

Informational Interviewing

One of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation or an industry is to talk to people working in the field. This process is called *informational* or *research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that **you** initiate - you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

Following are some good **REASONS TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**:

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to discover employment opportunities that are not advertised
- to expand your professional network
- to build confidence for your job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

Listed below are **STEPS TO FOLLOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**:

1. **Identify the Occupation or Industry You Wish to Learn About**

Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills, and evaluate labor conditions and trends to identify the best fields to research.

2. **Prepare for the Interview**

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered.

3. **Identify People to Interview**

Start with lists of people you already know - friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc... Professional organizations, the yellow pages, organizational directories, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title.

4. **Arrange the Interview**

Contact the person to set up an interview:

- by telephone,
- by a letter followed by a telephone call, or
- by having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you.

5. **Conduct the Interview**

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts.

6. **Follow Up**

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your contact within one week of the interview.

NOTE: Always analyze the information you've gathered. Adjust your job search, resume, and career objective if necessary.

20 QUESTIONS!

Prepare a list of your own questions for your informational interview. Following are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?
5. How did you get your job?
6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
7. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
8. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
9. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?

10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
12. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
13. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
15. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
16. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
17. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
18. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
19. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas? How would you suggest I change it?
20. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

"INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING" is a rather fancy phrase for a very straightforward, logical, and extremely helpful idea that works when you are choosing a career field or clarifying your job objective. Here's what you do:

a. Think back on your most enjoyable days of work (or play), and jot down some ideas about what you think you're best at and enjoy doing – not actual job titles, but SKILLS and ABILITIES and TALENTS and INTERESTS – all the things you bring into your various jobs and hobbies.

b. Ask around among all your friends, relatives, friends of relatives, neighbors, people you used to work with, ANYBODY, and get from them the names of people who are already at work using these same SKILLS and abilities that YOU most enjoy using – somebody you could interview for information (NOT for a job, just for information about that line of work).

c. Ask each friend, relative, etc., for permission to mention THEIR name when you call the person they recommend.

d. Call each of the people they recommend and:

- Mention the friend or relative's name;
- Ask for 15 or 20 minutes of their time to visit with them and learn a bit more about THEIR line of work;
- Explain that you think you might be interested in that field because it uses skills and abilities you have, BUT you're not sure yet, you're still checking things out and deciding your direction;
- Tell them you're not looking for a job, just getting more info to help you get clear.

e. Make an appointment to visit them at their workplace for about 20 minutes.

f. Make up a good list of questions that you'd like to ask – for example:

- How did you get into this kind of job?
- What are the requirements for this work?
- What are the best and the worst aspects of this work?
- What kind of pay range can be expected in this line of work?

- What chances are there for moving ahead in this field?
- *(Anything else that would help you decide whether this is a good career direction for you.)*

g. Show up right on time for the meeting, ask all your questions, and take some brief notes so you won't forget.

h. Wrap up the meeting on time, thank the person, and as you leave ask them for the names of two OTHER people who use those same skills that you want to use in your next job.

i. When you get home, sit down and **write that person a short thank-you note and get it in the mail that same evening.**

j. Next day, call the two people mentioned, make appointments with THEM, and follow the same plan as above.

k. Continue this process until you find yourself EXCITED and ENTHUSIASTIC about a particular line of work and know that this is the direction you want. THEN you'll have a Job Objective you can happily pursue with all your energy.

l. Always keep in mind that THIS PROCESS WORKS, and admittedly it SEEMS a bit scary, but the fact is that people ARE willing to share their information when you show respect for their time, interest in their line of work, and appreciation for their help.