Informational Interviews

DEFINITION
Informational interviews are conversations with particular individuals about their work in the academic programs, professional jobs, or companies/organizations in which you are interested in. Informational interviews are a good way to obtain career-related information and can be one of the most valuable sources of occupational information because it presents opportunities for an intimate and flexible inside view of a job field unmatched by other sources.

PURPOSE
• Gather factual career-related information and advice about an organization, job, and related professional concerns that are not available from written sources.
• Check your understanding in the particular job and organization.
• Learn and examine the working environment of a field (i.e., culture of work/company)
• Learn the professional vocabularies or technical terms of the particular job.
• Create contacts and build relationships with people in your career field.
• Gain experience and self-confidence to present yourself more effectively in future job interviews.
• Explore your thoughts and ideas from professionals’ experience and expertise.
• Obtain other referrals in your interested career.

RESOURCES
Identify individuals who:
• Share a common academic major or interest, enthusiasm, or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you.
• Work in a setting you would like to pursue.
• Work in career areas in which you are interested.
• Work in specific jobs in specific organizations.

PREPARATION
Unlike job interviews, informational interviews provide a non-threatening forum in which to practice interactions in a professional setting. Thus, preparation for informational interview is important.
• Search general information about the job that you are going to conduct an informational interview.
• Review and examine your interests, personality, skills, values, and goals that you can discuss in relation to this field.
• Develop a set of questions that helps you gather important information about this job/company.
• Read and research before the interview so you ask questions that cannot be answer with reading.
• Dress professionally as if it were an actual job interview.
• Bring copies of your resume with you to share with the individual if ASKED, or to seek suggestions to improve your resume.
• Arrive 10-15 minutes early before the appointment.
• Build rapport and a genuine relationship.

GETTING STARTED
• Ask friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, former employers, or anyone you know for an information interview or for a referral.
• Contact faculty or the Career Center to find alumni and other individuals willing to speak with you. The Career Center also has the names of many employer contacts.
• Contact community service agencies, trade, and professional organizations or visit their web sites.
• Use company databases like Hoover’s (provided by Auraria Library) or the Denver Business Journal to begin exploring the wide variety of companies that fit your direction and workplace expectations.
• Scan the Yellow Pages, articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals.
• Attend local, state, or regional conferences of professional associations in your career area.
• Use Social Media sites like LinkedIn. LinkedIn has an alumni section where you can search for Alumni in fields (www.LinkedIn.com/alumni).

SAMPLE EMAIL/SCRIPT

• Mr. Jackson, my name is __________________. I met you last week in Dr. Smith’s management class when you gave us some very useful information about ___________. I will be graduating in _____ with a degree in ______________, and I am in the process of exploring opportunities in my field where I can utilize my skills and experience. You are obviously very knowledgeable in this field, and I wondered if I could meet with you for about 15 – 20 minutes to discuss some specific questions I have?

• Be prepared for responses such as, “I think our HR Director can probably be of more help”. You might say, “That may be true if I were looking for a job, however I would like to speak with you because I am really seeking information and advice about the (field, company, industry) and ____________ told me you would be someone whose advice I could respect”.

• Dear ____________,

As a junior at ______________, I start my __________ course next semester. I would love the opportunity to schedule an informational interview with you to learn more about the field, more about how you got involved in this career, and the day-to-day activities of a ____________.

I was fascinated with the approach to ____________ that you describe in your blog postings on ______________, and I felt you would be one of the most enlightening people in the field that I could possibly interview.

I know that you must be quite busy, so I assure you I will be brief -- taking up no more than 30 minutes of your time.

I will contact your office next week to inquire about a convenient time for scheduling this informational meeting. You can also reach me at ____________.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,

______________

• Building an introduction email/phone call.
  1. Introduce yourself and why you are contacting them (if you can leverage something you have in common, reference that)
  2. Briefly talk about why you choose them & the company they work for
  3. Reassure them you only want 30min, are flexible with scheduling, and understand they are busy
  4. Follow-up and next steps
  5. Sincerity and gratitude go a long way
STRATEGIES FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

• Stress at the beginning that you are only seeking career information, not a job.
• Listen attentively and gear your questions to the flow of conversation, without losing track of the time and your specific goals.
• Be respectful of individuals you interview.
• Always send a thank you letter to interviewee.
• Stay within time limits, unless the interviewee indicates otherwise.

QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Preparing questions will help you build a detailed picture of the particular career as it relates to work environment, qualifications, industry trends, career path, lifestyle, typical compensation, challenges, and rewards.

• How did you get started in this career?
• What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
• What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
• What skills are necessary for a successful career in this field?
• What percentage of your day is spent dealing with people? What percentage of your day is spent dealing with paper?
• What kinds of problems do you deal with?
• What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying/challenging?
• What do you like and not like about working in this field?
• What do you know now that you would have known before you entered this field?
• What do you think about the company’s future and your future in this job or organization?
• How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
• What were the keys to your career advancement?
• How has your job affected your lifestyle?
• What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
• What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
• What professional publications do you read and why?
• Could you suggest other people who may be helpful to me in gathering information about this field/location? (always ask this questions to grow your knowledge and network of contacts)
• What advice would you give a person in my situation who wanted to enter your profession?

FOLLOW-UP

After an informational interview, write or type a brief thank you letter to the person for spending time with you. Not only will this demonstrate gratitude, but this will also leave a positive impression. Also, it is important for you to evaluate your experience and synthesize the knowledge and information from the informational interview in order to obtain new thoughts and ideas about that career. If you build a strong relationship, be sure to keep in touch with this professional. They can help mentor you in the field and be a professional contact for you in networking.

WORDS OF CAUTION

• Remember to differentiate between your interests in the occupation and how you feel about the person you interview. For example, do not confuse liking the person for assuming that you would like the occupation.
• Interview another person in the same occupation to verify that you have received an accurate perception of the field. You may have spoken to someone overly euphoric or burned out. Counter balance with another opinion is always useful.