

Informational Interview Steps & Tips

How can an informational interview help me?

- It may give you an opportunity to gather first-hand information (research) about career fields you are considering
- It provides the opportunity for you to expand your network of professional contacts
- You may receive frank advice about a profession or industry that you will never read in a book
- You can obtain valuable advice about entering and advancing in a field, as well as ideas for locating contacts or job leads within the profession

Informational Interview Steps

- 1. Identify someone to interview:** Use family and friends, professors and advisors, professional organizations, Deans, Masters, the numerous job and internship databases available at UCS, or even an online directory. Get correct spelling and pronunciation of contact's name and be sure of contact's job title and salutation (Dr., Mr., Mrs., etc). ****If you are currently interning, you may want to ask your supervisor for permission to conduct an informational interview. Once settled in as an intern, ask your supervisor for potential leads for your informational interviews. After you have started forging your own personal relationships within the organization, you will also acquire a sense of the individuals you would like to interview.**
- 2. Contact: Call or write a letter or email** to request an appointment. Be sure to state the reason you are contacting him/her, how much time you are seeking (30-45 minutes), and how you learned about his/her work. You can also request a telephone interview (if the person does not live nearby) or an observational visit/job shadow that lasts a several hours.
- 3. Scheduling:** Be prepared to adjust your schedule. Suggest lunch, coffee break, etc. (When is it convenient for your contact to meet with you?)
- 4. Confirm:** Be sure you have agreed on the date and place of your meeting. A brief note of confirmation can serve as a helpful reminder to you both.
- 5. Research:** Research and read about the career field before the informational interview. Informational Interviews should not be a starting point for your career research – they should supplement what you have already learned. Also research your contact's place of work/company/organization.
- 6. Preparation:** Prepare a list of relevant questions (see following page). Prepare your resume and take a copy with you in case you are asked for it - but be aware that it may be inappropriate to offer it during your meeting. **NOTE:** Let the interviewee determine the formality of the conversation.

7. **Appearance & Arrival:** Plan what you will wear; the formality of your dress should match or exceed that of your interviewee's workplace. Also bear in mind how long it will take you to get to the meeting place. Arrive 10-15 minutes early; this may give you a little extra interview time.
8. **Thank You:** Ask for a business card before you leave and send a short note thanking the person for his/her time. Remember, these contacts can continue to serve as resources throughout your career. Consult the UCS Guide for sample notes.

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing

In preparation for your meeting, develop a list of topics to discuss. Below are some suggestions for questions to ask:

Occupational requirements and experience

- How did you get started in this field? Is that typical of most people?
- Describe a typical work week. Would these duties be the same for anyone with your job title or level within an organization?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important for success in this job?

Occupational Environment

- How would you describe the professional climate in your office? In your industry?
- What portions of your job involve interaction with coworkers, clients, or vendors?
- How much evening, weekend or overtime work is required? What about traveling?
- Observe the work environment while you are there: the people who work there, their daily routine, dress, office layout, etc

Benefits and challenges

- What are the greatest rewards of your work?
- What are the greatest frustrations? How do you deal with them?
- On what basis are professionals in your field evaluated? How is success measured?
- What is the starting salary range for new professionals in this field? (Do not ask for their salary).

Occupational outlook

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?

- How is this field likely to be affected by changes in technology and/or globalization?

Advice

- What kinds of education or specialized training would best prepare me for this field?
 - What courses can I take or projects can I complete that will also be helpful?
 - Are there any professional organizations that would help me to build my network in this field?
How do people find out about job openings in your line of work?
 - Where do people in this field typically look for internship and job opportunities?
 - Can you recommend other people for me to talk to?
 - What do you wish you had know about this field when you were just starting out?
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Don't Forget To...

- **Keep good records of your contacts.** Consider keeping a journal or spreadsheet dedicated to recording names, contact information, and notes from your informational interviews, including referrals to further contacts. Also, it is helpful to record the dates on which you sent your thank you note, and subsequent communications.
- **Maintain contact with the individuals you interview.** Write follow up letters/emails throughout the year to touch base with your contact and let them know how your career search is progressing and (if applicable) how their advice has worked out.