

BROOKHAVEN COLLEGE
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

An informational interview is a meeting that you arrange with a person who currently does the job you think you might want, or who has specific knowledge of an occupation or career field of interest. This person will usually be able to provide up-to-date information on their occupation and industry trends and may be able to direct you to the person who has hiring power within their organization. An informational interview is a situation where you have the opportunity to gather the data you need to make a realistic career choice while gaining advice on how to conduct your job search. You are not job-seeking during an informational interview.

HOW AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW CAN HELP YOU

- Informational interviewing allows you to access the most up-to-date career information on positions, industries and companies. It helps you to explore careers and clarify your career goal and job search.
- You can discover the skills that are required for certain jobs and match them with your own abilities and strengths.
- Finding out how people feel about their work or the culture of their company can help you to assess whether a similar position would be right for you
- Informational interviewing can give you a competitive edge in an interview by providing you an understanding of current issues and knowledge that you can use in an actual interview.
- The professionals with whom you interview can serve as valuable job contacts in the future. By asking for names of those who are doing similar work, you can begin to establish a list of professional resources that you can use to develop your network of contacts.
- You will develop self-confidence in the art of interviewing, while learning the process of taking comfortable, assertive control in job hunting and interview settings.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT?

Identifying who to contact is often a difficult step. Look for people who:

- work in settings you like (i.e. hospitals, politics, big business, airlines, etc.);
- work in careers you are interested in (i.e. counseling psychologist, market researcher, criminal lawyer, etc.);
- work in specific organizations that you are interested in (IBM, Nations Bank, Legal Aid Office, SMU, etc.).

Start with lists of people you already know: friends, fellow students, present or former coworkers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. Professional organizations, the yellow pages from the phone book, college career center or alumni office, organizational directories on the Internet, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title. There's no one in the world who you can't try contacting. In general, people like to help students out with job information. One student whose dream job was to run a Fortune 500 company called the president of Levi Strauss & Co., asked for an informational interview, and got it. So don't give up!

BE PREPARED

Before you contact anyone to request an informational interview, know exactly what kind of information you want. Generally, don't ask for routine information that is readily available elsewhere. First, check out the materials at the Career Development Center, Learning Resources Center, or other resource libraries. Know your own interests, skills and values, and be ready to describe them if asked.

Phone calls are the best ways to schedule an interview; letters seldom work unless they include a personal referral and follow-up by telephone. Prepare a general outline of what you want to say to the person when you call them. If someone has personally referred you to this contact, mention them when you introduce yourself. Be prepared to answer questions about what type of information you are looking for in case they want to talk in more depth over the phone. Here are some examples of how to make the initial contact:

“Hello, my name is _____. I'm conducting career research in your field. I would like to meet with you for about 30 minutes to talk about your job and expertise so I can get more acquainted with the ___ field.”

“Hello, my name is _____. Jill Banes suggested that I call you. I am considering a career in urban planning (or 'working with children' or 'in a hospital setting') and would be interested in any information or advice you could share with me. Could we set up a time for about 20 minutes to talk about this?”

“Hi, my name is _____ and I'm a student at _____ Brookhaven College. I got your name from _____. You're in a line of work that I'm interested in, and I would like your assistance to help me gain insights into the profession. I'm sure that my questions could be answered in a 20-30-minute informational interview.”

“Ms. Darcy, I'm _____, a former Braniff pilot. I'm very interested in a career in the oil and gas industry, but need more specific information about it. I understand from your personnel director that you are an expert in the areas of oil and gas land lease contract negotiation. I would be interested in your personal perspective about careers in the oil and gas industry. Could we arrange an appointment time next week?”

If you prefer to arrange an appointment in person and cannot get past the front desk, treat receptionists as resources. They hold the key to getting inside the unit or section of the organization if you do not already have an inside contact or referral. Ask them some of your questions. You will usually get good information. Receptionists and other support staff know much more about their company than we often realize. They know how it works, the names of key people, job requirements, etc. It is important that they understand what you want. If you ask them something that they feel could be more fully answered by someone else, they will usually give you a referral.

