



Informational Interviews

What are informational interviews?

An informational interview is an in-person or phone conversation with an individual who can share information and advice regarding your career options or job search. Informational interviews are typically conducted when an individual is in the process of researching a particular career or industry or wants to meet people within a particular field for job search purposes.

An informational interview is often regarded as one of the most valuable career development tools because it can provide exposure into the hidden job market and turn a passive job search into a proactive search campaign.

Benefits of informational interviews

- Informational interviews provide you with a first-hand job description that is needed to develop a focused career objective
- Informational interviews offer an “inside look” about day-to-day workings of a position from someone already in the field
- Interviewees can often serve as a source of constructive feedback about your resume because they view it from the perspective of someone who is familiar with industry terms and needs
- Interviewees can offer advice about how to get your “foot into the door” of a particular company or industry and give you clues about interviewing and conducting your job search
- Informational interviewing allows you to expand your job search network by meeting people in the field who may be able to connect you with eventual job leads

Guidelines to informational interviewing

- Don’t confuse it with a job interview! Your agenda is to obtain advice and information, not a job...yet
- Make a specific appointment, not to exceed 30 minutes
- Prepare 5-10 questions to ask
- Dress professionally (business or business casual depending on the environment)
- Establish rapport and develop a reciprocal relationship, giving and receiving information
- Take notes
- Expand your network by asking for referrals of other people in the field that you can contact for more information
- Send a thank you letter or note within 24 hours after the meeting
- Ask if you can stay in contact with your interviewee
- Keep your contact informed of the results of any leads he or she has provided you
- When you update your resume, consider sending the newest version to your contact as a way of staying in touch

Questions to Ask During an Informational Interview

Inquiring about a person's career...

- 1) How did you acquire your position? or How did you get started in this field?
- 2) What is your background and experience?
- 3) What is a typical work day like for you?
- 4) In your position, what skills do you use regularly?
- 5) What personal attributes are essential for success in this career?
- 6) What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
- 7) Despite these challenges, what motivates you to remain?
- 8) What do you find most enjoyable about your job?
- 9) What do you like least about your job?
- 10) Are there any dangers I should be aware of?
- 11) How often do you work past 6:00pm and on the weekends?
- 12) Which seasons of the year are toughest in your job?
- 13) I'd like a walk-through the job site. Can that be arranged?
- 14) Are there opportunities for self-employment in your field? Where?
- 15) If you could start all over again, would you have followed your career path differently? Why and how?

Skills and experience...

- 1) How do most people enter this profession? At what level would I currently be able to enter?
- 2) What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible in this field?
- 3) What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to (enter or advance) in this profession?
- 4) Which of my skills are strong compared to other job hunters in this field?
- 5) What do you think of the experience I have so far? What types of positions would my experience qualify me for?
- 6) What do you see as my most marketable strengths and skills?
- 7) What would you suggest that I work on regarding how I present myself and my skills?
- 8) What do you think of my resume? What changes or improvements would you suggest?
- 9) Considering my background and education, what other careers should I explore before making a final decision?
- 10) What other occupations are closely related to this one that may use my skills or experience?
- 11) Can you recommend any course I should take before proceeding further with my search?
- 12) What organizations might be interested in hiring someone with my background?

Industry, trend or field questions...

- 1) Are too many or too few people entering this profession?
- 2) This industry/field has changed dramatically in the past (five) years. What have you seen from inside your company?
- 3) What professional publications on this field/industry should I read?
- 4) What professional associations should I join?
- 5) What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
- 6) Why do people leave this field/industry?
- 7) Who are the recognized leaders or most important people in this industry/field today?
- 8) How frequently do layoffs occur?
- 9) Which companies in this industry have the best track record for promoting women and minorities?

Money and advancement...

- 1) What kind of compensation could I expect in the first year? What would be my earning potential if I entered this field?
- 2) To get promotions, is job-hopping or relocation necessary?
- 3) What is the typical advancement or career path for this position?
- 4) How long does it take for managers to rise to the top?
- 5) What is the background of most senior-level executives?

General questions...

- 1) How many people like me have made a successful career change into this field? What were their backgrounds?
- 2) Where do you see a person like me fitting in this (fields, industry, company)?
- 3) How can I best utilize the degree (or education) I have?
- 4) What advice do you have for someone like me who is just starting out in this career?
- 5) Which other professionals should I contact? Will you be contacting them first?
- 6) Can I keep in touch with you regularly? Please consider how I might assist you with your career.

Initial Approach

- Describe why you are approaching the individual (for example: common acquaintance, knowledge of expertise or reputation, etc.)
- Stress that you are looking for career information and advice. Do not mention your job search or finding a job
- Explain what you hope to gain from the conversation
- Ask the person if he/she would be willing to meet or talk on the phone for 20 or 30 minutes at a convenient time and location
- If the person is unable to conduct the interview with you, ask if he or she knows another contact within the organization or at another organization within the industry that may be able to speak with you
- Thank the contact for his or her time

SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT REQUESTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

“Hello Ms. Jenkins. My name is Donna Brown, and I am a 3rd year student at University of the Pacific majoring in Communications. I received your name and contact information from my faculty advisor, Dr. Jones.

I am currently pursuing a career in broadcast journalism. I am hopeful that you may be able to speak with me about your experience in this field. Would it be possible to set up a time that we can speak either over the phone or in person?”