

Informational Interviewing

What is it?

An informational interview is a brief meeting between a person who wants to investigate a career and a person working in that career. It is a meeting initiated by you and an interview usually lasts 20 to 30 minutes. The goal of an informational interview is not to get a job. Instead, the purpose is to gather information about industries, jobs or organizations you might like – to see if they fit your interests and personality.

How can it help you?

- ❖ Learn more about the realities of working in a particular occupation
- ❖ Decide among different occupations or choose an occupational specialty
- ❖ Focus career goals
- ❖ Discover careers you never knew existed
- ❖ Discover what skills are required for certain jobs and match them with your own abilities and strengths
- ❖ Find different ways to prepare for a particular career
- ❖ Gain confidence in your networking skills, and become more comfortable in the interviewing process
- ❖ Most importantly: the people with whom you speak will remain contacts and lead you to other, perhaps even better contacts and sources of job or internship opportunities



How do you arrange an informational interview?

Brainstorm all your resources for finding someone to interview including:

- **People you already know** – family, friends, teachers or past co-workers may work in the occupation you want to explore, or they may know people who do
- **Stockton's Alumni Career Network** – the Career Center manages a database of Alumni Mentors who have volunteered to assist students in their career exploration. Alumni offices of high schools may also be a good resource to explore.
- **LinkedIn** – this professional social networking site allows you to search alumni from your college by job title, industry, college major and geographic location. You might also find connections through your own network.
- **Professional associations** – these associations maintain and often publish membership directories. Many also produce journals, trade magazines or newsletters describing the activities of specific members. These members might be potential interview subjects.
- **Directly contacting businesses and organizations** – research places that do the work you want to do and who hire the type of workers you hope to consult

There are three main ways to arrange for an informational interview:

- **Mutual acquaintance introduction** – friends, family or acquaintances might be willing to make the initial request for an interview for you or allow you to use them as a referral – using their name when writing or calling the contacts yourself.
- **Letter or Email** – The most common way to ask for an interview. Some employers prefer to receive a letter or email before you call to set up interviews (See sample letter on the last page of this handout).
- **Telephone** – Faster, but often more stressful way to arrange an interview. Practice your introduction and request once or twice before making calls.

How do you prepare for an informational interview?

- ✓ **Research** – Look up websites, company literature and/or industry trade magazines to learn more about the company or industry where you'll be interviewing.
- ✓ **Bring a resume** – It will give your contact an idea of how you are presenting yourself, and something to remind them of you in the future. You may also ask for their feedback on your resume.
- ✓ **Develop questions** – The most critical part of preparing for an informational interview is to compose the questions you want to ask. Review the section below for sample questions.
- ✓ **Dress professionally** – If you are meeting in person, dress as if you were interviewing for a job. Women should wear dresses or suits, men should wear a suit and tie.

Tips for Informational Interviewing

- Seek to interview people actually working in the occupations you are considering. These people probably know more about what the work is like than human resources specialists or hiring managers.
- EMPHASIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT LOOKING FOR A JOB!
- Keep the interview to 20-30 minutes. But don't be surprised if the interview lasts an hour; people like to be helpful and enjoy talking about themselves.
- Compile a notebook of questions asked and responses received
- Keep a list of the people with whom you talk and their job titles, addresses and phone numbers
- Always ask who else you should contact prior to the conclusion of your discussion. This referral is sometimes the best lead you can get!

What questions should you ask?

Since you are interviewing for information only, use this opportunity to learn as much as you can about the particular occupation. You may want to ask, modify, or add to the suggested checklist of questions here.

About the job:

- ⇒ Tell me about your present job and some of the responsibilities.
- ⇒ What types of tasks do you spend most of your time doing? Or, Describe how you occupy your time during a typical work week.
- ⇒ What skills or talents are most essential for effectiveness in this job?
- ⇒ What do you find most rewarding about the work itself, apart from external motivators such as salary, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- ⇒ What are some of the more difficult or frustrating parts of this job?
- ⇒ What types of advancement opportunities are available for an entry-level worker in this job?
- ⇒ I read that _____ is an issue in this occupation. Have you found that to be true?
- ⇒ Is this career changing? How?

