

Informational Interviewing

Informational Interviewing is a key strategy for career exploration and for building your network (which helps you access the "hidden job market".) It is a form of networking that can be very effective for learning about and understanding careers, industries, organizations, and much more.

THE PURPOSE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- The goal of these conversations is to expand your understanding of a career area as you consider career directions, and to make valuable professional contacts. The purpose is not to obtain a job.

Informational interviewing allows you to:

- Learn about a career field, its culture, opportunities, and necessary preparation
- Gather information about a specific organization or position
- Receive advice on graduate school or other preparatory experiences
- Receive advice on job search strategies and develop a network of contacts
- Build your confidence and knowledge for job interviews

Making contact and arranging time to talk is the first step; knowing what you want to ask is critical. Review sample questions, pick those that are most appropriate, and tailor them to fit the situation and your style. Consider additional questions of interest to you. Let the conversation flow – don't feel pressured to ask every question on this list.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Career Path

- Describe the career path leading to this position. How did you select this career? What was your first job?
- Are there alternative routes to the same career/job?
- What are the levels or steps in this career? Is there mobility between organizations? Nationally? Internationally?

Education/training/experience necessary

- What background, skills, or experiences are necessary?
- Are there particular courses I should take? Does a certain concentration / major make a difference?
- Is a graduate degree necessary for an entry-level position? For advancement within the field?
- Is an internship advisable? What recommendations do you have for such internships?
- Are there gaps in my resume that need to be filled? *Could you look at my resume and give me some advice?*

Daily activities/organizational culture/lifestyle/fit

- What is your typical day like?
- Is there a typical work schedule? Is overtime, flextime, part-time, job-sharing, travel required or possible?
- What is the work environment like? Casual or formal? Fast-paced or relaxed? Team-oriented or independent?
- What types of people generally thrive in this environment/career?
- What effect does this career have on your lifestyle and family life?
- What are the rewards of your work? Drawbacks?

Entry-level positions

- What type of training is provided? Will an internship help me to get an entry-level job?
- What is the typical salary range? Timeframe for promotion or raises?
- How much autonomy is there? Are there opportunities to receive mentoring?

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SAMPLE QUESTIONS CONTINUED...

Future of the career field

- How do you see the career field changing in the next decade?
- Where will the jobs be in the next decade? What types of jobs will emerge? Be eliminated?

I want to learn more

- Who else would you recommend that I contact?
- What professional organizations are helpful to students?
- What journals/magazines would be helpful to read?
- What are some good web sites to explore?
- What question haven't I asked you that I should be thinking about?
- What is the best career advice you can give me?

MAKING INITIAL CONTACT

Send an introductory email if possible, with the goal of getting your contact on the phone. Focus on your interest in the work of the contact, and identify how you are connected to him/her. Be concise, friendly, and ALWAYS professional.

Attach your resume if you would like to ask for feedback on it, or if you would like to give the potential contact some background info about yourself. Bring one to the CDC for a helpful critique first!

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am a junior at Brown concentrating in English and got your name from my advisor, Professor Foreman. I have been interested in learning more about writing careers, especially in advertising and public relations. I would love to have an opportunity to talk to you about how you got started in advertising.

I would like to set up an appointment to call you at your convenience. I can be contacted by email or by phone at 401-863-3326. Thank you in advance for your time and any assistance and advice you can provide.

Best,
Amy Jones

**ONE LAST & REALLY IMPORTANT DETAIL:
Send a thank you note to whomever
you talk to!**

GENERATING CONTACTS:

WHO DO I TALK TO?

You may be thinking—great, I'll do an informational interview and network with people—but I don't know anyone in the field!

You don't have to already know people to start networking. The following resources are extremely helpful in getting you started:

- **BRUnet:** Brown's alumni career network contains over 3000 alums who have signed up to talk to students like you.
- **Social Networks:** [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) are great places to meet the leaders in your fields of interest. Read what the experts have to say, then join in on a discussion! Also, consider [Facebook](#) as a place to generate contacts.
- **CDC Speakers:** We bring alumni back to campus all of the time! Take advantage of this chance to meet people in your fields of interest. Check out our [calendar](#) for information.
- **Friends, Family, and Faculty:** Consider networks that you DO have but haven't tapped into—the more people you involve in your job search, the more leads you will generate. Are the people you know aware of the type of jobs you're considering? If not, TELL them!

ORGANIZING YOUR CONTACTS

It is crucial that you keep your contact information in order. How you do this is up to you, however we have some helpful suggestions.

Create a spreadsheet containing:

- Name of your contacts
- Job title
- Contact Information
- What you learned
- Area of career focus
- Organization
- How you connected
- Follow up needed

OR

A notebook containing that information would suffice! Keep it updated, keep it organized.