



Career Services

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

DEFINITION

Informational interviews are conversations with particular individuals about their work in the programs, jobs, or organizations in which you are interested. An informational interview is the most valuable sources of occupational information because it presents opportunities for an intimate and flexible inside view of a job field unmatched by other sources.

PURPOSE

- To gather factual career-related information and advice about an organization, job, and related professional concerns that are not available from written sources.
- To check your understanding in the particular job and organization.
- To learn the professional vocabularies or technical terms of the particular job.
- To create contacts and build relationships with people in your career field.
- To gain experience and self-confidence to present yourself more effectively in future job interviews.
- To explore your thoughts and ideas from professionals' experience and expertise.
- To obtain other referrals in your interested career.

RESOURCES

- Individuals who share a common academic major or interest, enthusiasm, or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you.
- Individuals who work in a setting you would like to pursue.
- Individuals who work in career areas in which you are interested.
- Individuals who work in specific jobs in specific organizations.

PREPARATION

Unlike job interviews, informational interviews provide a non-threatening forum in which to practice interactions in a professional setting. Thus, preparation for informational interview is important. Suggestions for preparation before conducting informational interview are:

- Search general information about the job that you are going to conduct an informational interview.
- Develop a set of questions that helps you gather important information about this job.
- Dress professionally as if it were an actual job interview.
- Bring copies of your resume with you to share with the individual if asked, or to seek suggestions to improve your resume.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early before an appointment.

STRATEGIES FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- Stress at the beginning that you are only seeking career information, not a job.
- Listen attentively and gear your questions to the flow of conversation, without losing track of the time and your specific goals.
- Be respectful of individuals you interview.
- Always send a thank you letter to interviewee.
- Stay within time limits, unless the interviewee indicates otherwise.

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FOLLOW-UP

After an informational interview, write or type a brief thank you letter to the person for spending time with you. Not only will this demonstrate gratitude, but this will also leave a positive impression. Also, it is important for you to evaluate your experience and synthesize the knowledge and information from the informational interview in order to obtain new thoughts and ideas about that career.

QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Preparing questions will help you build a detailed picture of the particular career as it relates to work environment, qualifications, industry trends, career path, lifestyle, typical compensation, challenges, and rewards. Here are sample questions that you may consider for an informational interview:

- How did you get started in this career?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
- What skills are necessary for a successful career in this field?
- What percentage of your day is spent dealing with people? What percentage of your day is spent dealing with paper?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying?
- What part of this job do you personally find most challenging?
- What do you like and not like about working in this field?
- What do you know now that you wish you would have known before you entered this field?
- What do you think about the company's future and your future in this job or organization?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What were the keys to your career advancement?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- What professional publications do you read and why?
- Could you suggest other people who may be helpful to me in gathering information about this field/location?
- What advice would you give a person in my situation who wanted to enter your profession?

GETTING STARTED

- Ask friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, former employers, or anyone you know for an informational interview or for a referral.
- Contact faculty or Career Services to find alumni and other individuals willing to speak with you. Career Services also has the names of many employer contacts.
- Contact community service agencies, trade, and professional organizations or visit their web sites.
- Scan the Yellow Pages, articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals.
- Attend local, state, or regional conferences of professional associations in your career area.