.
- Always write a thank you note that will help you be remembered. Mention what you talked about, what you learned, or who you are going to see at his/her suggestion. If you are interested in pursuing a job with that person, try to keep the door open to get back in touch.

Suggested Questions

- ◆ In the position you now hold, what do you do on a typical day?
- ◆ What are the most interesting/challenging/frustrating aspects of your job?
- ◆ What part of your work do you consider dull or repetitious, and what percentage of your time do you devote to those activities?
- ◆ What were the jobs you had that led you to this one?
- ◆ How long does it usually take to move from one step to the next in this career path?
- ◆ What is the step above the one you have now?
- ◆ Given your present position and experience, what position do you see yourself in five years from now?
- ◆ What is the top job you can have in this career?
- ◆ Are there other areas of this field in which people in it may be transferred?
- ◆ What are the prerequisites for jobs in this field?
- ◆ Are there any specific courses I might take that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
- ◆ What types of training do companies give to persons entering this field?
- ◆ What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
- ◆ What aspects of a career in this field do you consider particularly good? Particularly bad?
- ◆ What special advice would you give a young person/career changer entering this field?
- ◆ Is there a demand for people in this field?
- ◆ What are the growth prospects for this field in the future?
- ◆ What other fields or jobs would you suggest I find out more about before I make a final decision?
- ◆ How do you see the jobs in this field changing over the next two years? What can I do to prepare myself for such changes?
- ◆ What is the best way to obtain a position that will start me on a career in this field?
- ◆ Do you have information on job specifications and descriptions that I may have?