



CAREER SERVICES / INFORMATION INTERVIEW

What are Informational Interviews?

- The informational interview is a form of networking and the job seeker's equivalent of market research.
- Informational interviews are NOT job interviews! Job interviews are formal meetings for the purpose of evaluating and screening job applicants. Generally, the purpose of networking used in the context of the job search is to ask for information, not a job.
- Informational interviews can be planned or unplanned and can occur at conferences, meetings of professional associations, social events, in one-on-one meetings at your contact's workplace or while stranded in an airport

Why Conduct Informational Interviews?

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to expand your professional network
- to practice articulating your goals and interests
- to build confidence for future job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to develop greater understanding of a profession or field
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- to obtain critical feedback on your resume/job-search goals

You gain invaluable interviewing experience and you gain visibility. In short, informational interviewing prepares you for what's in store and allows you the opportunity to network with others in your field of interest. Talking with family, friends or anyone with whom you feel comfortable should reduce the anxiety you may feel about interviewing.

Before the Meeting

Conduct Some Research

For an informational interview to be truly effective, you can't just go into it blindly. Thorough company research is an absolute necessity when you go on a regular job interview. You don't have to do quite as much research for an informational interview, but some degree of research will greatly enhance the quality of informational interviews.

If you are informed about the company, you'll be able to ask more intelligent and relevant questions. You'll respond thoughtfully to information and any questions the interviewee might put to you. You won't ask questions that could easily have been answered by doing your homework.

Set Up the Meeting

- You can phone your contact directly, send an email asking for a meeting, request a conversation via LinkedIn messaging, or write a letter
- Information meetings are far more effective when conducted in person rather than over the phone or by email
- Phone meetings are necessary in long distance job searches, or when asking for a referral to someone more appropriate

Phone Dialogue to Ask for a Meeting

Perhaps write your own script ahead of time to help you feel more comfortable and in control of the situation:

Sample Telephone Script: Requesting an Informational Interview

Hello. My name is Jane Sample and I'm a student at Colorado Mountain College. Is this a good time for you to talk briefly? I heard you speak at an event sponsored by my department last semester. Although I am not currently looking for a job, I have become very interested in field of marketing and would like to find out as much as I can about careers in this area. Would it be possible to schedule 20 to 30 minutes with you at your convenience to ask you a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field?

Sending Email or Writing a Letter to Ask for a Meeting

The process is the same through email or a letter, but it's helpful to follow up with a phone call. It is usually best not to enclose a resume with a letter or email message, as it looks like you are applying for a job. Describe your experience in your note in a brief, natural way.

During the Meeting

General Guidelines

- Dress neatly and appropriately, as you would for a job interview.
- Arrive on time or a few minutes early.
- Restate that your objective is to get information and advice, not a job.
- Give a brief overview of yourself and your education and/or work background.
- Be prepared to direct the interview, but also let the conversation flow naturally, and encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking.
- Listen well and show genuine interest in what the person has to say.
- Take notes if you'd like.
- Respect the person's time. Keep the appointment length within the time span that you requested.
- Ask the person if you may contact him or her again in the future with other questions.

Special Note: You can bring a resume, but don't take it out right away or lead with questions about it or your interviewee may think you're actually fishing for a job opportunity. You may wish to ask for input about it at some point in the interview, but first make sure you've established a comfortable rapport with the person.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

See the Addendum document at the end: *Good Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview*

Ask for Referrals

"You've been very generous with your time, and you've given me several new ideas to explore. I have a final request. The jobs you thought might be appropriate for someone with my skills and background sound interesting, and I'd like to find out more about these possibilities. Do you know anyone in these kinds of jobs who would be willing, like yourself, to provide me with additional advice and information?"

OR

"Do you know anyone in (market research) at (ABC Company) who could give me advice or would be willing to share their knowledge and give me ideas for additional contacts?"

Say Thank You

"Thanks again for taking the time to talk with me. I've enjoyed our meeting it's useful to hear about your experience. I will let you know how I'm doing." Or "This meeting has been so helpful; may I contact you in a few months when I have progressed further in my search?" Then ask for their business card.

After the Meeting

Keep Records

Right after the interview write down what you learned, what more you'd like to know and your reactions in terms of how this industry, field or position would "fit" with your lifestyle, interests, skills and future career plans. It's important that you do this while the information is fresh in your mind.

Say Thank You Again

Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given. Based on whether the informational interview was relatively informal or more businesslike, this may be a brief handwritten note, an email, or a business letter.

Keep In Touch

Those who have assisted others enjoy hearing how things have worked out, especially if the interaction was particularly positive. Over time, let him or her know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result. This relationship could become an important part of your network.

Repeat Many Times Over!

The more conversations you can have over time to support your career exploration, understanding and goals, the better. This guide is designed to help you get comfortable with the formal "ask" with those you don't know. Once you do this once or twice, it will feel more natural. Keep in mind you may encounter opportunities for impromptu informational conversations as well. These are *just* as valuable. Just be ready to make the most of the moment! Be genuine, curious, and respectful. The conversation will take its natural course.

Addendum: Questions To Ask During An Informational Interview

Select questions that are appropriate for your target career field and stage of decision-making. You can ask about such topics as the nature of a person's work, how to get started in the field, or effective approaches for the job search. Use some of the following questions or make up your own.

- What are your main responsibilities as a...?
- What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What do you like least about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- How does your position fit within the organization/career field/industry?
- How does your job affect your general lifestyle?
- What current issues and trends in the field should I know about/be aware of?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
- What related fields do you think I should consider looking into?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- How did you begin your career?
- How do most people get into this field? What are common entry-level jobs?
- What steps would you recommend I take to prepare to enter this field?
- How relevant to your work is your undergraduate major?
- What kind of education, training, or background does your job require?
- What skills, abilities, and personal attributes are essential to success in your job/this field?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?
- Can you recommend trade journals, magazines or professional associations which would be helpful for my professional development?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?
- I've read that the entry-level salary range for this field is usually in the range of _____? Does this fit with what you've seen? (Don't ask about the person's actual salary.)
- What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?