

Informational Interviewing

What is it?

It is **not** an interview for a position. The purpose of an informational interview is to help you define your career options. It is also useful in researching companies where you may want to work. It is a meeting of usually 15 to 30 minutes with a person who has hands-on experience in the area you want to know more about.

Objectives:

- To gain solid information that will help you evaluate how your skills and interests dovetail with a particular career or business.
- To learn what the industry or company values in its employees.
- To increase your network by leaving a positive impression with someone who could provide encouragement, support, and future access to job leads.
- To find out whether jobs are available in the field or business you want to enter.

Whom to contact:

Everyone you know. Ask, "Do you know anyone who works for General Mills?" "Do you know anyone in a non-profit organisation?" "Do you know anyone who does freelance writing?" Then once you have a name . . .

"Mrs. Smith, Brad Johnson suggested I speak with you. My name is Steven Olson and I am interested in the accounting field. I could use some advice from someone who is in this field. Do you have any time this week when I could meet with you? I only need about 15 minutes of your time. It would really help me in my decision making process."

Preparing for the interview:

Select questions relating to the occupation or business you are considering. Research key areas of potential discussion. Take an active role in the interview. Encourage suggestions. Ask questions that provide the information you want. Show your interest and knowledge.

What do I ask?

- What is a day on this job really like?
- How did you get into this field?
- What do you like about your job? Dislike?
- What's the best way to find out about jobs in this field?
- What kind of experience or training is required?
- What is the potential for advancement?
- May I have a copy of a job description?
- What are employers looking for? (Skills, education, experience)
- How important is the resume and what makes one impressive?
- What do you look for in employees?
- How do you stay current in your knowledge?
- What's the corporate culture like here? (Hours, salary, titles)
- Are there related fields I might want to look into if few jobs are available in my primary career goal?
- What are current job prospects like?
- Is your job typical of others in this field?
- Which firms do you think are your toughest competitors, and how do they differ from your company?
- Can you refer me to someone else in this field?

Keep in mind that you can also ask about other things. Get a sense for whether they enjoy their work. Try to decide what they actually do, how they spend their day, what their short and long term responsibilities are. Look for the answers behind the answers.

It is important to gauge just how friendly your contacts really are. If they're sympathetic, you can ask hard questions and reveal doubts about the field. If they are stand-offish or judgmental, be cautious. You should not be afraid to ask technical questions - especially if it shows what you already know about the field.

When you go:

This is an opportunity to meet a person in the profession you are hoping to enter. Dress professionally, take paper for writing notes, and an extra resume in case there is an opportunity to have it critiqued or to leave it with the employer. Avoid anything that might jeopardize your interviewer's desire to refer you to other people. One important objective is getting additional leads and referrals, one of which may eventually lead you to a job.

When it is over:

You should have names of people to contact. You should follow up on the advice the employer gives you. You should have a good idea if this is where you would want to work or could work.

Don't forget to send a thank-you note to the person for being so generous with their time.