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PROFESSIONAL
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FOR
INFORMATIONAL
INTERVIEWS



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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is a **meeting with professional who is currently in the field or type of job you would like to have**. It is a great way to get the inside scoop about career fields that you are potentially interested in, as well as a great way to talk to people about their current job or career path. In this kind of interview, you are asking the questions in order to get information that is useful as you explore majors and potential jobs for the future. **It is not a job interview. Never under any circumstances should you ask for a job or expect to be offered a job while conducting an informational interview.**

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. However, you will want to put your best foot forward because you may meet someone who you can network with to meet other contacts in your field of interest

How to locate a person to interview

A potential interviewee can be found in many ways. Build a list of people that you know (both professional and personal contacts) that may work in or know people who work in the field you are exploring. *(See our Survival Guide for the Job & Internship Search to brainstorm your network find and ideas to expand your network)* **DO NOT be afraid to contact a complete stranger.** Most people are more than happy to share information about their field of choice, as long as they know you aren't expecting to be offered a job. 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 interviewees:

- Career + Calling
- Alumni Relations
- Faculty contacts
- Former employers
- Professional Associations
- Company websites
- Family, friends, church members, friends of friends
- LinkedIn

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How to Arrange an Informational Interview

An informational interview may be arranged by emailing or calling the person you'd like to meet. You should always volunteer 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.

Email/Phone 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 the person will respond positively. The script below is only a suggested format.

"Hello, (Dr., Ms., Mr.) _____! My name is _____. I'm currently a student at Azusa Pacific University majoring in _____. I would love to find out more about your job at _____ and your experience working in _____ (his/her industry or field) _____. I'm wondering if you have 20 minutes to spend talking to me about your experience."

If the person seems hesitant or unreceptive you could state the following:

"I'm not currently looking for a job/I'm not expecting to get a job interview. I'm just hoping to gather some insights and will take up as little time as possible."

OR:

"If I've reached you at an inconvenient time, 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. 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 sending an email to introduce yourself and ask for the help which you are seeking.

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Tips for Conducting your Informational Interview

- **Do some background research about the person, company and/or industry before your meeting** so you can keep conversation flowing and get the answers to the questions that you want. Read up on the field using the Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco/) and browse the website of the organization where your contact works.
- **Dress professionally and act as if this was a job interview.** Give a firm handshake, make good eye contact, smile and show that you are interested in the conversation.
- **Show up 5-10 minutes early** (but no earlier- you don't want to inconvenience your interviewee).
- **Take notes.** This also proves that you take their insights and advice very seriously.
- **Always ask the interviewee for a referral** or another person that he/she might know that can give you more insights and advice.
- **Leave your business card and ask for theirs.** Remember that most informational interviews last between 10-30 minutes, so make sure to respect the interviewee's time and keep an eye on your watch.
- **Send a thank-you card, not just an email.** Send a handwritten thank-you note in the mail that same day or the next, addressed directly to the interviewee and thanking him/her for his/her time and expertise.

Questions to Discuss in an Informational Interview

Below are some questions you can choose from when you conduct your informational interview. This list is not exhaustive, so feel free to add questions that are more specific to your interests or the interviewee's career field. We suggest you choose up to 5-6 questions so you don't take up more than your allotted time for the interview.

1. How did you get your start in this career?
2. How did you prepare for entry into this field? Did you have any specialized training or earn a specific degree?
3. How is this field growing or changing? Do you see any trends?
4. What type of people do well in this field?
5. What do new professionals in this field need in terms of training and education?
6. What type of internships, part-time or volunteer opportunities are best suited for me if I want to enter this field when I graduate?
7. What are the qualifications you would look for in a recent graduate looking to enter this field?
8. Do you recommend any professional associations, conferences or journals I should keep up with?
9. What are some obstacles I should be prepared to face when getting started in this field?
10. What are the major responsibilities you hold in this job?
11. What are the most enjoyable and the most challenging aspects of your job?
12. What is your typical workday like?
13. How many hours/days per week do you usually work? Is your schedule flexible? Do you ever travel or is relocation important?
14. Do you have any other suggestions for someone interested in this field?
15. Do you have any ideas for other professionals I can talk to who can give me more insights and guidance?

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After the Informational Interview

Re-Evaluation

Think about the information and advice you gained from the interview. Did anything surprise you or make you think differently about your interest in the job or field? Be willing to reformulate your goals if you've realized that you want to head in a different direction. Make an appointment with a Career Consultant to discuss your options.

Follow-up

Always send a hand-written thank you note through the mail, thanking your interviewee for his or her willingness to share. ***Your goal is to maintain the contact in case you are searching for an internship or job later.*** Give positive updates on your progress through school and in your career. For example, if you talked with the professional about applying to graduate schools and you were accepted into your number one choice for a program, let him or her know! You never know how a positive interaction can benefit you in the future