



Conducting Informational Interviews

Informational Interviewing

Informational Interviews are a great source for gathering information about an occupation or an industry in which you are currently interested. An informational interview is an interview that **you** initiate - you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

Informational interviewing can be utilized to

- Gain first-hand knowledge of an occupation from professionals currently working in an area of interest to you
- Learn about the nature of work in that particular occupation
- Determine a fit between your personality, interests, skills, and values in relation to a specific occupation
- Define career goals more clearly and identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- Obtain information about specific companies
- Improve job interviewing skills and build confidence
- Expand your professional network

Steps to follow to conduct an informational interviewing

Step 1: Determining the purpose of the interview

The purpose is the foundation of the interview. In determining the purpose of the interview, you may want to have a clear idea of why you're conducting the interview and what you plan to do with the information. It may help you to identify the occupation or industry you wish to learn about.

Step 2: Preparing for the Interview

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. This will allow you to develop relevant and thoughtful questions. Having a solid base of knowledge about the topic will also enhance your credibility with interviewees. To learn more about an occupation you can access organizational public information such as annual reports, public relation materials or visit their web sites. You can also visit the Career Connection web site or stop by our library located in the Younkin Success Center (2nd floor).

Step 3: Identifying People to Interview

Start with lists of people you already know - friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc... Professional organizations, the yellow pages, organizational directories, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title. In choosing interviewees, you need to ask three questions: Does the person have the information I need? Is the person available for an interview? Will the person provide me with the information I need?

Step 4: Arranging the Interview

Contact the person to set up an interview: by telephone, e-mail, by a cover letter followed by a telephone call, or by having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you. Arrange the time, projected length, and place to meet.

Step 5: Conducting the Interview

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. You can take notes if in need. Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts. Never leave a resume during an informational interview – this would violate your invitation. You can always send a resume, if requested.

Step 6: Following Up

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you letter or note to your contact within one week of the interview.

Possible Questions to Ask your Contact

In the information interview, you want to ask questions that will elicit the information you need. Carefully-worded questions can motivate interviews to answer freely, accurately, and thoughtfully. Most important develop your own list of questions for your informational interview. Following are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
5. How did you get your job?
6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
7. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
8. What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
9. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
12. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
13. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
15. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
16. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
17. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? What would you change?
18. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
19. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

The following sample questions are organized in specific categories to assist you in better preparing for your interview

Occupational Environment

1. How would you outline or describe a “typical day”? (e.g., your routine or the duties you perform)
2. How much flexibility are you allowed on your job in term of dress, hours, vacation job-location, etc?
3. What portion of your job involves interacting with others, such as co-workers and/or the public?

Occupational requirements and Experiences

1. What college courses (requirements, electives) were the most helpful to you in your present career?
2. Is special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job? If so, what?
3. Describe the types of jobs or positions you have had and skills you have developed in them?

Personal Views

1. What was your undergraduate major field of study? Have you always been interested in this area of study?
2. Did you have any practical experiences or training, other than college, prior to your current job?

Outlook

1. What are the opportunities for advancement in this field?
2. What are the current and future demands for people in the occupation?
3. What are the possible salary ranges and benefits for someone in your occupation?

Advice

1. Are there any professional groups I, as a student, can join which would be beneficial to me?
2. Do you know where I can write for further information, such as pamphlets or books about this occupation?
3. Do you know of any other people in this field who might be willing to talk to me about their experiences?
4. How can I get experience in this field while I am still in college?

Always analyze the information you have gathered. Adjust your major and career exploration process or your job search, resume, and career objective if necessary

Occupational Interview: Summary Sheet

Name: _____

Occupation: _____

Interviewee: _____

Place of Employment: _____

1. What did you learn about the occupation from interviewing with this individual?

2. Would you pursue this as a career?