

THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

The informational interview is a vital component to Step 2 of the [Career/Life Planning Process](#). One of the best ways to find out about a position, company, or industry is to talk with people in careers you are considering. No one else can give you a better sense of the real life experiences, the challenges and opportunities, the specific and perhaps hidden demands as well as the drawbacks and limitations of the career field.

What is an informational Interview?

An informational interview is a highly focused information gathering session (preferably face-to-face) with a “networking contact” for the purpose of learning more about his or her occupation and/or field. This meeting is designed to help you choose or refine your career path by giving you the “insider” point-of-view. This insider view is information that you will not find in other resources such as the internet or textbooks. It is best to interview at least two people in the same occupation as job settings differ. The length of the meeting may vary, but a reasonable amount of time to request is about 30 minutes. Please note that this type of interview is to gather information only and is not for you to ask for a job.

What are the benefits of conducting the Information Interview?

- Identify important information about courses, majors, and educational programs.
- Learn about the realities of working in a particular occupation.
- Gather valuable information from professionals on career planning and job search strategies.
- Opportunity to fine tune career goals and choose a specialty within an occupational field
- Evaluate whether the career is compatible with your skills, interests, values, personality, lifestyle and goals.
- Develop confidence in interviewing with professionals by discussing your interests and goals.
- Gain access to the hidden job market: Over 80% of quality jobs are secured through networking.
- Expand your network of contacts by receiving referrals to other professionals in your field of interest for future opportunities.

Find Contacts

- Think about people you know of (warm contact) who work in jobs that are interesting to you. It may be someone you know well or you have seen on occasion.
- Ask friends, relatives, faculty, counselors, or former employers for a referral to a candidate for an information interview.
- You can talk with a person you don’t know personally (cold contact) by reaching out to professional associations, attending workshops and conferences. You can find a list of professional associations on the [CaCareerCafe](#) or on the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#).
-Sound a bit scary? Don’t worry. Most professionals actually enjoy talking about their jobs and giving career advice.

Contact the person by phone, letter, or email.

- Make it clear that you are interested in career information and that you *are not looking for a job*.
- If someone referred you, mention the name of the person or referral source.
- If sending a letter, this will give the contact time to check their calendar and schedule the interview. It can serve as a preliminary introduction and explain your purpose. See Sample Letter.
- If calling via telephone which can be stressful for the contact, mention how you received the contact’s name then get right to the point of the call. (You might want to practice this once or twice before making the call.) See Script.

- Be prepared for resistance from the contact. Try to balance your request without being forceful, yet sincere. The contact may in fact be very busy at the time of your call. If the interview is denied, politely request a phone interview or if he or she can refer you to a colleague who may be able to answer your questions. Don't be shy with being persistent.

Prepare for conducting the interview

- Read about the career field by reviewing the resource materials (e.g. online or Career Library) in the Career & Life Planning Center.
- Look at the company or organization's website.
- Prepare an opening statement that gives a brief profile of who you are and your interest in the field.
- *Although it is not required*, you can have a resume to share during your interview where can give you more to talk about with your new contact. Who knows? What you've already done in your life might impress your contact more than you expect! Some great websites for help with resumes are [sample resumes](#), [Occupational Outlook Quarterly](#), and [Optimal Resume](#).
- Dress appropriately in professional attire.

Develop Questions

Composing and writing down the questions you want to ask is critical! Informational interviews should be relaxed and informal, but they also need to be focused and organized for you to get the best information in a reasonable amount of time. (Remember, your interview should be about 30 minutes.) Some questions can be:

1. How would you describe what you do throughout your typical day?
2. Do you enjoy what you do on the job?
3. What parts do you enjoy the most?
4. What do you like the least about your job?
5. What pit-falls or difficulties would you warn a newcomer to avoid along this career path?
6. What specific training would you recommend a newcomer to obtain for this career?
7. What would you have done differently in your career path (if anything)?
8. Would it be alright if you give me the names and phone numbers of one or two of your colleagues, so that I may obtain even more information about this career? (Networking)

Follow-Up with your contacts

- Send a formal thank you letter to the person you interviewed. It would be nice for you to share with him/her the results of this assignment/project or suggestions discussed during the interview, and inform them what you have done to apply the advice you received.
- Report back to anyone who gave you the lead for this contact. This is not only common courtesy, it helps keep others interested and involved in your career plans.
- It is important to maintain contact with the person you interviewed. Keep in touch by sending an occasional article on a business related topic that you think would be of interest to him/her. Writing a quick note updating them on your current activities/progress is also helpful with maintaining contact.
- In the future, if you decide to pursue the career field, you may want to send out an interest letter by stating that if s/he hears of any job possibilities to give you a reply and enclose your resume.

For more information on informational interviews and more sample questions:

http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html

<http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2010/summer/art03.pdf>

SAMPLE LETTER:

6200 Fullerton Street
XYZ City, CA 92060
(714) 555-1123
email: mary@fullcoll.edu
October 10, 2013

Mr. John Smith
Crain & Associates
800 K Street, N.W., Suite 720
Washington, DC 20001-8000

Dear Mr. Smith:

I will be graduating from Fullerton College with an Associate in Science Degree in Business Management in May 2007, and am researching career information in business management. I obtained your name from Professor Jones here at Fullerton College. I very much appreciate your volunteering to help students with career information, and I hope that your schedule will permit you to provide me with information and some advice. I am particularly interested in investments and understand that your firm does work in this area. I am also interested in learning how the financial analysts in your firm began their careers. My resume is enclosed simply to give you some information about my background and project work. I will call you in two weeks to arrange a time to speak to you by telephone or perhaps visit your office if that would be convenient. I very much appreciate your time and consideration of my request, and I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature Here)
Mary Jones

Enclosure

SAMPLE SCRIPTS:

Script #1

Hello, my name is _____. Professor Smith suggested I call you because I am doing research on careers in business management. He thought you would be a good person to answer some questions about the profession. I could meet with you for coffee or lunch one day. Or, if it is more convenient, I could call you back at a time when you might have 20 minutes to spare. Do you think you might be able to find some time for me?

Script #2

Hello, my name is _____. I recently heard you speak at the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce public meeting. I will be graduating from Fullerton College in May and am interested in a career in business management. I am not looking for a specific job at this time, but I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this career field. Could you schedule 20 to 30 minutes with you at your convenience?