

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Benefits of Informational Interviews

- Learn firsthand about what it is like to do a particular kind of work in a particular organization.
- Gather information about what the opportunities are in a given field or organization.
- Develop contacts in key positions with people who hire or who make recommendations to those who do.
- Find out about jobs and career paths you did not know existed.
- Promote your skills and abilities in a low-threat, open-ended situation.
- Begin to build, or expand, your network of professional contacts.

Whom to contact

- People who are friends, friends of friends, relatives, co-workers of yours or your friends.
- Members of professional associations related to your field.
- Employees listed in company directories.
- Alumni from undergraduate or graduate programs.
- People doing work that interests you, who are with an organization that you would like to know more about, or who might know someone in any of these other categories.
- People mentioned in newspapers, magazines or other media.
- People who would know other leaders in a field, organization or community.

How to Approach Your Contacts

Tell your contact that you are in the process of making some decisions about your career, and you want to learn more about his or her field. In particular, you want to learn whether, and how, someone with your background might enter and succeed in that field. **You are not yet in a job search.** There is a lot at stake in terms of your future, so you want the best information you can get. That is why you would like to meet with this person.

Be prepared for a response such as "I think our Personnel Director can probably be of more help." A possible response on your part might be "I'm sure that would be true if I were looking for a job. I'd like to talk with you because from what _____ said about you, I could respect your advice and would like to get your personal perspective."

Your basic question will probably be a variation of "Here is what I can do. Where do you feel the best opportunities are for someone with my skills and experience?" Additional questions to help you get the information you need are suggested below.

How to Prepare for the Interview

Prior to setting up informational interviews, it is essential that you do some preliminary research on the companies, jobs, professions or industries that interest you. A wide variety of resources are available in the **Career Services Center** and **Gleeson Library** (see the CSC handouts on researching employers and occupations). The information you obtain from your research will form the basis for the questions you ask during the interview, and your interviewing contact will be invaluable for supplementing your research with a "real world" perspective.

How to Handle the Interview

1. You are **not** asking this person for a job. You are gathering information on which to base some decisions. Make sure friends and relatives understand this.
2. Always make an appointment; this puts the meeting on a business-like basis and helps eliminate interruptions.
3. Do not bring your resume to the interview unless your contact has agreed in advance to give you feedback on how you are presenting yourself. A resume can make an informational interview suddenly feel like a job interview, which is not what you want. If you want your contact to have a copy of your resume, send one after the interview. This will give you the opportunity to make any appropriate changes in the document based on what you learned during the session.
4. Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation - remember, you are doing the interviewing. Know what you want to ask. Don't ask questions just to show off or you may end up showing off your ignorance. The person being interviewed

will feel it was worthwhile if you ask thoughtful questions, but not if you ask only superficial ones. Having notes with you is fine and can be very helpful.

5. Respect the person's time.
6. Towards the end of the conversation, **always** ask for additional contacts. This is the key to developing more contacts and building your network.
7. Keep your eyes open for clues about what kinds of problems or challenges the organization/industry/career field may have, and how you might present yourself as the solution.
8. **Always** write a thank you note that will help you to be remembered. Mention what you talked about, what you learned, or who you are going to see at the person's suggestion. If you are interested in pursuing a job with his or her organization, try to keep the door open to get back in touch.

Suggested Questions

1. In the position you now hold, what do you do on a typical day?
2. What are the most interesting/challenging/frustrating aspects of your job?
3. What previous jobs led you to this one?
4. How long does it usually take to move from one position to the next on this career path?
5. What is the position above the one you have now?
6. Given your present position and experience, what position do you see yourself in five years from now?
7. What are some of the most senior positions in this career?
8. What are the prerequisites for jobs in this field?
9. Are there any specific courses I might take that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
10. What types of training do companies give to persons entering this field?
11. What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
12. What aspects of a career in this field do you consider particularly positive? Particularly negative?
13. What special advice would you give to a young person/career changer entering this field?
14. What skills do you think made you a competitive candidate for this position?
15. Is there a demand for people in this field?
16. What are the future growth prospects for this field?
17. What other fields or jobs would you suggest I find out more about before I make a final decision?
18. How do you see the jobs in this field changing over the next two years? What can I do to prepare myself for such changes?
19. Can you recommend a few professional associations to join that would be helpful for my professional development?
20. What is the best way to obtain a position that will start me on a career in this field?
21. Do you have job specifications/description information that I may have?
22. Can you recommend other people with whom I should talk?
23. When I've done some more research, may I contact you again?