

Conducting an Informational Interview

An **Informational Interview** is a meeting where a student or job seeker asks for career and industry advice and information, rather than employment. An informational interview:

- Allows you to gain valuable career information in a comfortable, no pressure atmosphere.
- Provides you with an excellent opportunity to establish a network of contacts that could lead to future employment.

Steps for successful information-gathering interviews:

- 1. Analyze your skills and interests to clarify career goals.**
- 2. Research the “World of Work”.**
 - Select occupations which fit your career interests and then research these fields. You can find information on hundreds of careers online at www.onetonline.org or www.bls.gov.
- 3. Identify professionals who are knowledgeable about your targeted career or organization.**
 - Use your resources to help you develop a list of people.
 - Keep in mind personal, family, school, and business contacts.
- 4. Set up an appointment.**
 - Call or write your contact person and tell them that you are interested in their career field.
 - Be resourceful, sincere and show genuine interest in what your “target” person does. Explain that the meeting will be short (no longer than 30 minutes).
 - If a person cannot meet with you, ask whether you can ask them a few quick questions over the telephone or ask them for names of other people you might contact within the same career field.
- 5. Prepare for the interview.**
 - Thoroughly research the organization by studying annual reports, brochures, and other materials. Talk with people who are acquainted with the organization.
 - Write a resume and bring it with you.
 - Prepare and rehearse a list of questions to ask the person you will interview.
 - Dress professionally.
- 6. During the interview.**
 - Remember, this is not a job interview! Your purpose is to acquire information. It is okay, at appropriate times, to indicate your strengths and interests but be subtle.
 - Before you leave, ask your contact if they could refer you to others in the same career. By doing so you can establish a referral list and build a job search network.
 - Feel free to ask your interviewer if they will look at your resume to see if you are on track for entering that field. You may even ask them to keep it on file.
- 7. Send a Thank You letter! Your contact has given you valuable time.**
- 8. Follow-up.**
 - Keep a record of each person you visit. Check in with those contacts from time to time.
 - Contact people on your referral list and interview them.



Suggested Questions

Present Job:

- What do you do during a typical work day/week?
- What skills are most essential for effectiveness in this job?
- What are the most difficult or challenging elements to the job?
- What are the most rewarding aspects of the job? What do you enjoy least?

Preparation:

- What kind of training or experience is required for entry into this career field?
- How does one gain experience in this field before and/or after college graduation? How much do employers value internships? ...volunteer work? ...summer jobs? ...unrelated work experience?

Hiring Decisions:

- If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why? Any other factors you would look for?
 - A. Specific major or degree level
 - B. Past work experience
 - C. Personality, personal attributes
 - D. Specific skills, talents
 - E. Applicant's knowledge of the job, department, organization, etc.

Supply/Demand:

- What types of employers hire people for your line of work? Where are they located?
- How do people find out about these jobs? What professional associations are there for this field?
- How does one advance in this field? What is the turnover rate like?
- What kind of non-salary benefits are common in this type of work (high job security, health benefits, sick leave, vacation time, profit sharing, retirement plans)?

Career Future:

- How rapidly is your present career field growing? Is the growth greater in certain geographic areas?
- How would you describe or estimate future prospects? Where will the jobs be in 5 or 10 years?
- If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, are there related career areas that you could pursue?
- How far can a person advance? What is the career track like? Do people in certain areas advance faster?

Life Style:

- What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary work week?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc?
- Does your company offer flex or comp time? Day care? Is relocation necessary? Does the company help with relocation?

The Company:

- What is the corporation culture like here?
- Who are your biggest competitors? How are those companies different from this one?
- Do you enjoy working for this company?

Advice to Me:

- How well suited is my background for this type of work? What do I need to do to become competitive?
- What kind of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend.
- If you were back in college and had to prepare all over again, what would you do differently?

Referral to Others:

- Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
- Can you name a few people who might be willing to see me? May I have permission to use your name when I tell them how I got your name?