

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational Interviews involve talking to people about their work. They are a very effective way to gather useful information about a career or job that interests you from the most informative and reliable source there is: someone who is actually doing the job. To get comfortable with the idea of interviewing people, you may want to start by interviewing friends, family members, or anyone you know well. This will help you minimize some of your anxiety about interviewing.

### What Is An Informational Interview?

It's an informal but structured conversation between you and someone who is doing the kind of work you are interested in and want to learn more about. It is a great way to do career research. Informational interviews are usually done in person, at the convenience of the person being interviewed, ideally at their place of work (a picture really IS worth a thousand words).

### Why Do An Informational Interview?

1. To find out more about a job that interests you.
2. To build a network of contacts that can help you locate the job you want.
3. To develop your skill and confidence for job interviews.
4. To become a more impressive job candidate because you have done your homework.
5. To find out about jobs and career paths you didn't know existed.
6. To deepen your understanding of the world of work in a variety of settings.
7. To have first-hand, current information.
8. To learn to mentally connect talking to strangers about jobs as a low stress experience, enhancing your job-related communication skills.
9. To give potential employers a chance to meet you at your best, without the pressure and anxiety of an employment interview.
10. To clarify your goals and re-define them each time you get more information.
11. To have an opportunity to overcome shyness or inhibition about talking to people.
12. To put your career into your schedule and make it a #1 priority.
13. To find out what motivates you and to find out what you can live with or compromise on.
14. To improve your listening, communication, and social skills.
15. To build pride in yourself for doing something hard, i.e. contacting strangers and asking for their time.
16. To learn a skill that will serve you well throughout your entire life.
17. Everyone you establish a contact with will also be in a position to be looking for a job for you. If you make a good impression (on time, well-dressed, prepared and organized, asking thoughtful questions), thank them, communicate clearly about your abilities and goals, and stay in contact with them, you will make your job search more efficient and productive. And, believe it or not, more enjoyable!

## HOW TO DO A SUCCESSFUL INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

### Initial Contact (usually by phone)

1. Introduce yourself and mention the name of the person (if any) who referred you.
2. Explain that you're doing some research about work that interests you so you can decide if this field is a good fit for you. You are talking to knowledgeable people, experts in the field, to learn the details about this kind of work and the companies where it is done.
3. Say you would like very much to meet for a brief interview, about 15 to 20 minutes MAX, at their convenience some time in the next few days.
4. **Be sure to clarify that you are not interviewing them for a job, you are not looking for work, that you only want to gather information to help you make an informed decision.**

### The Interview

1. Know beforehand what you want to ask. Take a note pad with questions written down with space in between to write important points from their responses. Some sample questions are presented below, but these are only suggestions. Be sure to think of other questions that are targeted specifically toward your interests and needs, toward what YOU want to know. In the interview, ask the questions in your own words--it will make you feel and seem more relaxed and genuine.
2. Be brief and to the point and **respect your interviewee's time!** You've made a contract for 15-20 minutes, MAX. At precisely 20 minutes, no matter how well the interview is going, remind your interviewee of your commitment to take no more than 20 minutes of their time and be prepared to leave. By reminding them of your commitment, and your willingness to hold to it, you make a very powerful statement about your integrity (and manners). In the VAST majority of cases, your interviewee will suggest that you continue but if they "allow" you to leave, by all means do so after thanking them for their time.

### Follow-up

1. Write up your notes and ideas gained from the interview.
2. Write a brief thank you note, using the sample provided or one of your own. Say in your own words that you appreciate the person taking time to talk with you and that you enjoyed and found the interview very helpful. Try to state at least one specific piece of information that you learned or found helpful. Make sure to include your name, address, phone number, and/or e-mail so that s/he can contact you in the future. *Be sure to have the thank you note in the mail not later than 24 hours after the interview.*

Remember that Informational Interviews are great opportunities to meet people who may be powerful contacts for you in the future. Make a good impression and try to relax and enjoy the process along the way!

## QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

### **I. Job Duties & Responsibilities**

- What's a typical day like for you?
- To whom do you report? How are you evaluated?
- What gives you the most trouble? What part of your job do you dislike the most?
- What do you like most about your job?

### **II. Skills, Experience, and/or Training Necessary for Entry**

- How did you get into this line of work? If you had it to do over, and knowing what you know now, what would you do to enter this field?
- If you were in my position, what would you do to get into this field?
- What are the best training sites (if applicable)? Best networking sites?

### **III. Needs and Values (company climate, setting, physical/mental demands, etc.)**

- What do people in this field value and reward?
- Is there a specific "culture" that people in this field tend to adhere to? Is there a specific "type" of person that's drawn to or who succeeds in this field? (fast pace, being of service/philanthropy, cutthroat and competitive, world peace and/or environmental concerns, etc.)
- Close supervision? Autonomy? Work alone? Work in teams? Specifics?
- Rate the level of stress in this work on a scale of 1 to 10. Please give some specific examples of the kinds of stress. How often do they occur? How would you describe the pace?
- What are the requirements for using your memory in this work? Specific examples?
- Do you lift more than \_\_\_\_\_ pounds on this job? If so, how often? Is help available?
- Do you use your hands and/or wrists a lot in this work? Specific examples?

### **IV. Employment**

- Describe the employment climate in this field? Growing? Shrinking? Trends?
- What is the turnover rate in this field? Is hiring seasonal? If so, when?
- What's the best way to get hired in this field? (recruiters, want ads, internet job boards, networking/social media [and specific sites], cold calling, trade associations, other)
- How did you get your job? If you were me, how would you go about getting hired?
- Any current openings with your company? (but be VERY sensitive/cautious about how you ask this – do not request an informational interview and then flip it into an employment interview)
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### **V. Compensation**

- Salary ranges? (asking about "ranges" gives you and your interviewee some comfort room) Entry level? Potential (and time to reach it)? Overtime?
- Benefits? (medical, dental, child care, family leave, comp time, stock options, tuition, car, other)
- Job sharing? Telecommuting? Other hybrids?

### **VI. Ending**

- Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't? Anything we missed?
- Is there anyone else you'd recommend that I talk to? If so, may I mention your name?

## TELEPHONE REQUEST FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

It may seem hard to make a phone call to a stranger. Below is a sample script. In the very beginning of the call, within the first minute, it's important to clearly state your name and your purpose. Remember, you are asking for a meeting only to gather information, not to look for a job.

"Hello, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (*Name of referrer*) referred me to you as a good person to ask about (*job you are researching*) since I'm gathering information about careers. I'm wondering if you would be willing to have a brief meeting to ask you a few questions about your work so I can decide if this would be a good fit for me. I promise not to take more than 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

## FOLLOW-UP TO AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

1. Keep a detailed follow-up sheet for each informational interview. Be sure to record:

Date of interview	Company name
Name and title of contact	Company address
Phone/cell/e-mail	Name of secretary/assistant
Topics discussed	Unique information or insights
Suggestions for other jobs	Other contacts/leads (w/ name, title, company, phone, etc.)
Permission to use contact's name?	Date thank you note sent

2. Follow-up every informational interview with a thank you note within 24 hours. Some say it is best to handwrite thank you notes, while others feel all business correspondence should be typed. Example:

Date

Name of contact and title

Company name

Company address

City, State, Zip code

Dear Contact:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today to talk about (*name of company*) and the (*field or job you are researching*). The information you gave me will be very useful in helping me decide whether this is the right field for me. In particular, I found the information you gave me about (*subject matter*) to be very interesting and helpful because (*elaborate BRIEFLY*).

Thank you again for your time and effort in helping me with my career exploration. I'd like to keep you posted about my progress and would also appreciate a contact if you think of anything or anyone that might be of help.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your contact info (address, telephone, email address)

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