

INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

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THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW

What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is an opportunity to gather information on a career, job or industry that interests you. It is also an often-overlooked networking resource that may eventually lead to employment opportunities.

In an informational interview you should be very clear that you are asking for information only. This type of interview has been greatly abused over the years, and some employers may be reluctant to give an informational interview if they feel that you are only trying to get your "foot in the door." Therefore, let the employer know that you are interested in gathering information to research an industry or explore career options.

The Steps in an Informational Interview:

Research

Use the following resources to identify a company in your field of study. These resources can include the following: the Internet, books, the yellow pages, business directories, personal referrals from teachers, counselors, friends, etc. Find out everything you can about the position in which you are interested. Identify if they have a person in the company who is working in the position for which you are interested.

Make the Call

Contact the person you want to interview. If you received the contact name from someone you know, it is a good idea to ask this person to introduce you to the contact or let the contact know you will be calling.

Call the person, explain why you are calling, and ask the person for the informational interview. Ask for 30-60 minutes of time.

Next, prepare a list of questions to ask your contact. Be thorough, including questions about industry trends, pay, education, pluses and minuses about the job, personal observations, and employers to seek and/or avoid.

The Interview

Do not go over the time you have agreed on for this interview! You show respect for the interviewee by adhering to the time limit you established initially.

At the end of the interview, ask if the interviewee has any names and/or numbers of additional people who would be willing to give you an informational interview. If you feel things are going well and your interviewee is receptive to it, ask the interviewee to mention to these people that you will be calling.

Some Suggested Informational Interview Questions:

1. What attracted you to this field?
 - a. What field did you expect and prepare to enter originally?
 - b. When did you begin working in this field?
 - c. What previous career fields have you been in?
2. How would you advise me to better prepare for this kind of work?
 - a. What preparation is necessary to enter the kind of work you are doing now?
 - b. How much education is required for this position?
 - c. What level of education is required to begin working in this field?
 - d. What type of position can a college graduate with little or no experience realistically expect to obtain in this occupation?
 - e. Are there certain courses to take that would be most helpful?
 - f. What work/volunteer experience and/or skills would be advantageous in this occupation?
3. What personal qualities are most important in your occupation?
4. What do you do during a typical workday?
 - a. What are the duties for an entry-level position?
5. What is the long and short-range employment outlook for this occupation?
6. What is the average salary range?
7. What are the greatest rewards of your job?
8. What are the sources of frustration/disappointments or pressure in this occupation?
9. What are the opportunities for promotion/advancement in this field?
10. If your present job were to become obsolete, in what other kinds of jobs could you apply your skills?
11. What are the working conditions? Do you work alone, with a few people, or in a large group?
12. Is there a kind of social life-style or "culture" included with this occupation?
 - a. How does your job affect your lifestyle (dress, leisure time, home life, vacation, social life, etc.)?
13. How do people find out about openings in your line of work?
 - a. Is there a professional association in your career field I could contact for additional information or future opportunities?
14. Other questions I may want to ask (jot these down before your interview).

Follow Up!

At the end of the interview, thank the interviewee for his or her willingness to talk with you and for the valuable information provided. The follow-up process is on-going. First, send your interviewee a thank-you card immediately after you interview them. Next, if the interviewee has agreed to continued contact, keep in contact with this person by calling periodically at agreed-upon dates/times. This takes some effort on your part, but it will pay off. This process transforms your interviewee into a networking contact, and networking is the most successful job search method for job seekers.

Sample Letter Requesting an Informational Interview

