

# Informational Interviewing

## What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing is a research tool -- a way to gather first-hand, "real life" information about a type of job, occupation, career field, or industry. Informational interviewing can be used as a supplement to the Career Counseling Library's published and electronic resources, which include career books and files, computerized career information systems and Career Exploration Links on the Web.

Informational interviewing serves two primary functions:

1. Career exploration
2. Job search strategy (often called "networking")

## How Do I Setup & Conduct an Informational Interview?

Below are some guidelines for successful informational interviewing:

### 1. Research

Before you contact someone for an interview, it is important to do some preliminary research on your field (job, occupation, or industry) of interest. That way you will be able to make the most of your time with your interviewee.

### 2. Identify People to Contact

Trying to decide whom to interview? Define your personal contact network by writing down a list of people you know who can provide you with information about your field of interest, or who may know someone who can. This list can include:

- ◆ Immediate and extended family
- ◆ Friends
- ◆ Neighbors
- ◆ Mentors or colleagues
- ◆ Professionals in your community
- ◆ Members of relevant professional associations

### 3. Make Contact

- ◆ When you call to set up the interview, tell the receptionist the purpose of your call. Ask for the best time or method for contacting the person.
- ◆ If you get voicemail, state your purpose, leave your name and phone number, and note that you will call back.
- ◆ You may need to be persistent, but always be polite and friendly.

### 4. Prepare Interview Questions

Prepare a list of questions, in the order of your priorities, to ask the interviewee. Below are some sample questions:

- ◆ What are the main tasks you perform in your work?
- ◆ What is your typical day (or week) like?
- ◆ What do you like most and least about your work?
- ◆ What special challenges or problems do you face in your work?
- ◆ How did you become interested in this field?
- ◆ What kind of education, training, or background does your job require?
- ◆ How do most people get into this field?

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- ◆ What special skills and abilities are needed to do your job?
- ◆ What personal attributes do you think are essential to success in this field?
- ◆ Are most work settings in this field open to new ideas or fairly structured? Is innovation valued?
- ◆ How is performance evaluated in this field? What tends to be rewarded?
- ◆ How competitive is this field?
- ◆ How much interaction with other staff does this kind of work usually involve?
- ◆ Do people collaborate or tend to work independently? Are there really busy times or seasons?
- ◆ What kinds of changes have you seen in this field (or industry) in recent years? What kinds of changes do you think will happen in the next five to ten years?
- ◆ Which professional journals and organizations should I know about?
- ◆ How much turnover does there tend to be in the industry?
- ◆ What is the career path for this position? How flexible is it?
- ◆ What is the growth potential for this kind of job? Is it usually necessary to change organizations in order to advance?
- ◆ In what ways does your work impact your life outside of the job?
- ◆ What experiences and training have you gained that could help you in your next job?
- ◆ If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?
- ◆ What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?
- ◆ Are there related occupations that you think I should explore?
- ◆ Can you suggest anyone else for me to speak to who might be helpful?

### 5. The Interview

- ◆ Arrive on time and respect the person's schedule.
- ◆ Dress neatly and appropriately.
- ◆ Respect the person's time. Keep the interview to 30 minutes or less.
- ◆ Start with your most pressing questions.
- ◆ Don't ask questions about the person's salary.
- ◆ Always ask if the person can refer you to anyone else for additional information
- ◆ Ask the person if you may contact him or her again in the future with other questions.

### 6. After the Interview

- ◆ Write a thank-you note to follow up on an informational interview; it's OK for it to be handwritten. Send the note within a few days of (no later than a week after) the interview.
- ◆ Let the person know what aspect of your discussion you found most helpful. If you had a particularly nice interaction, you may wish to keep the person informed of your progress.
- ◆ Record and evaluate what you learned. Keep a notebook or database with information on people with whom you've spoken (name, title, organization), dates of contact, questions and answers, and your reactions and impressions.