

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is the process of talking to people who have jobs that interest you. It is a brief meeting between a person who wants to investigate a career and a person working in that career. The interviews usually last 20 to 30 minutes. The following guidelines will help you with an informational interview.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH

The primary objectives of informational interviewing are to:

- Investigate a specific career field
- Assist in narrowing career options
- Obtain advice on where you might fit in
- Learn the jargon and important issues in the field
- Broaden your network of contacts for future reference
- Create a strategy for entering your field of interest
- Not to get a job but to find out about jobs you might like
- See if the job or career fit your interests, skills and personality
- Learn more about the realities of working in a particular occupation
- Decide among different occupations or choose an occupational specialty
- Focus on career goals
- Discover careers you never knew existed
- Uncover your professional strengths and weakness
- Find different ways to prepare for a particular career
- Gather ideas for volunteer, season, part-time, and internship opportunities related to a specific field
- Provide an inside look at an organization you may want to work for in the future
- Aids in polishing communication skills and gain confidence before an actual interview

How/Where do I find people to conduct an Informational Interview?

- Friends of family
- Spiritual place of worship
- Your Doctor, Attorney, Dentist
- Your Professors for recommendations
- Someone you meet at an event
- VSU Alumni

Remember, this person is busy and you are on their time. Be flexible to meet on their schedule. It is about them, not about you.

How Do I Make Contact?

- Ask to meet with them via phone, in person (at their office), or for coffee
- See samples of how to request an informational interview in the Appendix

How do I Conduct an Informational Interview

Before the Interview:

- ✓ Prepare for an informational interview as if it is a job interview.
- ✓ Learn as much as you can about the organization.
- ✓ Write down the questions that you wish to ask.
- ✓ If possible, learn something about the person with whom you will be interviewing.
- ✓ Dress professionally.
- ✓ Bring copies of your resume. (Distribute only upon request).
- ✓ Arrive 10-15 minutes before your appointment.

During the interview:

- ✓ Restate your purpose and why you are talking with this particular person.
- ✓ Be prepared to initiate the conversation, since you are the interviewer.
- ✓ Adhere to the original time request of 20-30 minutes.
- ✓ Ask for referrals to other appropriate individuals in the field or in related organizations.
- ✓ Keep in mind that this is an information-gathering and advice-seeking interview, not an employment interview.
- ✓ Let the individual you are interviewing bring up the discussion of specific job vacancies.
- ✓ Although you are gathering information about a particular career field the person is assessing whether they could recommend you for an internship or job...put forth your best effort!

After the interview:

- ✓ Send a thank-you note and keep the individual you have interviewed posted on your progress.
- ✓ Keep the door open for future contacts with this person.
- ✓ Evaluate your style of interviewing. What could you have done better? Use what you have learned when you conduct your next interview.
- ✓ Evaluate the information you received. How does it relate to your plans?

What to Ask

Make a list of questions you would like answered about a career field or organization. Your questions will yield the most information if you use open-ended questions to engage your contact in conversation. Listed below are sample questions to help you prepare for your interview.

Questions about the Career Field:

- Types of positions most often found in the career field.
- General skills needed to perform responsibilities (e.g., organizing, supervising, and writing).
- Specific skills needed to do the job (e.g., academic, experiential).
- Recommendations for training or education required to perform this kind of work.

- Negative aspects of field, for example, “What would you change if you could?” or “If you had it to do over again, how would you have done it differently?”
- Typical entry-level position in the field.
- The outlook for entry-level professionals.
- Alternative methods to gain entrance to the field (e.g., part-time, mid-career change, volunteer work or other kinds of training).
- The future of this field in terms of new and expanding opportunities.
- Other information that may be helpful (e.g., critique of resume, job-seeking tactics, names of other professionals in the field).
- What do they like about the position? What tasks or parts of the position/career field do they dislike?
- See Appendix for additional questions.

Questions about the Organization

- Short and long-term goals of the organization such as growth, new products or services, and expansion of facilities.
- Philosophy of the organization and types of training programs available.
- Descriptions of the various positions they have held between entry-level and present job.
- Description of the individuals’ present job (as defined in the job description as well as what is done beyond the job description).
- Description of typical career path from entry-level to top management.

Summary

Your goal is to leave the informational interview with new insights about the career you want. Informational interviewing is an effective tool in your approach to career planning. It can be an important strategy in gathering information and establishing contacts as you start or continue to plan for the future. Make the interview a benefit for you and the interviewer. Remember, early career exploration usually means a better fitting career for you later.

Appendix

I. Informational Interview Request Samples:

From: Megan Brown [mbrown@emailaddress.com]
 To: Kenneth Smith [Kenneth.smith@abc.org]
 Subject: Virginia State University student seeking career advice

Dear Mr. Smith:

As someone with experience in finance, you have insight into finance occupations. I am hoping you can share some of that insight with me as I research financial management careers.

Currently, I am a full-time student at Virginia State University. I am not seeking an employment interview; rather, I am interested in gathering information about finance careers.

I will call next week to request an appointment. I would appreciate if we could meet for about 20 minutes.

Thank you for your time as I explore potential careers.

Sincerely,

Megan Brown
 mbrown@emailaddress.cm
 (555) 123-4546

Jane Ryan
15 Spring Road
Hamlet, LS 41112
(555) 302-8585
jryan@emailaddress.com

August 25, 2011

Ms. Susan Carson
Director
Hamlet Child Development Center
Hamlet, LA 41112

Dear Ms. Carson:

I am a student at Virginia State University. Currently, I am investigating careers to learn which would be best for me. I am very interested in the childcare profession and would appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about your work.

I found your article in the *Hamlet Gazette* about teaching phonics to preschoolers. After reading the article and learning about the Child Development Center, I am confident that your insight could help me.

I will call on Friday to request an appointment. Ideally, we can meet for about 20 minutes.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,
Jane Ryan
Jane Ryan

II. Questions to ask during an informational interview:

1. Personal background.

- a. Tell me how you got started in this field.
- b. How long have you held this kind of job?
- c. How long have you worked for this organization?

2. Nature of work:

- a. What are your major responsibilities?
- b. What are the major intrinsic rewards of your position?
- c. What aspect of your job was the biggest challenge when you first started?
- d. What are things you like or dislike about your job?

3. Working conditions:

- a. What hours do individual in this job usually work?
- b. Does this job require primarily independent activity or is there lots of teamwork involved?
- c. Who evaluates your performance? How is this done?

4. Preparation required:

- a. What kind of academic background is required for the position?
- b. Should I have a particular certification or achieve a higher-level degree in order to advance in this field?
- c. What kind of on-the-job training is provided?
- d. What kind of job titles what I probably have in this field?
- e. What life experiences have most helped you acquire and develop knowledge of this field?

5. Entry into the field.

- a. What is the current job market outlook for jobs like yours?
- b. Do you anticipate any change for better or worse during the next few years?
- c. What kinds of skills should a job seeker highlight in their resume and interview?
- d. Would previous experience as in intern or volunteer make a candidate more marketable?
- e. Would advice would you give a student?

6. Opportunity for advancement.

- a. What is a typical career path for individuals in your position?
- b. To what position in your organization could you realistically aspire?
- c. Are there also lateral moves that can be made into other areas of the organization?

7. Additional information:

- a. Are there any professional groups you would recommend I join?
- b. Who else should I contact within the field?