

Informational Interviewing



Career Services

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Informational interviewing provides an opportunity to learn about career options by obtaining information about occupations and industries. Informational interviews also allow employers to meet with you in a low-stress situation and build your professional network.

PREPARATION

Before contacting an employer, it is important to prepare for the informational interview by following these guidelines:

Clarify your goals

Write a brief summary of your abilities, interests, values and goals so you are focused when you contact companies.

Select places to visit

Utilize business directories in your area, Yellow Pages, Chamber of Commerce listings, professional associations, friends, faculty, etc., to generate the names of organizations you would like to visit.

Research the companies

Familiarize yourself with the organizations by reviewing their websites, finding articles about them in local business magazines and journals, and utilizing business directories such as Hoover's.

Set up an appointment or a phone interview

Utilize your networking contacts to get in touch with a specific individual within the company. If this is not possible, try contacting the person who is actually doing the job that interests you or contact someone in the department/area of interest. When calling, always ask if the person has a few minutes and/or if this is a good time to talk. Explain the reason why you want to meet with the person. Be courteous and always thank an individual for his/her time. If you cannot arrange an on-site interview, ask for a telephone interview. Be prepared to conduct the interview immediately if the opportunity arises.

For example: To explore a career in accounting, you might contact someone working as an accountant for a public accounting firm. You may have obtained this person's name by speaking with a professor. The conversation might be:

"Mr. Smith, my name is _____. I was given your name by _____. Is this a good time for you to talk? I'm very interested in the field of accounting and am thinking about changing majors and entering the accounting program at Webster University. I would like to know more about different areas of the profession, and I am specifically interested in learning more about working in a public accounting firm. I would like to know if we can schedule a time to meet to further discuss this."

Continue your conversation and set up a time to meet in person. Be specific about location and time.

THE INTERVIEW

Prepare a list of questions that will encourage the interviewee to provide you with specific information about his or her line of work. The following is a list of potential questions you may ask:

1. Describe the various careers and career paths in this field.
2. What is the future outlook for this career field?
3. What specific skills, interests or values are important for a person to have in this job?
4. How did you get started in this field?
5. What are the most significant pluses/minuses about working in this field?
6. How did you enter this field? What previous jobs led you to your current position?
7. What do you like/dislike about it?
8. Where might I be after 5 years with your organization?
9. If I left this career field after 5 years, what other occupations might be options for me?
10. What kind of training is necessary for this career field? Are there any specific college majors that relate well to this position?
11. What salaries are earned in this career field?
12. What is the top job you can aspire to in this career?
13. Are there any courses or activities a student should get involved in that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
14. What advice would you give someone entering this field?
15. What is the best way to obtain an entry-level position in this career field?
16. Do you have information on job qualifications and/or job descriptions that I may have?
17. Are there other people you may recommend for me to talk to so that I may learn more about this career field?

FOLLOW-UP

Keep a record of the organizations you visit. For each, note opportunities to pursue. Contact the referrals you received and arrange an informational interview with them.

Remember to always send a thank you letter to individuals with whom you meet for informational interviews. Doing so is the polite thing to do, and it may also help in maintaining your professional connections for future job search campaigns.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Read books on networking and informational interviewing. Several are available in the Career Services resource library and in most public libraries.
- Schedule an appointment to discuss informational interviewing with a Career Services staff member.