

Informational Interviewing

Informational Interviews are brief, face to face meetings with people in occupations or positions that you either want to explore or pursue. They can be one of the most valuable of all sources of occupational information.

There are two kinds: **Research Interviews** and **Networking Interviews**. It's important to understand the difference so that you can clearly state which kind you're doing when you first contact people and determine what you want to get out of the experience. Most college students and people exploring careers need to do research interviews. Once you are focused and experienced with research interviews, networking interviews for job openings and opportunities will become more appropriate.

How to Find Contacts

It's easiest to start with someone you know, or someone a friend, relative or professor knows. You really only need one person's name to begin with because at the end of the interview with them, you will ask for the names of a couple of other people you can talk to. Soon you will have many names for additional informational interviews. Other sources for informational interviews include Yellow Pages, Company/Organization Homepages, Professional Journals and Associations, Professors and Instructors, Human Resource and Personnel Officers, Directories, and Alumni.

You can also call the main switchboard at an organization you're interested in and ask to whom you might speak about your career area. Be prepared to ask questions and explain your objective to help locate the appropriate person.

Setting up an Informational Interview

It is important to do these face to face, so ask for a 20-30 minute meeting when you call. You may want to prepare a short script of 5-10 sentences and practice requesting the informational interview with a friend. Remember to:

- Give your name and affiliation. (Hi my name is _____ and I am a student at Concordia University in St. Paul)
- Say how you got their name.
- Give a brief background summary about yourself, roughly 2 sentences, if appropriate.
- Explain, in about 2 sentences, what the purpose of your visit would be. The main purpose of either research or networking interviews is to GATHER INFORMATION. With research interviews, you want to learn about the person's field or a specific career area.
With networking interviews, you want to learn more about a particular organization, a specific career path or employment opportunities in the field.
- Request a 20-30 minute meeting with them in person, so you can see their work environment. Remember to be flexible; you are asking something from them and may have to work around their busy schedule.
- Get complete directions to their place of business and leave your number in case they must reschedule. Try to avoid needing to cancel the appointment yourself.



Suggestions

- Arrive 5-10 minutes early.
- Dress professionally.
- Learn about the occupation/organization ahead of time so you can develop some thoughtful questions. Keep your own interest and values in mind when preparing your list of questions.
- Send a thank you note within 24-48 hours after the meeting.
- Though it may be appropriate to bring your resume to a networking interview, it can be strategic to send you resume with your thank you note after the meeting. This way you can tailor your resume to the specific company.
- If you have any questions or need more information about this process, email Diana Sukut, Career Specialist at sukut@csp.edu.

Informational Interviews: Research

- Are you unfocused or only generally focused about what occupation you want to pursue?
- Do you want to learn about a particular field, company, job titles, salaries, or opportunities?

Then talk with peers, people who have been in a certain job or occupation from 1-5 years, in order to learn how they got there and possibly create a plan to follow in their footsteps.

Why do Research Interviews:

- To explore options and to find out more about a certain career or job.
- To meet people in a field you're interested in and talk with them in a "low risk", non-threatening situation.
- To get ideas about what careers use your skills and interests.
- To get your specific questions answered.
- To get a sense of the range of possible environments for an occupation by talking with several people.
- To hear an insider's view of a certain career area.
- To gain firsthand impressions: observe the work environment and the person on the job.

Who do you talk to?

- Someone who holds the job you want to explore or who works in the organization you want to know about.
- Several people who hold a certain job, but who work in different settings and situations. This will enable you to gain a broader perspective on the career.
- Somebody who is likely to have broad knowledge or a lot of training in *some* field you are interested in.

What are the expectations?

- The expectations are **100%** on your part **0%** on their part. You are the interviewer gathering information to meet your needs.

How do you follow up?

- Make notes during your meeting and immediately after.
- Ask yourself a couple of questions:
How is this occupation compatible with my interests, values, and skills?
What changes are there in my knowledge/opinion of this career after this interview?
- Follow up on any suggestions while they're still fresh in your mind. Did the person you spoke with recommend publications, books, or articles? Did they suggest professional associations? Did they refer you to other people in the field? Pursuing additional resources will aid you in making career decisions.
- Be sure to send a brief letter thanking the person for their time and the information they shared.
- **Keep in touch.** When you are ready to begin a job search your informational interview contacts will be important.

