

Informational Interviews

Know What To Expect Before You're In Their Seat



As the name implies, an informational interview is one you conduct with a professional in a specific field for information only to learn about career options while making valuable contacts and building your professional network along the way. As we all know, in today's competitive and ever-changing job market, ***"it's not what you know but whom you know."*** The more people who are familiar with you, your qualifications and your career interests, the more doors will open for you when the time comes to land that job...whether it be now or two or three years down the road. So whether you are a freshman deciding on a major or a senior preparing to launch a job search, this powerful strategy can work for you!

Informational Interview Steps

STEP 1: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CONTACTS

Start with your own personal network by asking family, friends, roommates, past employers and anyone else for names of individuals within occupations that interest you. If you find yourself coming up empty, you may identify contacts by calling companies that interest you.



STEP 2: MAKE CONTACT BY PHONE OR LETTER

Initiate communication with your potential contact over the phone or with a letter. Explain who you are, why you are contacting him or her, and how you were referred. Be very specific about your request for information only, NOT a job. You may be pleasantly surprised - most people find talking about themselves irresistible. For further assistance on developing cover letters or making contact, call Career Services to schedule an appointment with a Career Counselor!

STEP 3: CONDUCT PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Gather some basic information about the respective career or organization to be able to ask intelligent questions. For information on the industry and field, consult the Occupational Outlook Handbook and a multitude of other career exploration materials available in the Career Resource Library. For information on a specific company, consult the company files and the World Wide Web available in the Career Resources Library.

STEP 4: DEVELOP QUESTIONS

The secret to successful informational interviewing is to ask your contacts for information or leads, NOT a job. Ask open-ended questions to avoid yes/no answers. Your questions should demonstrate your commitment to making an educated decision about your career, and should cover such topics as organizational culture, current issues or trends in the field, etc. Please refer to the attached sheet for sample informational interview questions.

STEP 5: CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

The typical informational interview will be 20 - 30 minutes long. You should let the interview roam freely in the allotted time period. Establish contact in the beginning by restating your purpose and explaining the types of questions you will be asking. You should dress professionally and take a pad of paper to jot down notes as you go.



STEP 6: FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Send a thank you letter! Inform your contact what steps you have taken to apply the advice you received, or merely express your appreciation and state that you will be in touch when further action is needed. Remember, this individual is now part of your personal network and has the power to assist you in the long run...don't overlook this common professional courtesy.

Informational Interview Sample Questions

- » **How did you get into this field?**
- » Which majors are most successful with securing employment in this field?
- » **How would you describe a typical day/week on the job?**
- » What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?
- » **What frustrations or drawbacks do you experience in this position?**
- » How would you describe the work environment?
Please be specific in terms of work pressure, deadlines, routines, and new activities.
- » **How often do you travel and for how long?**
- » What percentage of your time is spent utilizing computers? Interacting with people? Writing reports?
- » **How much contact do you have with people outside of your organization? What is your relationship to these people?**
- » Do you ever have to represent your employer at after-hours social functions? Do you have control over this?



- » **How does your career affect your lifestyle? (the amount of work, your material needs, time for leisure, travel, outside interests, and family)**
- » What are the latest developments and primary issues in this field today?
- » **How do you see the jobs in this field changing over the next five to ten years?**
- » Which other career areas do you see as being related to your work?

- » **What are the trade/professional groups to which you belong, and which do you find most beneficial to your work? Do any of them assist college seniors interested in entry-level; positions in your field?**
- » What educational degrees, licenses, or other credentials are required for entry and advancement in your kind of work? Are there any, which are preferred or helpful, although not required?
- » **What personal characteristics, personality traits, values, interests, etc., do you believe are necessary or helpful for success and satisfaction in this occupation or organization?**
- » How do people usually learn about job openings in your field?
- » **What do you wish you had known about this career field before you entered it? What about this employer?**
- » How is the organization structured? How would you rate the effectiveness of this structure?
- » **What kinds of entry-level jobs are available within organizations like this?**
- » What is your organization's leadership/management philosophy? How does this differ from other organizations in this field?
- » **Who are your competitors?**
- » What are your organization's plans for growth?
- » **Do you have a formal training program? Could you please describe it to me? What percentage of training occurs in the classroom? On the job?**
- » What are the typical career paths within your organization?
- » **How are employees evaluated in your division?**
- » What impresses you about this organization?
- » **Are there any books or periodicals that you would recommend?**
- » What special advice would you give to a young person entering your field?
- » **What are your personal future career plans?**

