



**INFORMATIONAL
INTERVIEWING**





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WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

An informational interview is a great way to learn about career fields that you are potentially interested in. It also is a great way to talk to people about how they feel about their current job. This kind of interview is an appointment that you schedule with a particular individual for the purpose of gaining specialized information from an "insider" point of view.

If you are in the process of choosing an academic major, making career choices, changing careers, or beginning a job hunt, then informational interviews may help you explore your possibilities. Unlike job interviews, informational interviews do not require that you sell yourself to an employer. A benefit of informational interviews is that every person you speak to can lead you to other contacts, expanding your network of professional connections.

Informational interviewing can also open the door to future job opportunities but you should **NEVER, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES**, ask for a job while conducting an interview.

HOW TO LOCATE A PERSON TO INTERVIEW

A potential interviewee can be found in many ways. Brainstorm a list of people that you know that have business or other contacts. **DO NOT** be afraid to contact a complete stranger. Most people are more than happy to share information about their field of choice. If you happen to run across someone who is unwilling to help, simply thank them for their time and move on to another person. The following list of potential resources may help you identify an appropriate person to interview.

- Career Services
- Employment directories
- Company literature or brochures
- Yellow pages
- Newspaper or magazine articles
- Faculty contacts
- Former employers
- Relatives
- Alumni
- Professional associations/conferences
- Friends of parents/parents of friends

HOW TO ARRANGE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

An informational interview may be arranged by writing, emailing, or phoning the person you'd like to meet. You should make an effort to conduct the informational interview face-to-face at a person's workplace. If you simply cannot arrange a face-to-face meeting because distance makes that impractical, then conduct the informational interview over the phone.

TELEPHONE/E-MAIL SCRIPT

Before you call someone, practice what you are going to say. This step in your preparation will allow you to be more relaxed when you place your call and increase the likelihood that you will get cooperation from the person you call. The script below is only a suggested format. Add or subtract anything you want from the example or use your own entirely.

"Hello (Dr., Ms., Mr.) _____! My name is _____. I'm currently a student at Azusa Pacific University majoring in _____. I would like to find out more about (insert job/area of interest) and I'm wondering if you might be able to spend 10 minutes talking to me about your experience and answering a few questions."

**If the individual seems hesitant or unreceptive you might consider stating the following:*

"I am not currently looking for a job and I will take up as little of your time as possible."

"If I've reached you at an inconvenient moment, could we schedule a time when I can call you back?"

One thing to remember: Don't be discouraged! There will be times that you are turned down when you request an appointment to speak with a potential contact. The key to rejection is to use any refusal as a learning tool. Go back over the conversation to see if you can improve your preparation, strategy, or presentation and then try the next name on your list. If you can't seem to get a hold of the person you are seeking over the phone, you might consider writing a letter to introduce yourself and ask for the help which you are seeking.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

It is essential to do some background research before your meeting so you can keep conversation flowing and get the answers to the questions that you want. Another important preparation tool is to read up on the field and browse the website of the organization where your contact works.

Create a short telephone introduction speech for yourself before you call. Try the above telephone/email script or create one of your own.

Dress appropriately for the field and act as if this was a job interview. Give a firm handshake, make good eye contact, and demonstrate active listening. If you have a business card, leave one with the interviewee before you leave and ask if you can have their business card for future reference. Remember that most informational interviews last about 20-30 minutes, so make sure to respect the interviewee's time and keep an eye on your watch.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Below are some questions you may want to ask in an informational interview. This list is not exhaustive. Be sure to include specific questions pertinent to you or the field you are considering.

1. How did you get your start in this career?
2. How did you prepare for entry into this field? Any specific training or degree required?
3. What are the major responsibilities you are involved with on the job?
4. What are the most challenging aspects of your work?
5. What do you enjoy most about your field and your current job in particular?
6. What do you enjoy least about your field and your current job in particular?
7. What is a typical workday like?
8. How many hours/days per week do you usually work?
9. What type of people do you work with?
10. What are some typical entry-level positions to get started in this occupation?
11. What are the qualifications you would look for in a recent graduate looking to get into this field?
12. Are there special skills (computer programming, report writing, graphics, etc.) that one can acquire which would be helpful?
13. Are there internships, summer, or part-time employment opportunities that would be useful in preparing for this field?
14. What personal qualities should a person possess if they are considering this field?

15. How important is relocation? Is travel involved in this field?
16. What is the current salary range in this profession? Entry level? Executive level?
17. Do you recommend any professional associations or journals I should keep up with?
18. What are some obstacles I should be prepared to face when getting started in this field?
19. What significant problems does the profession as a whole face?
20. What trends do you see taking place in this profession?
21. Do you have any other suggestions for someone interested in this field?
22. Do you have any ideas for referrals to one other person who it might be helpful to speak to?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW TIPS

- ✓ Call and set up a 30-45 minute appointment with the employer ahead of time
- ✓ Make sure to dress professionally
- ✓ Show up to your interview 5-10 minutes early
- ✓ Prepare your interview questions ahead of time
- ✓ Bring a notepad and pen to take notes
- ✓ Always ask the employer for at least one other person he/she might know with whom it would be helpful for you to speak

AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

THE RE-EVALUATION

After you gain insight from the person you interview, make sure to reflect on how you still feel about your area of interest. Re-evaluate the field that you were considering entering based on what you learned from the interview.

THE FOLLOW-UP

Write a thank you note! Express your appreciation for the interviewee's time and willingness to share their expertise. To maintain the interviewee as a professional contact, keep the networking relationship you just formed by emailing or phoning periodically.