

Informational Interviews

Benefits

Informational interviewing is a way to find out current information about a career field, a specific occupation or individual company. It is useful throughout a person's life, to make informed choices about selecting an academic major, a career target, a career change or a potential employer. Here are some of the benefits:

- Find the career field that “fits” you.
- Select a major and minor to support your personal and career goals.
- Know what classes will enhance your marketability.
- Find out what employers are looking for in your field.
- Build your professional network.
- Gain information about specific companies.
- Get current labor market information.
- Practice interviewing and marketing yourself.

Different from a job interview

You are there as someone who is interested and motivated to learn more about a particular field. The atmosphere is more relaxed than a job interview. You are the one in control of the interview and asking the questions.

Getting started

Target companies or career fields of interest to you and do some research. Companies and professional organizations have useful information on their web sites. Other sources are libraries, chambers of commerce and newspaper and journal articles. Use your network of family, friends, college faculty and staff for the names of professional contacts.

Making the call

Introduce yourself to the contact. Give your name and explain that you are a student interested in a career in . . . and seeking to learn more about the field. Mention the person who referred you if applicable. Ask if the person could meet with you for 15 – 20 minutes. If you don't have a contact's name, call and ask to be connected with a particular department, then ask for the department head and explain the reason for the call. Be prepared with your list of questions. The contact may prefer to speak to you at that time.

What to wear

Consider the industry, and dress accordingly. You will be taken more seriously if you dress professionally.

Research

Before you attend your informational interview research the company and the person you are going to meet with. Look at the company website and the contacts LinkedIn profile.

The interview:

- Be aware of the location, the environment, the technology, and the general atmosphere.
- Shake hands, introduce yourself.
- Re-state the reason for the interview.
- Have a prepared list of questions. Ask permission to take notes.
- Wear a watch and wind down the interview when the time is nearly up.
- Ask for a business card and 2 referrals.
- Thank the contact and send a thank you note within 48 hours.
- Add contact to your professional network on LinkedIn.

Sample Questions

- Could you tell me about your career path?
 - What was your first position and what brought you to your current position?
 - Why did you choose this field?
 - Is there anything you wish you would have done when you were my age?
- What do you find most rewarding about your job?
- Could you tell me about a typical day at your job?
 - What are your primary responsibilities?
 - With whom do you interact?
 - What hours do you work?
- What parts of your college experience best prepared you for your career?
- What was the best decision you made as an undergraduate with respect to your professional life?
- Who were your mentors when you first graduated and began your career? What about now?
- Did you envision yourself in this type of position as a student?
- What types of internships would you recommend if I'd like to break into this industry?
- What organizations do you recommend I belong to, and what types of events should I attend?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles, functions and salaries?
- What does your company (or department) look for in the people they hire?
- How did you find and get hired for your current position?
- Do you have any specific advice for me, based on my background and experience?
- How do people find out about jobs in this industry/within this company?
- What trends do you see impacting the industry - now or in the future?

De-briefing after the interview

- List the things you did well.
- What will you do differently next time?
- Review the information.
- Did the job seem right for you?
- Is more information needed from a larger or smaller employer in the same field?
- If the job/field is definitely not for you, this is valuable information.
- List your concerns; these are helpful clues to finding the job for you.
- If the job/field looks great, consider job shadowing to get your own perspective on the job.