

# The Informational Interview

**The Informational Interview** is a popular and effective method of collecting information on a career field from professionals currently working in that area. Your purpose in setting up an informational interview is not to get a job: However, if you impress the contact and maintain a relationship, he or she may pass on job leads or refer you to employers in the future.

## Getting Started

- Start with people you already know, such as faculty members, friends, fellow students, alumni, previous employers and internship supervisors.
- Once you've selected potential interviewees, call or email them to ask if you can spend 15 to 30 minutes talking with them about their careers. It is important to say the interview is purely to learn more about a profession or field and not to gain employment.
- Speak professionally and use proper grammar in your phone conversation or email. Even if it's "just" an informational interview, people are forming their opinions about you and you never know where it will lead.
- When the meeting ends, ask if they know anyone else with whom you could speak. You may be surprised where these contacts can lead.

## What do I say? How do I get started?

- Starting a conversation to get an information interview with a stranger is a challenge. You may feel shy, or afraid to impose, or worried that the person may not want to talk to you.
- Write out a "script" that you would be comfortable saying.
- Practice your "script" ahead of time. Think of it as a rehearsal and say the "script" until it feels natural. Try it out on a family member or friend.
- Make sure you identify yourself and why you're calling.
- Let the person know that you need only 10 or 15 minutes of his/her time.

## Start-off Suggestions:

**Approach A:** "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I understand that you are a (or work as a) \_\_\_\_\_. I'm currently exploring this career/occupation as a possibility for the future. I wonder if I could take about 10 minutes of your time to find out more about what you do (their career field)."

**Approach B:** "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. A mutual acquaintance, \_\_\_\_\_, suggested I give you a call. He/she said you would be the right person to talk to about working in your career field (occupation). Would you be able to talk to me now? I only need about 15 minutes of your time."

**Approach C:** "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I understand that you are a (or work as a) \_\_\_\_\_. I'm looking for advice about entering your career field (occupation). Could I take a few minutes of your time to find out what you would say to someone who wanted to get into your line of work?"

## If you get a negative response:

Chances are, not everyone will be willing to help you, but that doesn't mean it's time to quit. Try these responses:

Worker: "I'm too busy right now to talk to you."

You: "Thank you for your time. Could you recommend anyone else I might speak with?"

Worker: "I'd like to help you, but I have too much work to do right now."

You: "I really appreciate your interest and I understand you're busy. Is there a more convenient time that we could talk?"

## Informational Interview Questions

Prepare a list of your own questions for your informational interview. Following are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?
5. How did you get your job?
6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
7. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
8. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
9. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
12. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
13. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
15. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
16. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
17. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
18. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
19. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas? How would you suggest I change it?
20. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

**Follow-up** -Evaluate your experience.

- How did you manage in scheduling and conducting the information interview?
- How well did you prepare?
- Did you get the information you sought?
- What information do you still lack?
- Do you need to interview more people in order to get more than one biased viewpoint or additional information?
- What do you need to do next?

Follow-up with a thank-you note, thanking your contact for his/her time and interest. You may want to include your conclusions/decisions resulting from the interview, and decide to follow-up now or later with a resume and an application letter or form. Record the information that you obtained: names, comments, and new referrals for future reference, and make appointments to interview the referrals.

## Summary

After doing several information interviews you will be more informed. You will be able to make better decisions which are based on accurate, current information.

- If you were trying to choose a major, you now are more familiar with various career paths a major might lead to. You also may have learned numerous methods to prepare for a particular occupation, not only through academic majors, but also work experience and college activities.
- If you were trying to choose an occupation, you now are more aware of position titles, job descriptions and qualifications, types of employers, the skills utilized, as well as the interests and values expressed in several occupations.
- If you were preparing for a job hunt, you now are more familiar with potential employer contacts and the hiring process. You have developed your interviewing skills and received feedback on your resume and job hunting strategies. You have also demonstrated assertive job hunting behaviors by selecting, scheduling, participating in, and following through interview appointments.

