WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Informational interviews are a great tool to build your network and learn about general opportunities in an organization or profession. You can explore a specific industry, organization or position while assessing whether it’s a good fit for your skills, personality, and career goals. During an informational interview, you will have the chance to interact individually with professionals and inquire about their daily work environment and their career path. Here are some reasons why you should consider informational interviewing as a networking and professional development tool:

• If you already know the field or organization is a good fit for you, do an informational interview to network and gather more specific information about the industry or company.
• Observe a position or company to get a feel for different work environments that may fit your strengths and career goals.
• Connect with professionals and build relationships now as they may have tips about future job or internship opportunities.
• Develop the social skills you will need in professional interactions and build confidence for future job interviews.
• Gain insight about the hidden job market as networking often leads you to hear about opportunities that are not traditionally advertised.
• Access the most up-to-date career information from current professionals.

WHO CAN I APPROACH FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

People are usually very willing to talk to you. The easiest way to begin this process is to start with someone you know, or someone a friend, relative or professor knows. Below are other people or resources to use for finding information interview contacts:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Friends/family/neighbors</th>
<th>Conferences/workshops</th>
<th>Student clubs</th>
<th>Industry directories</th>
<th>Career Shift (login at Scotlink)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Professors/advisors</td>
<td>LinkedIn (direct connections and groups)</td>
<td>Professional journals</td>
<td>Service directories</td>
<td>Alumni groups</td>
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<td>Current/former bosses</td>
<td>Company websites</td>
<td>Professional associations</td>
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HOW DO I ARRANGE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

After you have found someone you want to talk to, contact that person to request a brief interview. You can call or send an email. Usually you’ll ask to meet for 20 to 30 minutes. Include the information below in your initial contact:

• Your first and last name
• How you got his or her name
• A brief summary about yourself (2 or 3 sentences is plenty)
• The fact that you’re contacting the person for an informational interview
• Your phone number and email address (if you leave a message, say your name and number slowly)

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Think about the kind of information that will be helpful to you and what you hope to learn from this particular individual. Do as much background research as possible so you can ask insightful questions that will get you useful information. Prepare questions in advance. Dress respectfully.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Evaluate your experience. How did you manage scheduling and conducting the informational 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 email expressing your appreciation to your contact for his/her time and interest. You may also want to include your conclusions/decision resulting from the interview. Record the information that you obtained: names, comments, and new referrals for future reference, and make appointments to interview the referrals.

WORD OF ADVICE AND CAUTION

• Do send a thank-you note
• Informational interviews are a career management tool, not a job search tool. Don’t try to turn an informational interview into something it’s NOT (sales pitch, recruiting interview, date, therapy session, invitation to be BFFs, sneaky way to get your foot in the door).
• Don’t make the mistake of thinking that because you don’t want to be too direct (“I’d really like a job at your firm”) that you should be completely indirect (“I’d just like to hear your, uh, perspectives on, um, the industry”).
• Have a clear purpose to the meeting. They cannot help you if you do not know why you set up the meeting. Be able to answer: “What do you want to do?” “What can I do for you?” “Never overstay your welcome. Whether it’s lingering too long in person or on the phone or engaging in too much follow-up, it’s important to read signals and respond accordingly.
• Always think of how to give back to those who give you time. It may take years to do it, but if you keep it on your mind, one day you’ll figure out how.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The information you are looking to gather through an informational interview should be the kind you wouldn’t be able to readily find on a website, in an annual report, or in a book. Bad questions consist of anything that you can find out in 5 seconds elsewhere or “questions” that are really attempts to brag about yourself.

Bad Questions:
• Are you hiring? • How much money do you make? • What are the different investment banking companies? • By the way, I have a 4.0 GPA in my finance classes - do you think I should mention that on my resume?
SUGGESTED INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NATURE OF THE WORK QUESTIONS
1. What are the specific duties and responsibilities?
2. What does a typical work day or week look like for you?
3. What are the toughest problems you deal with?
4. What part of this work do you find most rewarding?

WORK QUALIFICATION QUESTIONS
1. What skills or talents do you consider most essential to be successful in this career?
2. What personal qualities are important?
3. What kind of prior experience is absolutely essential?
4. What are other job titles for people who do similar work?

WORKING CONDITION QUESTIONS
1. What type of setting, hours, atmosphere, etc. can be expected?
2. What obligations does this type of work place upon you outside of the ordinary work week?
3. How much flexibility do you have in terms of hours of work, dress, vacation, etc.?

INTERNSHIP / WORK ENTRY QUESTIONS
1. What types of internships/part-time jobs would you suggest before entering this field?
2. What type of educational preparation is best for this field?
3. What types of employers hire people in this field? Where are they located?

WORK ADVANCEMENT QUESTIONS
1. What additional training or qualifications are necessary for advancement?
2. What are some of the job possibilities for experienced workers in this field?
3. Is turnover high in this field?
4. Do people normally move to another company/organization or do they move up in the company/organization?

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK QUESTIONS
1. How rapidly is the present career field growing?
2. If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel you could do?
3. How would you describe or estimate future prospects?

SALARY QUESTIONS – DO NOT ASK FOR THEIR SALARY
1. What is the average starting salary?
2. What are the salaries for experienced workers?
3. How much do salaries vary in this career according to the employer, region, or industry?

REFERRAL QUESTIONS – ALWAYS ASK THESE
1. Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
2. Can you name a few people who might be willing to see me? May I have permission to use your name when I call or contact them?
3. What professional associations in this field do you participate in?

PERSONAL ADVICE QUESTIONS
1. What are some of the best things about the decisions you’ve made in your career? How did you do it?
2. If you were a college graduate again and had to do it all over again, what would you do different? What would you do the same?
3. Is there anything I should be asking that I’m overlooking?

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