

Informational Interviews

The best way to learn what you really want in a career is to talk with the people in the area you are interested in. Because of the exploratory nature of informational interviews, they are effective for individuals at all stages of career and are also an excellent tool for career-changers. Informational interviews can be a helpful way of discovering facts and insights to help decision making, career planning, and expanding your professional network.

Important Planning & Tips for Successful Informational Interviews

- Prepare ahead of time and do some research before the interview. Leverage information that is available on the website or information that may be shared by the source(s) that referred you.
- Remember because you are scheduling an informational interview it would not be appropriate to ask for a job.

Scheduling the Informational Interview

- Request via email or phone call. Choose the option that best works for busy people.
- Prepare to introduce yourself and share your interests.
- State that you are researching careers in the contact's field.
- Write a brief statement of your interests or experiences in the person's field, organization or location.
- State why you would like to meet. Be straightforward; share why you are asking for information and advice.
- At the end, ask if you can contact this person again, and thank them.
- Make sure to follow up as you indicated (e.g. email, phone or in letter).
- Proofread all correspondence and save copies.

In Person or by Phone

- People who grant informational interviews are generally willing to share 15-20 minutes of their time to explain their expertise in the field.
- Be flexible in your scheduling. Volunteer interviewees may have prior commitments, so be patient.
- If the individual seems too busy to talk to you, ask when would be a convenient time to call back or ask if they prefer you speak with someone else
- Identify yourself and explain that you are researching careers in the contact's field, and that you obtained the person's name from _____ (if you were referred).
- Some suggested approaches:
 - "Hello, my name is _____. I'm conducting career research in your field. I would like to meet and talk with you for about 30 minutes so that I can find out more about your field of expertise."
 - "Hi, my name is _____ and I am employed at McMaster University. I got your name from _____. You're in a career area that interests me, and I was hoping that you could help me gain insights into the profession or this area of work. I'm sure that my questions could be answered in a 20-30 minute informational interview".
- If you prefer to arrange an appointment in person and cannot get past the front desk, treat support staff as resources. Ask them some of your questions, you will find they are informative as well.

Tips for the Informational Interview

- Dress appropriately.
- Bring a pad of paper and a pen (one that works!) to take notes.
- Have a list of specific questions you want answered during the interview.
- Thank your source for meeting with you, upon both arrival and departure.
- Follow up with a thank you card, letter or email.

Informational Interview **Rule #1**: Do not ask for a job

- Emphasize that you are seeking first-hand information and whatever they share with you will be appreciated and valued.

Sample Informational Interview Questions

- What motivated you to pursue this role?
- What is your typical day like? What challenges do you typically deal with through the services you provide and what kind of decisions do you generally make?
- What do you like most about your work? What do you like least about it?
- What education, professional development and experience helped you prepare for this role?
- Are there any specific educational requirements for this work?
- Based on what you know and have experienced, what additional advice can you offer?
- What are the opportunities in this field?
- What else may be helpful to know?