

Informational Interviewing

The informational interview provides an opportunity for you to learn about yourself and about possible career options appropriate for you. **The purpose of the informational interview is to obtain information, not to ask for a job.** The approach you take in a job interview is quite different from that of an informational interview. In an informational interview, you want to learn more about careers, organizations and specific occupations.

Why Use the Informational Interview?

- It helps you become more knowledgeable about your field(s) of interest.
- It allows potential employers to be introduced to you in a pleasant, low-stress interview.
- It starts the process to build your professional network.

Steps for the Informational Interview

- **Clarify your goals:** Write a brief summary of your abilities, interests, and values.
- **Select places to visit:** Use the St. Louis Business Journal Book of Lists, Yellow Pages, Chamber of Commerce listings, friends, faculty, etc., to generate at least one name of an individual who you would like to visit.
- **Set up an appointment or a phone interview: Utilize your network contacts!** Contact the person who is actually doing the job that you are interested in doing. When calling, always ask if the person has a few minutes and/or is this is a good time to talk. Be courteous and always thank an individual for his/her time. If you cannot arrange an on-site interview, ask for a telephone interview. Be prepared to conduct it on the spot if the opportunity arises. Importantly, be resourceful, sincere, and above all, show interest in what the person is saying and doing.

For example: To explore the career of an occupational therapist, you might call an Occupational Therapist working in a school. You may have obtained this individual's name by networking with a classmate. The conversation might go this way:

You: "Ms. Smith, my name is _____. I was given your name by _____. Is this a good time for you to talk? I'm very interested in occupational therapy and am in the OT program at Maryville University. Although I have some knowledge of the field, I would like to know more different areas of the profession, and I am specifically interested in learning more about practicing OT in a school setting. I would like to know if we can schedule a time to meet to further discuss this."

- Continue your conversation and set up a time to meet in person. Be specific about location and time. Also ask for names of others you might contact in the same career field.
- **Prepare for the Interview:** Research the organization. Talk to and learn from people who are acquainted with the organization. Prepare a list of questions for the person you will interview. Dress appropriately.
- **The Interview: Remember, this is not a job interview! Your purpose is to acquire information. You are asking the questions. Throughout the interview, you are trying to: learn as much as you can about this field.
create a favorable impression with the person you are interviewing.**

- **Thank you letter:** Remember this courtesy! It will impress the other person and serve to remind him/her of your. It may also help future job search campaigns.
- **Follow-up:** Keep a record of the organizations you visit. For each, note opportunities to pursue and issues that you could help solve. Contact the new referrals you received and arrange an informational interview with them.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- What is your title and name of company/organization?
- How did you get started in this field?
- What previous jobs do you have before this?
- What do you like/dislike about it?
- What are the most significant pluses/minuses about working in this field?
- What would I do in an average day working in your organization?
- Where might I be after 5 years with your organization?
- What kind of training is necessary for this career field?
- What is a typical salary range for an entry position in this career field?
- What is the top job you can aspire to in this career?
- Are there any specific courses or activities a student should get involved in that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
- Describe the various careers and career paths in this field.
- What is the future outlook for this career field?
- What kinds of persons do well in this field?
- What skills, interests or values are important?
- What special advice would you give a young person entering this field?
- What is the best way to obtain a position that will start me on a career in this field?
- Are there professional organizations that are open to student members?
- Do you have information on a typical job description that I may have?
- Who are other people with whom I could talk to learn more about this career field?

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