Informational Interviewing Guide
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Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing allows you to talk with people in your career field of choice to learn what working in that field would be like. No one is better able to describe the challenges and opportunities in the field than someone who has already experienced them. Planning and carrying out an informational interview is one of the best ways to explore career options, answer questions you may have about your career choice, and gain feedback and advice about how to succeed in your chosen profession.

Setting Up Your Informational Interview

Many students feel anxious about approaching a professional and requesting an informational interview. Most of the time, their anxiety is eased when they find professionals are often willing to spend time with students who are seeking to clarify their career goals. Most people feel a professional responsibility to provide information about their career that might help others. You may have someone in mind that you would like to interview. If you are having difficulty finding an appropriate person to interview, consider asking family, friends, faculty, or a Career Advisor for suggestions. Try to interview someone who has a position you would someday like to hold in a similar type of organization to those you are considering.

When contacting a professional to set up an informational interview, be sure to mention that you are not seeking a job, but instead are seeking information about their career field. If you have been referred to that person by a friend or colleague, mention that person’s name so that your contact is aware of who sent you.

You may want to call a person directly to set up an interview, in which case you may encounter a “gatekeeper” (a secretary or assistant whose job it is to reduce the workload and interruptions for the person you are calling). Be sure the gatekeeper understands you are seeking career advice, not a job interview. Otherwise, the gatekeeper will likely try to route you to Human Resources, the area that handles job applicants.

Another approach to setting up an interview is to write an introductory letter to the person with whom you’d like to meet. In your letter, explain your interest in their occupation and desire to learn more about the contact’s career path. Tell the contact you will call within the week to see if a meeting can be scheduled, and then follow through. Do not ask the contact to call you; it is your responsibility to handle the details of the meeting.
Planning Your Informational Interview

Prepare ahead of time by familiarizing yourself with the company where your contact works. Learn as much as possible about the occupation as well, so that you can engage your contact in conversation. You should also plan and write out some questions to take with you so that you are sure to learn as much as possible from the meeting. Questions should focus on your contact’s career choices, path, and advice. Some questions you might consider asking are as follows:

* How did you get into this career field?
* Why did you choose this profession?
* How does your position fit into the overall operation of the organization?
* What does the future look like for this profession?
* Describe a typical day on the job.
* What do you like most about your job?
* What do you like least about your job?
* What skills and abilities are most important in your work?
* What advice would you give someone starting out in this career?
* Can you suggest any reading, classes, or opportunities I should pursue?
* What other types of careers are related to this field?
* Could you suggest colleagues that would be a good source of information about the field?
* Could I use your name when I contact them?
* Is there anything else you feel I should know about this career field?
Conducting Your Informational Interview

The goal of your informational interview is to learn about your contact’s career field in order to help your career decision making. In order to help your contact help you best, talk about and demonstrate your skills. Know your strengths and articulate them clearly. Your contact can only help you if you make known you interests and abilities.

When arriving to your informational interview, dress professionally and arrive early, just as you would for a job interview. Shake hands and show confidence. Express your appreciation for your contact taking time to meet with you.

You may want to refresh your contact’s memory of what type of information you are seeking prior to starting into your questions. Let conversation flow and encourage your contact to share freely. Don’t worry so much about getting through your list that you forget to listen.
Concluding Your Informational Interview

Thank your contact for his or her time and willingness to share and ask if you may keep in touch. Ask if you can leave a copy of your resume in case your contact hears about an opportunity that might suit you. If you haven’t already, ask for names and contact information of other professionals that may be able to help you.

Thank You Note
Within a day after you informational interview, write your contact a thank you note. Mention specific advice that was especially helpful as well as any steps you are planning to take as a result of your meeting. An example:

<Date>
Cary Bradwood
Account Manager
Company Name
Company Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Ms. Bradwood,

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about careers in marketing. Receiving insight into the field from an experienced professional has helped confirm this is the right career for me. I appreciated your perspective regarding professional development and have decided to join the Public Relations Society of America so that I can interact with more professionals and learn about current trends in the field. I will also be in contact with Ms. Atkins and Mr. Sonites, as you suggested, to gain further insight. I am grateful for you willingness to share your knowledge and experience with me. I will keep you informed of my progress in my career search.

Sincerely,

Your Name