

career guide

informational interviewing

Informational Interviewing Defined:

The process of talking to people who do what you think you would like to do is called informational interviewing. It is primarily a meeting to get advice and information.

Reasons to Conduct Informational Interviews:

- To investigate and gain insights into a specific career field.
- To learn the terminology and important issues in the field.
- To gain information in the interview that can form the basis for making a career decision.
- To learn from knowledgeable people about how to best prepare for particular careers.
- To develop a new professional contact that could be helpful for you in the future.

Preparation:

- Identify your skills and how they apply to the prospective career field.
- Learn as much as you can about the organization through research - look at websites, annual reports, press releases, etc.
- Have your questions written down.
- Learn about the career in general - look at salary, working conditions, and advancement possibilities.

Typical Questions to Ask During an Informational Interview:

The applicability of these questions may vary from one occupation to another. Similarly, some of the items may be more important to you than others in your own career planning and decision-making.

- What do you do as a ...?
- How do you spend a typical day/week?
- Do you spend most of your time at your desk? Moving around the company? Outside?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kind of decisions do you make?
- What are your major responsibilities?
- What hours do you normally work? Is there much travel involved?
- What is the job title of the person you report to? The titles of people who report to you?
- What do you find most/least satisfying about your job?
- What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
- Would you trace your own career path? Is this typical, and if not, what might a beginner expect today?
- What is the corporate culture of your company? Is it informal or formal? Do people work autonomously or in teams?
- What are some of the different kinds of organizations that employ people in this occupation?
- What skills are most important for this kind of work? Are there other fields in which the same types of skills are used? What might be some related occupations?

What are the educational requirements for this career? Would you recommend graduate or professional school training after college?

What are the "hot issues" in this field?

What trends and developments do you see affecting career opportunities?

What kinds of entry-level jobs or internships do you think are good training ground?

What are the major responsibilities of these positions?

To what degree is there stress/pressure in this field? How could that stress/pressure be described?

What career paths are generally available?

Are you active in any professional organizations? Are students invited to attend? Are student memberships available?

Could you recommend sources for additional information such as special books, trade publications, and professional journals?

Could you share the names of other people who might be able to provide additional information? May I use your name as a referral?

Find Someone to Interview:

Think of all your contacts, then expand your list by speaking to and researching:

friends and family members

contacts made through friends and family

college instructors

previous employers

co-workers

alumni

trade or professional journals

officials of unions and professional organizations

community service agencies

speakers you have heard

career advisors

chambers of commerce

Helpful Hints:

If you have never done an informational interview before, practice with a friend.

Write out a script.

If possible, meet in person rather than by phone.

When making an appointment, if you're a student, say so, and tell the interview subject a variation of the following:

"I am in the process of making some decisions about my career and want to learn more about opportunities in my field for someone with my skills and experience. I was told by _____ that you might be a good person to talk to. May I set up a time to meet with you at your convenience?"

Be prepared for a response suggesting you talk with Human Resources. Let the person know that you are looking for information about careers, not job vacancies.

Be on time, prepared, and dress professionally!

Bring your resume with you.

During the Interview:

Respect the person's time and be prepared to actively participate.

Take notes during the interview, you will want to refer to them later.

It is okay to let your interview subject digress a bit, but make sure your questions are answered.

At the end of the interview, always thank the person for their time and always ask them if they know anyone else you could interview. This is essential to developing your network.

Follow Up After the Interview:

Evaluate your style of interviewing after each meeting. What could you have done differently?

Consider the career information you received from your interview subject. What have you learned?

Always write a thank-you letter. Refer to your conversation, mention what you learned, and share your planned next steps. If you didn't leave a resume at the interview, feel free to include it with your letter.

Keep the door open for further contacts. If the interview subject is on LinkedIn, connect with him or her.

Remember - informational interviewing means gaining valuable knowledge and access. Effective informational interviewing requires more than just making contacts. The process involves leveraging those contacts to build your network as you begin your career search.