



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

A wealth of information can be obtained from the doctor, travel agent, manager or engineer. That is the idea behind an informational interview. It offers you an “on the spot” look at people doing what you think you’d like to do and allows you to investigate different specialties in any given career (by all means, talk to more than one person).

Why do an informational interview?

1. To get valuable information for your job hunting and career planning.
2. To do a reality check on what you’ve read, heard and thought.
3. The person can offer you information that is:
 - Up-to-date
 - Personal and subjective
 - Specific and related to the local situation
 - Reflective of the “on the job atmosphere”
4. To gain self-confidence and learn the process of taking comfortable, assertive control in job hunting and interviewing settings.
5. To “expand your circle of expert contacts”, to get more referrals, and establish your own contacts.
6. To establish the first link in targeting an eventual job.

What is the difference between informational interviews and job-hunting interviews?

An informational interview, like a job-hunting interview, is a formal two-way conversation. It’s different from a job-hunting interview in terms of:

- **Control**: You control the conversation. You know what information you want and you ask the questions.
- **Purpose**: For you to gain meaningful information so that you can determine whether the field or job meets your interests or career objective.
- **Pressure**: There is less pressure on you. The focus is on their expertise and your interest in their expertise.

Whom to contact

Identify those who:

- Share a common interest, enthusiasm or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you.
- Work in settings you like (e.g. hospitals, politics, business, airlines).
- Work in careers which might interest you (e.g. counseling psychologist, market researcher, criminal lawyer).
- Work in specific jobs in specific organizations (e.g. counseling psychologist at university counseling center, criminal lawyer at Legal Aid Office, market researcher at IBM).

Where to find these people

1. Ask friends, family, neighbors, work colleagues ... anyone you know.
2. Contact faculty, college advisors, counselors, and other college offices.

3. Call community service agencies and trade organizations (e.g. Rotary Club, business and professional organizations, women's organizations, Chamber of Commerce).
4. Look in the Yellow Pages.

Remember, people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. Don't waste their time or yours – BE PREPARED.

Know exactly what kind of information you want. Don't ask for information that is readily available elsewhere. First research the material at the Career Development Center, college or business library and other campus offices. Know your own interests, skills and values, and how they relate to the person you are interviewing.

How to arrange an interview

Personal referral is the most effective. Have a mutual acquaintance be the bridge for your contact. Letters or phone calls are the next best if you don't have a personal referral. Follow up your letter with a phone call.

Here are some examples of how to make contact:

CASE 1: You have identified someone you want to talk to. You ask around and discover that Susan in your English class knows the person you are trying to contact. You have decided to call, but what do you say?

"Hello, my name is _____. Susan Longford suggested that I call you. I am considering a career in urban planning" (or "I really enjoy working with children", or "I am considering working in a hospital setting") "and would like any information or advice you could give me. Could we set up a time for about 15-30 minutes to talk about this?"

CASE 2: If you don't have a personal referral:

"Ms. Darcy, I am _____, a student at Saint Mary's College. I'm very interested in a career in the travel industry. I've read your travel column in the paper and understand you've been involved in this field for some time. I would be interested in your personal perspective about careers in travel. Could we arrange an appointment for next week? I would only need about 15-30 minutes of your time."

Note: If you receive a negative response, ask if they know of anyone else in the field (or profession, or position) you might talk to.

Follow-up

Always follow up with a thank-you note. In it, you might want to reiterate information you found particularly interesting or helpful. Also, keep records of names, dates, comments and referrals. Ask them if you can call if you have further questions.

REMINDERS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

1. You are not asking the person for a job. You are gathering information on which to base some decisions. Make sure your contacts understand this.

2. Explain how you obtained the person's name, e.g. the SMC Alumni network, your friend who works at the same company, etc.
3. You can also write a letter first, explaining your intent to arrange a meeting. Follow up your letter with a phone call to set up the appointment.
4. Dress in professional attire, as if this were a "real" interview. Be punctual and professional.
5. Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation. Remember you are interviewing him/her.
6. It is acceptable to have your questions written out and for you to take notes on what the person tells you.
7. Respect the person's time. Be appreciative without being apologetic, and plan a manageable agenda. Do not wear out your welcome.
8. Keep your eyes open for other clues about the organizational environment.
9. When using the SMC Alumni network, always direct inquiries (both phone and mail) to the Alum's work address, unless otherwise specified.
10. Keep your contacts updated on your progress. Maintaining your contacts is an ongoing process which will help you throughout your career.
11. Remember, you are asking for a favor from these people, so be courteous and professional.
12. Make sure you write a thank-you letter. Not only is this courteous, but it keeps your name fresh in the contact's mind. Furthermore, it makes your network stronger.
13. *Optional:* You could have an updated resume with you in case they ask for one. If you don't have one, you can send one later. Remember, though, this is not a job interview. Do not offer your resume if it is not requested.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Select four or five questions for the information-gathering interview. Ask about those things that are important to you.

1. How did you get into this work? Get started in this job?
2. How did you prepare yourself for this job/profession?
3. What classes or projects will be best to prepare me for a career in this field?
4. What do you like most about your job? Like least about it? What do you find most rewarding about your work?
5. What skills, personal qualities, experience and education are necessary in this career?
6. What do you do in a typical day?
7. What is your project (or organization) trying to accomplish?
8. What would you advise young people entering this career?
9. What, in your opinion, is the job outlook for this career? What will affect its growth or decline?
10. What are some current challenges in this field/job?
11. If you were looking to start in this field, to whom would you go for advice or more information?
12. What can a person expect to earn in a position like this?
13. Do you know anyone else I could speak with for additional information?

Prepare four or five questions of your own:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.