You can use your own creativity, but the most important thing is to emphasize that you are simply trying to get first-hand information, and whatever they share with you will be appreciated.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW TIPS

- Have an agenda for the meeting, including a list of questions (see below). Be prepared to ask questions and take the initiative. Seek information, ideas, advice, feedback and referrals to other contacts.
- Be open to suggestions or a new way of looking at things – the informational interview may help you to reevaluate, refocus and discover new opportunities.
- Make your contact aware of your objectives and background.
- Keep in mind that the purpose of the meeting is not to ask for a job. Your purpose is to gain information from your contact – not to sell yourself.
- Arrive early and dress for an interview (See “Dressing for an Interview” handout). Make a lasting impression by being punctual, professional and properly attired.
- Informational meetings sometimes develop into job interviews. Be sensitive to your contact's actions and words, and be prepared to answer questions about yourself. Bring a resume with you, just in case.
- Bring a notepad and, if it seems appropriate, jot down notes during the meeting or immediately following while your memory is fresh.

- At the appropriate time, near the end of the interview, ask if the person can suggest someone else you might contact. This could be someone at the same firm or someone at another company. The next person will be more receptive if you have been referred by a colleague.
- Remain sensitive to your contact's time constraints.
- Get a business card so that you have a name, title and address for follow-up.
- If you schedule a phone interview instead of a face-to-face informational interview, be sure to call back at the appointed time. Be well prepared. The conversation should not last longer than 15 minutes unless the individual chooses to extend the conversation.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Below are some sample informational interview questions. Read through them and choose the ones that apply to your needs to help you get the information you need. Remember, you **MUST** stay within your time constraints so choose carefully!

JOB-RELATED QUESTIONS

- What is your job like?
- What is a typical day like?
- What do you really do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job? (as opposed to job title)
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What other jobs can you get with the same background?
- What are the various jobs in this field or organization?
- What skills/education are most important for a position in this field?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?

EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?

VALUE AND SATISFACTION

- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?

REGARDING THE FIELD OF EMPLOYMENT

- What changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What are the typical entry-level jobs and which ones are best for learning as much as possible?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?

COMPANY INFORMATION

- Why did you decide to work for this company? What do you like most about this company?
- Why do customers choose this company?
- Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field? What other advice do you have?
- May I contact you if I have other questions? What method would be best?

MORE TIPS ABOUT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- **Never** be late for an informational interview.
- **Never** ask for a job during an informational interview.
- **Never** go over the amount of time you asked for when scheduling the informational interview.
- **Always** dress appropriately, as if you were going to a real job interview.
- **Always** be prepared with questions to ask (see above) as well as questions to be asked of you.
- **Always** send a thank you note!

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up is imperative! A successful meeting can quickly turn unsuccessful if you do not follow-up.

- Send a thank you note regardless of whether or not the interview was helpful.
- In your note, reiterate information that you found particularly interesting or helpful.
- Send the thank you note the same day as the meeting or the next day. It shows that you are conscientious and professional when you send a note immediately following an interview.

At a later date, you may want to send a letter expressing interest in employment. If so, you can mention your informational interview in your cover letter. Keep a copy of your thank you note, along with a record of names, dates, comments and referrals. The copy of the note will help you maintain a record of your contacts for future use.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

<http://www.santarosa.edu/~lhemew/interview/>

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

<http://www.rivier.edu/departments/cardev/talk.html>

http://www.apsu.edu/~careers/Car_dev/infointerview.htm

These resources were written and developed by:

www.quintcareers.com, Brookhaven College Career Development Center sStaff, and information from Knock 'Em Dead 2003 by Martin Yate.

IT ALL BEGINS HERE.



Brookhaven College

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www.BrookhavenCollege.edu, click on "C" and select "Career Development Center"

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