

Informational Interviews

An **Informational Interview** is one of the most effective ways to meet people in a professional field of your interest. It affords you the opportunity to gather information whether you are undecided about your major or career or in the first stages of your job search. Informational interviews are arranged with professionals who can provide the information directly or can refer you to others.

Your **first step** is to identify an occupation/industry you wish to learn more about. Assess your own interests, skills, values, and know how they relate to the career field represented by the persons you are interviewing.

Your next step is to **read all you can** about your areas of interest. This should be done prior to the interview. Check print materials found in Career Services for career advice, industry guides, articles, and company websites. Then, decide what additional information you wish to obtain about the occupation/industry.

You are now ready to prepare your **list of questions**. Questions could include information on background, work environment, problems, lifestyle, rewards, salary, promotional potential, industry, advice, demands, hiring decisions, and job market. Make sure they are well- thought-out questions and prepare to deliver them in a most professional manner (see examples below):

1. What was your college major and how did it prepare you for this position?
2. How does your position fit within the organization/industry/career field?
3. What do you like most and least about this position?
4. What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level? How could I prepare for a similar career?
5. What are some of the current issues related to this field?
6. What trade journals, magazines or professional associations would be helpful to my professional development?

Identifying the right people starts with a **list of people** you already know – friends, relatives, fellow students, faculty, professional associations, present or former co-workers, supervisors, and neighbors. Also, use your Career and Job fairs to gather business cards and talk with those representatives. They are most interested in you and will possibly connect you with someone who would be willing to share information with you.

To **make contact**, you should:

- Send a letter or email requesting a brief informational interview (15 – 20 minutes). Clearly indicate the purpose of the meeting and communicate that there is no job expectation.
- Follow this up with a telephone call to confirm, schedule the appointment and determine where you are to meet. Make sure the meeting will take place in a professional setting and during the day.
- Remember, the best way to obtain an informational interview is by being referred from one professional to another. Also, if you ask, this person may make the appointment for you.

When **conducting your interview**, remember it is always best to dress to impress (conservatively), arrive early (by at least 15 minutes), and be polite to everyone you meet. The whole idea is for you to shine, to make a good impression and to get referrals to other professionals. Before leaving and after asking for additional contacts, ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting those referred.

Immediately following your informational interview, make sure you **note the information** you have gathered. Always analyze the information and adjust your job search, resume, and career objective as necessary. Be sure to send a thank-you note to every person within 1-2 days who grants you time and to every individual who refers you to someone new.

In summary, while it may feel intimidating to talk with someone you don't know, just remember most people enjoy sharing information about themselves and their jobs and, particularly, love giving advice. They too know what it's like to be in the beginning stages of choosing their major, occupation or job search. We all started out just like you. Have fun!