Sample Research Interview Questions

- What does the organization do? **Note:** You should already have a general sense of this from your preparation and reading. Be sure your question reflects your prior research and focus on the specifics.
- What are your job responsibilities?
- Does this job go by any other title in other organizations?
- What background is necessary or helpful for this position?
- What are the five most important skills for this field?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- What do you like best/worst about this job?
- What personal characteristics are employers looking for in this position?
- What are typical career paths for people in this field?
- What are the best ways to enter this field?
- What is the occupational outlook on a local and national level?
- Looking back, what would you have done differently regarding your career path?
- How would you characterize the working conditions? For example, would you describe your position as closely supervised? Do you have a supportive management? Is this position high pressure? Do you work independently? Is there variety in the work that you do?
- What are current trends, changes or controversies in the field?
- If I work in this field, what are the big mistakes to avoid?
- What is a typical salary range? How does this vary by setting?
- Can you suggest some recent publications that discuss the field? What associations do people in this field generally belong to?
- Can you suggest other people I could talk to? May I use your name as a referral?
- Are there any other insights you have that would give me a greater understanding of this occupation?

- **Note:** Ask for a business card to obtain accurate name, title, and address information.

Informational Interviews: Networking

- Are you 99-100% focused?
- Have you done your career research and know exactly what you want?
- Do you want to learn about the specifics of a company and specifically what you need to do to find out about opportunities?

Then talk with hiring authorities. Speak with the "boss", the Director/Manager or someone with the power to hire you. They'll see how focused you are and will be able to imagine you within their organization.

Why do Networking Interviews?

- To zero in on targeted choices.
- To learn more about a particular organization.
- To build a network of contacts which may lead to future job leads, professional networking and possible mentor relationships.
- To find out about specific job opportunities and employment leads.
- To sell yourself to potential employers.
- To practice your interviewing skills.

Who do you talk to?

- Supervisors or other hiring authorities.
- The person's title could change from organization to organization; be sure to find out if the position you are seeking may be classified under different titles.
- Someone close to the position level you're interested in or the supervisor of that position.

What are the expectations?

- The expectations are that you will make a favorable impression and gather information to assist your job search. The organization looks you over and gets a sense of your strengths and how you might fit in. Bringing your resume might be appropriate, but remember this is not an interview for a job.

How do you follow up?

- Make notes during your meeting and immediately afterward. You may remember the first interview, however if you do several, they will all start melting together and you won't remember who told you what.
- Follow up on any suggestions while they're still fresh in your mind. Did the person you spoke with recommend resources or job-hunting hints that would be helpful? Did they suggest professional associations or refer you to other people?
- Be sure to send a brief letter thanking the person for their time and the information shared.
- **Keep in touch.**

Sample Networking Interview Questions

- Does the position go by another title?
- What does the organization do?
- How is this company/institution/position funded? How is it doing in terms of growth and expansion?
- What are your responsibilities?
- Are there any particular educational or training programs required or recommended for the position?
- What characteristics would an employer look for in a person to fill a position in this field?
- What top five skills, abilities, or personality traits are actually most useful on the job?
- What is the typical "career path" for someone in this occupation? Where do you start at entry level and what kinds of promotions or directions can you expect?
- What is the employment outlook for people in this field? Will there be more or fewer openings in the future?
- What is the salary range for someone entering this field?
- How would you characterize the working conditions? What is the stress/pressure on the job, supervision, dress code, level of autonomy, etc.?
- What are the most/least satisfying aspects of your work?
- If you could redesign your job, what parts would you keep and what parts would you change or eliminate?
- If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently in your career?
- If your present job were to become obsolete, in what other kinds of jobs could you apply your skills?
- How do people find out about openings in your line of work?
- Who would I interview for a different perspective about this career? May I use your name as a referral?
- **Note:** Ask for a business card to obtain accurate name, title, and address information.