

Informational Interviewing

A beneficial method of exploring career options and networking

What Is It?

Good career decisions result from having good background information regarding your field of interest. Valuable career information can be gathered by talking with working professionals in occupational fields you are interested in. Conducting informational interviews is a great way to gather information about a particular industry or occupation. Although it is not asking for a job, it is a great networking opportunity. The following suggestions will enable you to successfully identify, contact, and interview these individuals.

Where and How to Begin

- Connect with friends, family members, professors, alumni, and counselors who may be able to suggest contacts.
- Search for professionals in your industry on LinkedIn.
- Contact company division heads and/or professionals employed in specific occupations in which you are interested.
- Interview as many people as you can to gather helpful information.
- Ask for an interview by saying something like: "Hello, my name is _____.
I am currently a (educational/occupational status). I have experience working in/as _____ which sparked my interest in pursuing (desired field). I am very much interested in having the opportunity to sit down with you to discuss what you do and the field in general."
- Arrange a mutually convenient time for an informational interview by calling or emailing the individual.
- Research the person and company/organization to get more familiar with the industry before your interview.

Additional Suggestions

- Be organized with your questions and prepared to take notes.
- Your positive, enthusiastic attitude will create a good impression. People are more apt to help others after they get to know them on a more personal basis — this is a great way to get referrals and begin the networking process.
- Be conscious of time constraints.
- Dress and act professionally.

Suggested Questions to Ask

1. How did you get into this field?
2. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you find to be the most difficult aspect?
3. What is a typical day like?
4. How many hours per week do you work? Is travel required?
5. What salary range could I expect to make in this field?
6. How would you describe the company culture?
7. How is this field growing or changing? Do you see any trends?
8. What kind of individual (in terms of talent/personality) would be best suited for this kind of job?
9. Do you recommend any professional associations, conferences, or journals I should keep up with?
10. What do new professionals need in terms of training and education?
11. What advice would you give on how to apply for and find a job in this field?
12. Are there any other jobs that are similar to yours but with different job titles?
13. Who do you know that I might benefit from talking with?

Follow Up

- Write a thank-you note, which may be hand-written or typed. You may wish to enclose a resume, matching the information gathered from the interview with your experiences and background.
- Make sure your contact information includes your name, address, and phone number.
- Stay in touch with your contacts, update them periodically on your status, and inquire if they have heard of any new opportunities.

Evaluate

Whether the informational interview was successful or not, assess how well it went. Look for what went well and how you can improve for your next interview. Feel free to discuss the interview with a career counselor. Ask yourself a few questions, such as:

- Would I be qualified for his/her job?
- Do I understand what the job entails?
- Would I enjoy working in this field/with this company?
- Did I get additional ideas for alternatives?
- Do I have an idea about what my salary might be?
- What impression (positive or negative) do I now have about this area of work?