



Informational Interviews

One of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation or an industry is to talk to people working in the field. This process is called *informational* or *research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that **you** initiate and in which you ask the questions. **The purpose is to obtain information**, not to get a job, although it is possible that an internship opportunity or employment could result.

Good Reasons to Conduct Informational Interviews:

- to get first-hand information about a person, profession, or organization
- to explore careers and clarify your career goals
- to discover hidden employment opportunities that may not be advertised
- to initiate contact with professionals in specific career areas and begin developing a network
- to build confidence for your job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information and the needs of employers

Steps to Conduct an Informational Interview:

1. **Identify the Occupation or Industry You Wish to Learn About**

Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills, and evaluate labor conditions and trends to identify the best fields to research.

2. **Identify People to Interview**

Start with lists of people you already know—friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, professors, etc. Professional organizations and directories, and public speakers (from events and classes) are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title.

3. **Prepare for the Interview**

Research all you can about the career field and the person you are interviewing prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered. Prepare to answer basic, but sometimes specific questions about yourself and your background. See page two for examples.

4. **Arrange the Interview**

Contact the person to set up an interview by telephone, or email. Identify yourself and explain that you are a student who is researching careers in the contact's field and let them know how you obtained their contact information. As a general rule, 15 to 30 minutes should be sufficient time for the interview. A sample script for introducing yourself:

"Hello, my name is _____. I am a student at Portland State University, and I am doing career research in your occupational field. I am wondering if you would be willing to spend a short time with me to discuss your career path and current position. Any information you can share with me is greatly appreciated and will help me in my career exploration and development."

5. **Conduct the Interview**

Dress appropriately for the environment where you will be conducting interview. Arrive early, **bring an updated copy of your resume**, and be professional and friendly. Be aware of your nonverbal communication, e.g. body language and eye contact, and be an active listener. Listening is the most important half of communication.

Refer to your list of **prepared questions**; stay focused primarily on contact person's job, but allow for spontaneous discussion. **Take good notes**, including names and contact information of all you come in contact

with. Before leaving, ask if you may stay in touch. This is the first step in developing your network. Also ask your interviewee to suggest names of any others on-site or elsewhere who may be willing to talk with you, and ask permission to use your contact's name when approaching these new contacts.

6. Follow Up!

Immediately following the interview, record any additional information gathered. **Always send a thank you note or email within a few days of the interview.** Thank you notes are a very effective way to keep in touch and a good way to remind people of who you are. Include your name, address, telephone, and email.

Sample Questions for an Informational Interview:

Prepare a list of your own 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 your job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
5. How did you get your job? What types of positions did you have before this occupation?
6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
7. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
8. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
9. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
10. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
11. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
12. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
13. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
14. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why?
15. 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?
16. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas? How would you suggest I change it?
17. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

Be prepared to share information about yourself: Try to avoid dominating the interview by talking about yourself. Remember you are there to obtain information that will help you learn about careers and about the person you are interviewing. Be aware, however, that many informational interviews have turned into actual employment interviews.

- Why are you interested in this type of work?
- Why do you feel you would be good at it?
- What interests you about this organization or agency?
- How would you sum up your academic and work history?
- What do you want from this contact?
- How will you use the information you gather?

—Adapted from the State or Oregon Informational Interview Directory

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