Working conditions:

- ⇒ What kind of hours do you work?
- ⇒ What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary work week? Do you enjoy these obligations?
- ⇒ How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?

Preparation and Training:

- ⇒ What credentials, educational degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this field?
- ⇒ What kinds of prior experiences are absolutely essential?
- ⇒ How did you prepare yourself for this work?
- ⇒ What kinds of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend?
- ⇒ What courses were of most use to you, or would you recommend for students today?
- ⇒ How did you find this job?

Supply and demand:

- ⇒ What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
- ⇒ How do people find out about these jobs? Are they advertised in newspapers or online (what sites or papers), by word-of-mouth (who spreads the word), by the Human Resources Office?
- ⇒ Is turnover high? How does one move from position to position? Do people normally move to another organization, or do they move up in the organization?
- ⇒ How much do wages or salaries vary in your work by employer or region?

Hiring Decisions:

- ⇒ If you hired someone to work with you today, what factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why? Educational credentials? Past work experiences? Personality? Specific skills? Applicant's knowledge of your organization, department or job?

Career Future:

- ⇒ If things develop as you'd like, what would be the next steps in your career?
- ⇒ If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel that you could do?
- ⇒ How rapidly is your present career field growing? How would you describe or estimate future prospects?

Referral to Others:

- ⇒ Based on our conversation, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
- ⇒ Can you name a few of these people who might be willing to see me? May I have your permission to use your name when I call or contact them?

How do you address questions from the resource person?

The person whom you are interviewing may want to know something about you as well as share information about her/himself. S/he may even tell you of job openings or inquire as to whether or not you are interested in hearing of any. How you answer will depend upon where you are in your job search. You may or may not be ready to commit yourself to a particular occupational field. In any case, try to keep options open for yourself and respond accordingly. Answer questions regarding your skills and background honestly, and with a positive attitude.

What should you do following the informational interview?

- ✓ Send a thank you note. A thank you note will help you be remembered by the contact person in a positive light. Holiday cards and other postcards are very appropriate.
- ✓ Keep in touch – cultivate the relationship. At a later date you might want to send a letter expressing interest in working for them, recalling your informational interview and enclosing a copy of your resume. You may also want to telephone the contact person, remind him/her of your informational interview and inquire about employment opportunities, that they may have knowledge of within your field of interest. LinkedIn.com can also be a great tool for staying connected and continuing to grow your network. Keep them posted on your job search efforts, and let them know when you've found a job.

Cover Letter for Informational Interview

31 Plum Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08840

August 1, 2015

Ms. Shelly Mars
Director
Marketing Department
IBM Corporation
Armonk, NY 10607

Dear Ms. Mars:

As a graduating senior from Stockton University's Business Program, I am writing to you in order to seek your advice as a knowledgeable professional in the marketing field. I found your name in the Stockton University Alumni Mentor Network at the Career Center here, and am thankful for the chance this has given me to obtain guidance from your expertise.

My degree in Business with a Marketing concentration, my experience creating marketing materials for two active student organizations and my internship designing a marketing plan for a boutique retail shop have led me to want to pursue a career in the field of marketing. My interest is to research and inquire about current marketing opportunities in the corporate world and to determine whether or not it is a setting that would complement my skills and interests.

I would like to meet with you briefly, not to seek employment, but to learn your insights on: current and possible future trends in the marketing industry, the personality needed to succeed in corporate settings; and the dynamics of careers for women in this field. I am sure that your insights will assist me in making a substantive career decision.

To give you an idea of my background and how I am presenting myself I am enclosing a copy of my resume. I will call your office to arrange a brief appointment, at your convenience, in a few days. I look forward to meeting you and learning from you.

Sincerely,

Karen Riley

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For more information on informational interviewing or to find Stockton Alumni to contact in your field of interest, contact the Career Center.

Some material for this handout taken from: Informational Interviewing: Get the inside scoop on careers; *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*; Summer 2002.