

Questions About Informational Interviewing

What is an Informational Interview?

An Informational Interview is an interview you conduct with a person who currently does a job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge about an occupation or career in which you are interested.

Its purpose is to provide a low stress situation where you have the opportunity to gather data you need that will help you make a more realistic career choice. While its purpose is to get you information, not a job, Information Interviews can serve the dual purpose of being a networking strategy by circulating your name and face among potential employers.

How Does an Informational Interview Differ from A Job Hunting Interview?

Informational Interviews differ from job-hunting interviews in the following ways:

- Purpose: The purpose of an Information Interview is to get information, not a job offer.
- Control: You get to ask most of the questions based on the information you decide you need.
- Pressure: You have much to gain and little to lose in an Information Interview so you should feel less pressure than you would during a job interview.
- Focus: The focus is on the person who you are interviewing and his/her expertise rather than on you and your qualifications for a job.

Why Should I Do Informational Interview?

Informational Interviews can provide you with valuable information for job hunting and career planning that you could not get any other way. They:

- Present you with up-to-date facts about an occupation that can help you in your decision-making.
- Inform you about the skills required for certain jobs so you can match them with your own.
- Demonstrate how people feel about their work so you can assess how you might feel if you did the same job.

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Questions About Informational Interviewing

- Provide you with valuable networking contacts to utilize when you are doing your actual job search.
- Help develop your communication skills and self-confidence in talking with professional people in a low pressure interview environment.
- Teach you occupational "buzzwords" unique to the career field of your choice.
- Give you an edge in future interviews by providing you with inside knowledge not known by all of your competition.
- Develop basic skills similar to a targeted job search which you will be conducting later.

Does Informational Interviewing Really Work?

Yes! Informational Interviews work because most people:

- Enjoy talking about their jobs and career fields.
- Are flattered that you ask their advice to assist you with your own career and future.
- Are empathetic about career transitions because they have experienced them.
- Like to help others because it makes them feel good.

How Can I Get Started?

First you must build a potential contact list. Who has the information you are looking for? You need to identify those people who:

- Share a common interest, enthusiasm or involvement in some activity that appeals to you
- Work in a setting you like
- Work in career areas which interest you
- Work in specific jobs or in a specific organization which interest you

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Questions About Informational Interviewing

Once I Have My List, How Do I Find These Potential Contacts?

- Ask friends, family, neighbors, professors, anyone.
- Check resources in the Career Resource Lab such as directories and company literature.
- Ask the Career Services staff about Connections, a new data base of alumni who have volunteered to be contacted by students to discuss what they do.
- Use the Internet! You might even make your first contact via e-mail!
- Check the Yellow Pages for employers in the geographical areas that interest you.

How Would I Contact These People?

There are four ways to do Information Interviews. You may wish to use one or all of them.

- Walk-in - "Drop in" on one of your identified prospective contacts. Depending on the type of career you are researching, this may or may not be an effective method. For some organizations appointments are a must.
- Use the Telephone - Call an organization and ask for the name of the person who works in a job you think you might like. Explain that you are a student doing career research and wish to get additional information in order to make your career decision. Your goals for the call are to:
 - 1) Get the name of a person
 - 2) Make a 30 minute appointment with him/her

Informational interviews are best done in person unless the distance makes doing so impossible.

Write a Letter - If you have the name of a potential contact you may wish to write a letter before making the phone call. Make sure your letter clearly states your purpose and desire to speak to him/her. Indicate that you will follow up by phone in hopes of setting a specific interview time.

Get a Referral - If you get the names of your potential contacts from people you know or from the Connections program, you can be pretty confident you will be granted an Informational Interview because they have already indicated a willingness to be contacted and will not be surprised when you call or write. Make sure you let the contact know how you got their name.

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Questions About Informational Interviewing

What Are Some Steps I Can Follow?

Although Informational Interviewing may seem difficult, it is very easy to master and gets easier with each experience. Keep the following in mind as you begin:

- Know what you want to accomplish. The primary objective of informational interviews is to investigate a specific career field so you can make a more informed career decision.
- Identify your potential contacts. When you know what you want to accomplish, ask yourself - "Who has the information I need?"
- Arrange for the interview. Decide which method(s) you will use keeping in mind that different methods might work better with different contacts and occupations.
- Prepare for the interview. Decide and plan ahead of time what you want to ask your contacts. Come with specific questions. Even though you are looking for information rather than a job, this same organization might have an opening in the future that you would be interested in. Being prepared will help you make a good first impression.
- Conduct your interview. Remember that this is a professional interview you are conducting. You do not need to wear "interview apparel" but you should dress appropriately.
- Try to get additional contact names. Before you conclude your interview, ask your contact if they can think of other people it might be helpful for you to contact for additional information. By doing this you will gradually build up your personal network. Informational Interviews could become your best source for additional contacts.
- Follow up, follow up, follow up. Write every contact you interview a thank you letter as soon as possible. Mention something that you found particularly interesting or helpful. Some contacts may ask you to stay in touch so they can see how your search is going. Take advantage of this. Remember, Informational Interviewing is a primary networking strategy.

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