

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

One of the best ways to learn about a particular career field is to talk with people in careers you are considering. No one else can give you a better sense of the real life expectations, the challenges/opportunities, and the limitations/potentials of the career field.

When you call for an appointment, make clear your status as a college student and the explicit purpose of your interview. When calling business people, state that you are not looking for a job, but are interested in learning more about their occupational area.

## Benefits of Informational Interviews:

- Discover the “realities” of a particular career field and what it is *really* like to work in a given industry.
- Determine a fit between your personality, interests, skills, and values in relation to a specific occupation.
- Develop confidence in interviewing and meet people in your field in a low risk, non-threatening situation.
- Expand your network of contacts and gain referrals to other contacts for future networking opportunities.
- Find out about career paths you did not know existed.
- Improve your communication skills by talking informally with an interested professional.
- Hear an insider’s opinions of the career field and see the work environment. (Ideally you should conduct the informational interview at their place of employment)
- Gain career-related advice from someone in your field. (Is an advanced degree required? What advice would you have for someone entering this field? What additional skills or courses are attractive to hiring managers?)

## How to Locate Contacts for Informational Interviews:

- Increase your network through people you know formally and informally. Consider the following: parents/siblings, extended family, friends, professors, coaches, advisors, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, neighbors, social networking contacts and contacts from professional organizations.

## Informational Interview Topics:

- Work Environment
- Ideal Skill Set/Qualifications
- Industry Trends
- Career Path of Interviewee
- Lifestyle
- Typical Compensation for Entry Level
- Challenges/Rewards
- Career Ladder of Field
- A Day in the Life
- Advancement

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## Do's and Don'ts for Informational Interviews:

1. DON'T email a contact with a list of questions and expect them to respond to them and for you to receive the same wealth of information as you would in-person or over the phone.
2. DON'T confuse it with a job interview: be clear, honest and unambiguous about your motive or agenda, and stick to the agenda of just getting career information, not fishing for a job opening.
3. DO make an explicit appointment for a short period of time (20 minutes); be on time, and leave on time.
4. DON'T ignore the preparation process. Arrive thoroughly prepared with the questions you want answered. See the list below for sample interview questions.
5. DO talk about (or demonstrate) your skills: know what your strengths are; be articulate, she/he cannot help you effectively if you do not explain (or show) what you can do.
6. DO leave with at least two referrals to other people in the field that you can talk to in the same way.
7. DO take down notes immediately after the interview, recording everything you learned.
8. DO send a thank you note right away and maintain regular contact.
9. DO keep well-organized records of your informational interviewing process.

## Questions to Ask during the Informational Interview

### Education

- What was your undergraduate degree and major? Do you think your choice of major was important to your career path?
- What educational program is recommended as preparation for this job? Distinguish between what is desirable and what is necessary.
- What makes a person most marketable for jobs in this field? For example, should I have certain classes or internships in my background?
- Is it important to pursue a graduate degree to advance in this field? If so, will employers support this pursuit?

### Career Information

- What is your position? With whom do you work? Can you describe your career path?
- What do you do on a typical day? Is there a set routine?
- What are typical entry-level positions in this field?
- What kind of work experience would employers look for in a job applicant? How might a student obtain this work experience? What skills are particularly important?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? How long does it take to move "up the ladder"?
- What are the different work settings in which people in this occupation may be employed?
- What are some related occupations? Are there occupations doing similar work, but at different levels, e.g., assistant, para-professional, or in different areas? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these positions?

### Vision for the Field

- In what ways is this field changing or growing?
- What are major issues affecting the field, your position or your organization?
- How will these changes/issues affect the plans and training of persons interested in a career in your area?
- What advice would you give someone wanting to enter this field?

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## Personal Aspects of the Career

- What are the satisfactions you find in your work? What are the rewards, both tangible and intangible?
- What are some of the dissatisfactions you find in your work? Did your training prepare you for these?
- What are some of your joys and challenges about the setting you work in, its structure, its facilities, the people you work with?
- Does your career permit you to lead the kind of life you would like to live? How does your career affect your style of life—the amount of work required, the amount of time required, your time for leisure, your material needs?

## Information About Your Career

- How do you stay current in your field? Are there associations/organizations or publications that you would recommend?
- Can you suggest others who might be willing to talk with me about their career?

## Questions to Ask Yourself After the Interview:

- What aspects of the job would you like? Dislike? How long could you put up with them?
- How do you feel about working with the kind of people that you have met in this field?
- What is your reaction to the conditions (e.g., stress/anxieties) of this occupation? Could you handle them?
- Do you have (or could you acquire) the skills and personal characteristics necessary for this job?
- Can you meet the educational and other requirements?
- How do you feel about the duties described in relation to the kinds of activities you presently enjoy?
- What projects, volunteer work or internships have you participated in that will help in your career?
- What are your personal goals and ambitions?

Source: University of California, San Diego *Career Services Center*