

Exploring your Career Interests through Informational Interviewing

What is an informational Interview?

An informational interview is not a job interview. Instead it is a stress free way to gather information on an interested career by connecting with professionals in the field and gaining insight from those conversations. Informational interviews are a great way to build and expand your professional network, learn more about your chosen field, and clarify your career goals.

Finding People to Informational Interview

You may be wondering, “Who can I informationally interview?” First consider people you may already know; family, friends, classmates, former or current coworkers. If you don’t know anyone in the field be creative.

Here are additional ideas when searching for contacts:

(Remember the worst they can say is no, so don’t be afraid to ask.)

- Faculty members- who may know potential contacts for you to meet with
- Professional organizations- many of which have student members
- Companies/Organizations in your community- send an email, call, stop by and see if someone would be willing to meet with you

Contacting the Person for an Informational Interview

You can do so either by email or phone. Keep in mind most people are busy so you want to keep your email/phone brief and to the point.

You will want to:

- Explain who you are
- Why you are contacting them
- How you found their name
- Give brief description of your work/education history
- Why you’re interested in speaking with him/her
- Request a 20-30 minute meeting to get information and advice
- Make sure your correspondence is error free

Preparing for Your Meeting

It’s important that you arrive prepared and professional. Below are some tips to help get you ready.

- Research the individual – you can do so through LinkedIn or their organizations website.
- Prepare written list of questions in advance
- Keep in mind your goals for the meeting are to get to information and advice you can’t find online. Being well-informed about the person and his/her field shows respect. You don’t want to waste either of your time.

Questions for your Informational Interview

Job Content

- Could you describe a typical work day or week?
- What part of your job do you find most satisfying/challenging?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this job?

Career Path

- What is the typical career path for this field?
- What steps did you take to get your job?
- Can you tell me about entry level opportunities in this field?

Preparation

- What advice would you give to someone who's interested in starting out in this field?
- Do you have any special words of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- Are there any professional associations I should join?
- Are there any job hunting strategies that you would suggest to enter this field?

Next Steps

- Is there anyone else you can recommend I speak with for additional information?
- Would you mind if I sent you my resume to review?

The Meeting

- Restate your objective and give a brief overview of yourself (education and work)
- Dress for success- you always want to look and act professional. You never know if they could be a potential employer or refer you for a position.
- Arrive on time
- Show interest and enthusiasm
- Bring a resume, but present only if asked
- Keep track of the time
- Take notes
- Before leaving ask for a business card and ask if they can refer you to anyone else for you to speak with.

Steps after the Interview

- Write a thank you note/email within 24 hours – express your appreciation for the information you received and mention one or two points that you learned
- Try to stay in touch with your contacts every few months by sending a friendly email. Remember these contacts could help you with employment.