

## What is an informational interview?

Informational interviewing is a common career exploration strategy that allows you to assess interest in careers and “size-up” organizations. Information gained from an interview can be used to promote yourself to a prospective employer, or open the door to future contacts and job possibilities.

Informational interviewing involves contacting professionals in a field of interest to you and requesting a half-hour of their time to discuss their position or career path. **Remember, you are not asking for a job, but are seeking career information.**

To maximize your time during an informational interview, **preparation is critical.** Before the interview, develop a list of questions that reflect your goals for the interview. A list of prepared questions helps you to keep the conversation flowing and can make the whole process a lot less daunting!

This brochure contains a list of sample questions. Choose questions based on your personal values and the areas that are of the greatest importance to you regarding job satisfaction. Use the sample questions as a guide to help you develop 5-6 specific questions. The goal is to have a conversation. You direct it through the questions you ask, so be sure to develop questions about the things that interest you.

After developing your list of questions, prepare to answer questions about yourself that the person you are interviewing may have. **Be prepared to discuss two or three experiences that highlight your personal strengths.** You may want to include information about your background, interests, and goals.

Take this opportunity to promote yourself. Give the interviewee a reason to remember you.

## Benefits of an informational interview

Informational interviewing is a great way to build upon your network. The people that you talk to are connected to various professionals through their workplace, community, and professional organizations. Ask the person you are interviewing if there are other people who they would recommend that you talk with about the field. Check to see if you can mention their name when following up with the contact.

## How to locate a person to interview

You can locate your potential interviewees by utilizing a number of resources. Start with people you know. Ask friends what their parents do. Ask your parents what their friends do. Talk to faculty members and ask if they have contacts you can interview. Ask graduate students in your school about jobs they have held between their undergraduate and graduate schooling. It is always easiest to have a personal contact with someone, but there are other ways to go about finding someone to interview. The Career Center has several employer directories that list companies in different industries—and often personnel within those companies. We also have a course called the Mentor Program that can help you connect with two professionals in the field(s) you are interested in.

## Career Center

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# Informational Interviewing



*Get the information  
you need from someone*

*who really knows...*

*interview the person*

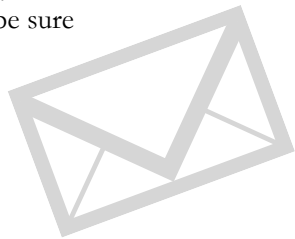
*who has the job you want!*



## Getting in contact with a potential interviewee

There are several ways to contact professionals. You might use a telephone, a letter of introduction sent through the mail, or e-mail. The type of contact you choose depends on a variety of factors, including familiarity with the professional, geographic location, and the professional's daily schedule. Think about how your request will be received. For example, a telephone call can be a quick and easy way to make contact. However, for some busy professionals, it might be a disruption to their day. Regardless of your method, here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Be professional and courteous. Use a formal business format for written correspondence.
- If you have been referred by someone to talk with this professional, be sure to mention your referral source at the beginning of the communication.
- Emphasize the fact that you are interested in gathering information about the career field, organization, or the professional's career path. You want the professional to understand that you are not seeking employment.
- Let the professional know why you are interested in this particular field, company, and career.
- Explain what you hope to learn from the professional.
- Be prepared to discuss your skills, experiences, and interest relating to this career.
- State your desire to arrange a 20-30 minute meeting (either in person or by phone, depending on what is feasible) with the professional.



### Follow Up

- If you haven't heard from the professional for more than a week after your inquiry, it is appropriate to make a follow-up phone call.
- After the interview takes place, **write a thank you note**. Express your appreciation for the professional's time and expertise as well as how they have helped you with your search for information.

### Additional Resources

- Mentor Program: 1-credit Career Center course that connects you with professionals for informational interviewing.
- Career Library: books and information about the informational interviewing process and sample letters of introduction.
- Drop-in Advising and Appointments: see an advisor to discuss your strategy or to review your letter.

## Informational interviewing questions

### Occupational Requirements and Experience

- What skills are necessary to succeed in your field/industry?
- What training, past employment, and experiences led you to or prepared you for this field?
- Is your educational background typical or atypical of your career field?
- What types of special certification, licensing, or advanced degrees are necessary in your field?
- What special qualities do you see as important for success in this occupation?
- If you were in charge of hiring in your field/for your company, what criteria would you use to make your selection?

### Occupational Environment

- Please describe your work environment. What parts are enjoyable? What parts would you wish to change?
- What is a typical day like for you? Describe a typical daily "to do" list.
- What do you like most and least about your job? What is the most stimulating aspect of your position?
- What are the current trends within your industry/field?
- How many hours a week do you work? How much overtime is expected?
- How much flexibility are you allowed on the job in terms of dress, hours, vacation...?

### Organization

- How did you select this organization/company?
- Who do you come into contact with on a regular basis (clients, vendors, volunteers)?
  - How often do you receive feedback from your supervisor?
  - Do you think there are any biases (gender, age, ethnicity, orientation) within your industry/organization?
  - What sort of problems—at the company, division, or department level—do you encounter?
- What kind of meetings do you participate in? How often?
- Who are your company's competitors?

### Advice

- Are there any professional groups or associations that I should belong to?
- Should I obtain any licenses or special training?
- Do you know of any other professionals in this field who might be willing to talk with me?
- What advice can you offer to someone interested in entering your field?
- What's the best method for finding a job in this field?
- Are there any majors or college courses you would recommend?

