

Informational Interviews

Informational interviews can be a great job-hunting resource. They are like job interviews except you ask all the questions about an occupation, not a specific job. You have two goals during the interview. First, learn about the occupation to see if it might suit you. Second, establish a connection with the person you're interviewing. If handled properly, informational interviews can lead to job search suggestions or contacts—even offers!

Benefits

Informational interviews provide many benefits to help you.

- Make a contact — a connection with someone.
- Learn more about the company, industry and job.
- Gain confidence as you practice your interviewing skills.
- Possibly learn about “hidden” (unadvertised) jobs or internships.

Who to Ask

Interviews take time, so target only individuals who have occupations you really want to pursue. You might ask:

- Friends, family, neighbors, supervisors, coworkers, and anyone they know.
- People listed in the yellow pages or association directories.

Guidelines

Here are some general guidelines for the interview:

- Interview three people for each occupation of interest.
- When you call, say how you got that person's name.
- Explain that you're seeking information and guidance.
- Ask to meet for 20 minutes and stick to it (wear a watch).
- Bring paper and pen with you and take notes.
- Research the occupations and organization beforehand as you would for a job interview.
- Dress and act as you would at a job interview.
- DON'T ask the person for a job in any way.

Questions to Ask

Since you probably don't have much time, pick only a few important questions to ask. Here are some ideas:

- How did you get into this type of work? This job?
- What type of preparation/education/training did you have? What is required?
- What do you enjoy the most? The least?
- What three skills do you use most often?
- Describe a typical day or week.
- What motivates you?
- Describe difficulties you regularly face on the job.
- What are the advancement opportunities and limits?
- How does a person usually progress in this field?
- What must a person know to stay competitive?
- What's the economic outlook for this career?
- How does your job affect your home life?
- What are typical entry-level job titles and duties?
- How do you suggest I learn more about this field?
- Here are my strengths. How do they fit in this field?

Afterwards

When your scheduled time is almost up, end the interview with these suggested hints.

- Before you leave, thank the person.
- Ask for referrals to others who might be available for an informational interview.
- Get his or her business card.
- Immediately send a thank you note.
- Evaluate how well you conducted the interview.
- Decide how to weigh what the interviewee said. Take what you heard with a grain of salt and trust your own judgment.
- Review the notes you took and decide on your next step.
- When you eventually do get a job, tell your interviewees about it—they'll want to know how your search ended!