

Informational Interview

An **Informational Interview** is something an individual can do to obtain detailed information about a field of work that they are interested in going into. Sometimes a person's idea about a certain career is not necessarily an accurate reflection of what a day-to-day job in that field would be like. This process is just one way to help you make a sound career decision.

Everyone likes to talk about his or her own success. In an informational interview you can ask a person how they got to be where you would like to be. If you follow these steps carefully and systematically, you will end up with:

- Good contacts in the career field you may wish to pursue (you will begin to develop the "who you know")
- Up-to-date information on the latest trends and expectations of the work you are interested in. You will be able to find out what qualifications are necessary, what schools are more highly regarded, and perhaps even who is doing the hiring.
- Chances to determine interviewing skills, which can help you, land the job you want. By practicing this method, you will learn how to ask the right questions, how to guide the interview, and how to stay relaxed.

Remember...

You are not looking for a job through an informational interview;
you are simply looking for career information

THE PROCESS

1) Identify people to interview

Using the yellow pages, library resource materials, newspaper and magazine articles, professional associations or organizations, and referrals (from friends, relatives, teachers, former employers, etc.) develop a list of people in your career field of interest who may be able to give you some useful information.

Talk to more than one employer so that you will get an overview of the field, not just information about a specific job in the field.

2) Preparing for the informational interview

Write your questions out in advance, take them with you, and allow yourself space for taking notes. Thorough preparation is the key to an effective interview, both to gain the information you want, and to give a favourable impression of you as a candidate.

This will also help develop your organizational and communication skills, which are two very highly regarded characteristics that employers often look for.

3) Arranging the meeting

Call in advance or send a letter to arrange an informational interview. Make it clear that you are not asking for a job, but for information about the career field. Before calling, prepare a brief script saying who you are, why you are calling, and ask if they would be willing to meet with you at a time and place that works best for them.

Some employers are more receptive than others to giving their time and advice. Respect the fact that who you are talking to probably have a very busy schedule, and that they may decline. Don't be discouraged; go onto the next name on your list.

Be prepared to ask your interview questions over the phone should the person prefer this to an in-person appointment.

4) Conducting the Informational Interview

Dress neatly, making sure you are on time, and handle yourself in a professional manner.

Refer to your list of prepared questions and ask if you can take notes as it proves that you are serious about your research.

Ask for constructive criticism about your chances of breaking into the field, and for any other feedback they have to offer.

At the end of the interview ask your contact to recommend other people for you to talk to that may be able to provide more information about the field.

5) Send a than you letter to each contact you interview

This reinforces the motivation and sincerity of your approach and will encourage people to speak with you again if you need to.

Informational interviewing sometimes results in being hired. You may discover that you are qualified for the position you are interested in, or the employer may be impressed by your interest and decide to train you on the spot.

THE QUESTIONS

The questions below are a guideline or starting point for creating your own. Compose questions of your own to fit the circumstances of the occupation or organization you are investigating. Substitute 'occupation/organization' with the actual name of the occupation or organization you are interested in.

Sample Questions

- What are the ideal qualifications for someone in this type of work?
- What education or training is required for entrance into this field of work?
- Describe a typical day at your job.
- What responsibilities and duties do you have in your work?
- What do you like the best about this work? The least?
- What is the work schedule for this occupation/organization (hours, time of day or night, overtime, seasonal, etc)?
- What steps did you take to get where you are now?
- What is the entry-level salary rate?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- How often are there openings in this occupation?
- What would you recommend as the best way to get started in this field?
- Could you suggest any temporary, part-time, or summer work experience that would help a person get ready for you occupation?
- What other occupations are closely related to this one?
- What do you see as the future for this field?

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