



Informational Interviews

Ready Reference ♦ C-7

College of Engineering, Architecture & Technology ♦ Career Services

Do you already know the perfect career for you but need information on how to reach your goal? Are you aware of professionals that utilize the knowledge and skills that interest you and you'd like to speak with them about their positions? Then you need to consider conducting an informational interview. Below you'll find the information necessary to complete an informational interview.

Seven Steps to Informational Interviewing

1. Identify sources of information.

Two ways of identifying sources of information are through personal referrals and direct contacts. Personal referrals are obtained by using your current network of friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, professors, etc. to obtain names of individuals they know who are using the knowledge, skills, interests, and/or talents that you enjoy or are interested in using. A direct contact is a source you identify by reading newspapers, magazines, professional journals, and websites, or by researching professional associations related to your areas of interest.

✓ **HOT TIP:** Read magazines from your field of interest and contact a professional who was profiled for an informational interview. Mention that you read the article and were very interested and impressed. This is nice flattery and will likely increase the professional's willingness to help you.

Each method of identifying sources has benefits. Personal referrals can save you time by eliminating some of the research required for seeking out direct contacts. Obtaining a personal referral can increase the chance that your request for information will be warmly received. Direct contacts, however, are likely to have more rapid access to the type of information you are pursuing. Utilizing direct contacts also allows you to practice being assertive. In summary, use personal referrals when possible and direct contacts when personal referrals are not an option.

2. Make an initial contact with your source.

Initial contacts can be made either by phone, mail, or e-mail. Regardless of how you are

making the contact with your source, be sure to identify who you are, why you are contacting them, and what type of information you are seeking. Your source should have a clear understanding that you are contacting them only for information because you are considering their career field as a possibility for yourself. It is best not to call it an informational interview. Interviews, to employers, translate into job search. Your source should be assured that you simply want information, not a job.

If your source is the result of a personal referral, mention the name of the person who referred you, but be sure you have that person's permission first.

Lastly, if you are writing, indicate when you will call your source to arrange for an informational interview.

3. Arrange the details of your interview.

When personally speaking with your potential source, ask him/her for fifteen to twenty minutes of time to visit and to learn more about his/her position and career area. If possible, arrange to meet with your source at their workplace. If this is not possible, scheduling a telephone interview may be necessary.

If your potential information source is not able to assist you, ask if he/she knows anyone who might be able to provide the information you are seeking and if your source would mind you using his/her name when contacting that person.

4. Prepare interview questions.

Before you interview your source, you should develop a list of good questions to help you obtain the information you desire. You should also research the company thoroughly in preparation. Remember that an informational interview allows you to obtain a "real world"

perspective and information not readily available from other sources, therefore ask questions that can't be answered by common reference materials. Questions should be open-ended and not "Yes/No" questions since open-ended questions provoke a more detailed response. A list of possible questions to ask is provided at the end of this Ready Reference.

5. Interview your source.

On the day of your scheduled interview, be sure that you respect your source's time by being punctual and by only staying as long as you are welcome. Some sources will be happy to allow you more time than you initially requested, however others don't have the additional time to spare.

Realize that conducting an effective informational interview involves more than simply asking questions; active listening and observing is the key to gaining all of the information your source has to provide. Allow the interview to progress on a natural course and you will likely obtain more information than you were initially seeking. Pay attention to your source's attitude and feelings about their job and organization, and take brief notes throughout the interview so you don't forget the valuable information. Some sources may also allow you to tape your conversation, but remember to ask for permission beforehand if you want to use this option. Remember, at no time during the interview should you ask for a job! If you're talking about careers, they know you want a job and if they can help you, they most likely will without your asking.

6. Ask for additional referrals.

As a member of the career area you are considering, your source undoubtedly knows other professionals in that same career field. Remember to ask your source for the names of others who he/she believes would be valuable to you in obtaining information about this career option.

7. Send a thank you note to your source.

You should always follow up with your contacts promptly with a brief thank you note. Thank you notes allow you to express your appreciation for the time and useful information your source granted you, and they leave a favorable impression with your source in case you need more assistance in the future.

Possible Questions to Ask

- How did you get into this line of work?
- What type of skills/knowledge/academic preparation does one need to perform this job?
- What are some of the particular advantages and disadvantages of this type of work?
- Can you describe a typical workday for me?
- What are the rewards of this type of work?
- What are the frustrations of this type of work?
- How much flexibility do you have regarding dress, hours of work, vacation schedules, or place of residence?
- What types of advancement opportunities are available?
- To what professional organizations do you belong? Should I join now?
- If you were starting out again in this field of work, what might you do differently?
- What is the future outlook of this line of work?
- What areas do you feel promise the most growth?
- What are some typical job titles in this field?
- Who hires individuals to do this type of work?
- How would I best acquire the necessary skills to perform this job?
- Would you recommend graduate or professional school directly after completing undergraduate work, sometime in the future, or not at all?
- What do you think are the most critical factors in hiring someone into this line of work?
- How would you advise me to look for an entry-level job in this area?
- What might be the best way to approach prospective employers?
- How did you go about finding this job?
- If you were to leave your current position and line of work, what other kind of work would attract you and why?