

PURPOSE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

An informational interview is utilized to seek information and leads regarding an industry, a career path, or an employer by talking to people you know or who have been referred to you.

You are on a fact finding mission trying to get information to help you make the right career decisions down the line. As you use this guide, keep the following key principles in mind:

- The most important rule about informational interviews is they are for information—not a job.
- You are also there to develop your reputation and make a personal connection, which may lead to future opportunities.
- In this process, you will have to take risks and stretch beyond your comfort zone.

STEPS TO AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

1. PRE INTERVIEW

Don't Be Afraid to Ask

- Reach out to people you have a genuine interest in learning more about, and know why you want to learn from them.
 - It is most appropriate to reach out to individuals who can speak about jobs at the current level you are at (ie: HR, entry level employees, hiring managers).
- Send the person a friendly, concise email that gets right to the point.
 - Start with a personable message—leverage your relationship.
 - Interview requests should be made within a minimum of 1-2 weeks, and interviews should be 15-30 minutes.
 - Send a meeting reminder 24 hours in advance.
 - Sample language: "I'm a recent college graduate and would love to learn from your experience and how you got to the position you are in today."

Do Your Research

- *Learn as much as you can about them and their industry before the interview.* Consider the following:
 - Research the industry and what will be happening in this field over the next few years.
 - Spend a lot of time on the company's website to understand their products/services, locations, names of key executives, and what's going on with the company now.
 - Conduct a LinkedIn or Google search on the person meeting with you. Note similarities you share.

Prepare Your Questions

- Prepare information on yourself (1-2 minutes).
 - College background
 - Current work
 - Future direction
- Prepare interview questions. If the meeting is 15-30 minutes, you will only have time for about 5 questions total. (See "Questions" handout for examples.)

- Only ask questions that can't be answered through an internet search.
- Use this opportunity to ask the questions you might not want to ask in a job interview.
- Update and polish your resume to bring with you, but don't offer it unless requested.

2. INTERVIEW DAY

Conduct Yourself as a Professional

- Dress and act the role of the position you are seeking.
- Wear a watch; glancing at your phone is poorly received.
- Bring a notepad, pen, and business cards.

Make it a Conversation

- The best interviews, informational or otherwise, are the ones that naturally flow.
- Express your gratitude early on. Start by thanking them earnestly for their time and information.
- Be enthusiastic and impress them by being articulate about what your background is.
- Focus your early questions on the interviewer. (See "Questions" handout for examples.)
 - Sample language: "Mary gave me your name and told me you're considered to be an expert in your field. How did you get started?"
- When you have about 5 minutes left before your meeting is scheduled to end, note the time you have left and mention that you want to be "mindful of their time." This gives the person you're interviewing the opportunity to either extend the interview, or transition to a graceful conclusion.

3. POST INTERVIEW

Cement the Connection

- Ask for other contacts in the field. If no names are suggested, be grateful for information or suggestions obtained, and ask for recommended next steps.
- Always send a thank-you note.
 - Send the thank-you note or e-mail within two days of the informational interview.
 - Paper thank you is best; email is most common (within 24 hours).
 - Go the extra mile and find an article or something similar which is related to a topic you discussed. Include a link with your thank-you, noting how your conversation with them inspired you to look this up.
- Stay in touch with your contacts by writing notes or emails, informing the person how helpful their suggestions have been to you.
 - Keep them in the loop by e-mailing the person you interviewed after you've met with one of their referrals or after you've gotten a job.

Reflect and Move Forward

- Review the notes you took during the interview.
- Considering what you learned.
 - Does it impact your thinking?
 - Does it impact your actions?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended as a guide to help you build a detailed picture of the occupation. Keep in mind you will realistically be able to ask about 5 questions, so your interview will be most effective if you critically select questions ahead of time that reflect your genuine curiosity about careers.

General Information:

- How long have you been with this company and in your current position?

Background:

- What has been your career path from college to present?

Current Duties / Responsibilities and Experience:

- What are the duties performed during a typical day? Week? Month? Year? How much variety is there on a day-to-day basis? (As the person describes the duties, ask what skills are needed.)
- What are your major job responsibilities?
- What are the satisfying aspects of your work?
- What are the greatest pressures, strains or anxieties in your work? Are there dissatisfying aspects of your work beyond what you mentioned? Is this typical of the field?
- How would you describe the atmosphere/culture of the work place? What are your typical hours?

Preparing for this Field:

- What degree or certificate do employers look for? What are the most valuable courses to take in order to gain the skills necessary for success in this occupation? (Distinguish between what is desirable and what is critical.)
- What kind of experience and skills are most important to acquire and are employers looking for in an applicant?
- What are opportunities for advancement? To what position? Is an advanced degree needed? (If so, in what discipline?)
- What do you know now which would have been helpful to know when you were my age?

Broader Perspective:

- What are the different salary ranges?
- What are some related occupations?

Recommendations and Additional Information:

- What advice would you have for someone starting out in this field?
- Can you suggest others resources [events to attend, networks to join] to investigate?
- Who else do you think I should have an informational interview with, and would you be able to help connect me with that person?