

Informational Interviewing

The process of talking to people who have jobs that interest you is called Informational Interviewing. You initiate the interview and ask the questions. The following steps will guide you through the process.

A. Know What You Want to Accomplish

Some examples of interview objectives are:

1. Investigate a specific career or occupation.
2. Obtain advice/strategies for entering your field of interest.
3. Narrow your options based on what you learn.
4. Broaden your network of contacts for a future job search.

B. Identify People to Interview

1. Start with the people that you already know – family, friends, or faculty.
2. Professional organizations in your field, or the yellow pages.

C. Arrange the Interview

1. Contact the person to set up an interview:
 - a. By telephone or email
 - b. By a letter or email followed by a phone call, or
 - c. By having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you.

D. Preparing for and Conducting the Interview

1. Before the Interview:
 - a. Think about what you want to accomplish.
 - b. Research the organization; they probably have a website with all the information you will need. Learn about the person with whom you will be meeting.
 - c. Dress professionally.
 - d. Prepare extra copies of your resume. Give out only if requested.
 - e. Write down questions that you want to ask. (see F. on the next page for sample questions)
2. The Interview
 - a. Arrive early, appropriately dressed, and prepared.
 - b. Restate your purpose for the interview.
 - c. Listen, show interest, enthusiasm and appreciation.
 - d. Focus on gathering information and seeking advice. Remember that you are not asking for a job.
 - e. Ask for referrals to others in the field that you might learn from.
 - f. Be certain to get the business card of the person that you met with.

E. After the Interview

1. Send a thank you note/letter. Handwritten is best, but typed letters or emails are okay too.
2. Follow-up with any person that the interviewer suggested that you contact.

F. Sample Questions to Ask

1. Information about the field:

- What do you like about what you do?
- What don't you like about what you do?
- How is your time divided between people, data, and things?
- What kind of skills are important to be successful in this field?
- If possible, describe a typical work day, work week, work year.
- What are some of the possible career paths in this field?
- What are some of the challenges and major issues in your field?
- How much work do you take home?
- How many hours do you work each week?
- How much do you travel? How often and for how long?
- What are some of the toughest situations you have encountered?
- Whom do you supervise and to whom do you report? (You are looking for organizational structure.)
- What kind of person does well in this field?
- What are typical entry level opportunities in this field?

2. Information about preparation:

- What training or education is necessary to enter this field?
- How did you enter this field?
- What kind of work/internship/volunteer experiences would be helpful to prepare for work in this field?

3. Advice:

- What kinds of job hunting strategies would you suggest to enter this field?
- What do you wish you had known before you entered this field? What kinds of preparation do you wish you had?
- How can I learn more about this field?
- What are the professional organizations and journals in this field? May non-members attend meetings?
- Is there anyone else with whom I should speak for additional information?
- Who else would you recommend that I contact to learn more about careers in this field?