Telephone Strategies for Getting Informational Interviews

"Hello, this is Mara Jones. May I speak with Katherine Williams?"

If she is not in and/or the secretary asks the nature of the call reply...

"Sally Smith suggested I call regarding some research that I am doing in the field of _____. When would it be convenient for me to call back?"

Assuming the secretary provides you with the information, reply...

"Thank you very much. I'll call back at (estimated time)."

If you have been referred, your opening might go something like this...

"Hello this is Mara Jones. Sally Smith suggested that I call you regarding the possibility of setting up a brief interview with you. She tells me that you are an excellent source of information on the field of _____. I am interested in exploring new career options and am meeting with a small group of people for information and advice. When might you have a few minutes that I could meet with you?"

If your contact agrees, confirm the time, date, and place, and be sure to get clear directions to your meeting site. Before you meet your contact, send him/her a letter confirming your meeting and expressing thanks.

If your contact does not have time or does not wish to meet with you, reply...

"I appreciate your being unable to meet with me. Could you suggest someone else in your company or your field your field with whom I could meet?"

WHEN SPEAKING TO A SECRETARY



WHEN SPEAKING TO YOUR CONTACT

If you've uncovered the contact person on your own and have not been referred, your opening might go something like this...

"Ms. Williams, this is Mara Jones, I am calling because (select the appropriate option):

****of your expertise in the field of _____.***

****of your recent promotion to _____.***

****Of your association with _____ (professional or other relevant organization).***

****you are a fellow alumni of _____.***

****OTHER: _____."***

After you've opened the conversation, continue with your explanation of the purpose of the call .

If your contact asks if you are looking for a job, be honest, but recognize that you are contacting this person for informational purposes only. You might reply like this...

"Yes I am applying for various positions, but my meeting with you would be for informational purposes only. I hope to use your advise in developing leads and gaining additional information."

GENERAL TIPS

1. Speak with confidence
2. Remember that you're likely to have many of your requests denied. Don't be discouraged. Keep at it until you've reached people who agree to see you.
3. If you can't get through to the person whose help you are seeking, ask the secretary for suggested contacts.
4. Frequently, secretaries are valuable sources of information. Informational interviews give insight into your career interests and provide you with a valuable network.

Good Luck!

Informational Interview Thank You Letter

A thank you letter should always be sent following any employment interview or informational interview. Thank you letters remind prospective employers that you are still available and reinforces why you are interested in their organization. These letters are written to people in your job search network to keep them up-to-date on your job search.

(Sample)

123 Miller Ave.
Jacksonville, FL 32234

April 3, 2016

Ms. Celia Shubert
College Relations Manager
Hallmark Cards, Inc.
25th & McGee Traffic way
Kansas City, MO 64105

Dear Ms. Shubert:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me regarding opportunities within the law profession. Your description of the various levels within your firm, as well as our discussion with Judge Hathaway, were both extremely helpful.

As a result of our conversation, I have begun the process of applying to law school as well as continuing my national search for paralegal positions. Judge Hathaway mentioned two contacts, Timothy Jones and Adrienne Muniz, with whom I have already made contact and will be meeting with them in early March.

Your suggestion that I contact your sister in her firm in New Orleans has turned into an excellent lead, as she had three colleagues who are currently in search of paralegal support.

Again, Brad, I thank you for your efforts and consideration. I enjoyed meeting with you and have great memories from our lunch at the Sushi Palace.

Sincerely,

Ozzie Osprey

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