

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

This type of interview is conducted with a professional who works in a field of interest to you, in order to collect information about their job, career field, industry or company. It is **not** a job interview.

Through informational interviews you will meet people who share your enthusiasm, have similar talents and interests, and are putting these to use in their careers [*These people also know about the "hidden job market" in their fields, and can often share information with you. They can become important contacts in the future when you are job hunting.*]

The **Informational Interview** helps you identify careers that will:

- Fit well with your skills and interests
- Allow you to work in the environments that are best for you
- Focus on goals and values that are important in your life

HOW DOES IT WORK?

FIND PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW

If you don't already have names of professionals who work in fields that interest you, see our booklet "How to Get Your Foot in the Door" for guidelines on how to do this. Typically you will get these from professors, family members, friends, neighbors, or former co-workers.

LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN BEFORE YOU CALL

Before lining up interviews, prepare by researching the company and the industry, as well as the career field and the job of the person you plan to interview. You don't have to learn everything, of course...that's part of the purpose of the interview. But you will make the best impression and learn the most if you have done some work ahead of time.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO INTERVIEW THEM

Use the telephone (instead of email or texting) to arrange interviews. It is often the most persuasive and time-efficient method of contacting someone. It is easier to delete an email than to say "no" to a pleasant student who wants to know more about your career.

If you feel uncomfortable calling, write out what you'll say. Something like this:

"Hello, my name is Sara Smith; Professor Don Jones recommended that I call you. I am a sophomore Communications major at Capital University. I'm exploring careers in this field, and I'd like to get some information and advice. Would you have 20 minutes to meet with me to talk about your career?"

Make the appointment to interview these professionals at their work setting, if possible. A face-to-face meeting allows you to get a "feel" for the workplace. If they prefer scheduling a phone conversation, you should be flexible and accept their request.

DEVELOP QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

See the samples at the end of this guide for ideas. You should write the questions down; don't rely on your memory. Besides, you will look more prepared.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

Simple rules will help make the interview more successful:

- Call the day before to confirm the appointment
- Dress professionally
- Arrive on time
- Bring a current resume, but only provide it if asked, or to get their opinion
- Be courteous to *everyone* (starting with the receptionist and secretary)
- Take the initiative in conducting the interview
- Pay attention
- Show genuine interest
- End on time
- Thank the interviewee

FOLLOW UP

Send a thank you note or thank you e-mail within one day after the informational interview (see the sample at the end of this guide).

Make a record of the information you obtained, and the names and addresses of others to whom you were referred.

Make appointments to interview those people to whom you were referred. (This is the key to expanding your knowledge and your contact list.)

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ask open-ended questions. These are questions which can NOT be answered with a yes/no response. The idea is to phrase them in a way which allows the professional to elaborate on the answer.

Example: POOR: Do you enjoy your profession?
BETTER: What do you enjoy about your profession?

Sample Questions

General areas to explore:

- The professional's personal career experiences (how s/he chose it, prepared for it, likes/dislikes it, uses the skills s/he likes best, sees the career changing).
- How they see your values, skills, goals and environmental preferences relating to career opportunities. (Prior to this line of questioning, briefly summarize information about yourself)
- Other individuals, in that career field or related fields, with whom it would be helpful to speak based on your discussion.

Specific sample questions which might be helpful for you to review as you prepare for your informational interview. You do not need to ask all of these!

- Why did you choose this career field?
- What was your undergraduate major and how did you come to choose it?
- If you were a college graduate again, what would you do differently?
- What type of formal training (if any) have you had?
- What other experiences or training have been helpful to you?
- Describe the jobs you progressed through in your field to achieve your current position.
- How do you spend a typical work day or week?
- What skills are necessary (or most important) for the type of work you do?
- What kind of training or experience would be helpful to a person entering your field?
- What do you like best about your work? What do you like least?
- What are your primary duties and responsibilities?
- Why is this type of work important to you? What satisfaction do you get?
- Describe your working relationships with your co-workers, supervisor, supervisees.
- What type of work hours are expected in this field?
- What are some typical career paths in this field?
- In what ways has your work affected your lifestyle?
- What advice would you have for someone considering your field or occupation today?
- Are there related fields I should explore?
- How has your field changed since you started in it? How do you stay up-to-date, and how do you see the field changing in the future?
- Do you know of any general qualities a person should possess to succeed in the world of work?

And, the last question to be asked in every informational interview:

- Can you suggest other people that I can talk to in order to learn more about this (or a related) profession? May I let them know that you provided their name to me?

You can help them think of other professionals! Let them know that you are especially interested in three or four specific parts of the job or the career field that they shared with you, and then ask them to consider who comes to mind as good “next step” connections, since they now know those three or four things about your interests. Let them know that you would like to have a **similar conversation** (that is, asking for information and advice) with those people.

SEND A THANK-YOU EMAIL, PROFESSIONAL THANK-YOU CARD, OR LETTER

Although any of these (email, card, or letter) will be fine, one might be more appropriate than another depending on the person you meet with. A hand-written card or hand-written letter (if your handwriting looks professional and legible) is a great option because they convey a personal touch.

Dear Ms. Washington,

I very much enjoyed our discussion on Monday, and appreciate the time you took to speak with me. Your comments about the advertising and promotion industry, and your career experiences are very helpful to me as I gather information and consider various career options.

I plan to contact John McVey, with Eastland Merchants, to discuss his background in shopping mall promotion, an area where my skills may be suitable. Thank you for referring me to Mr. McVey; I would not have been aware that such an area existed, and am eager to explore this field with him.

Best wishes on your new advertising campaign; the ideas you shared with me really sounded exciting. I'm looking forward to talking with other individuals in the advertising and promotion field.

Sincerely,

Chris College