

Information Interviews



Compiled from:

Career Center - Texas A & M University

<http://careercenter.tamu.edu/Students/S1/S1H.shtml>

Work Search Canada

<http://worksearch.gc.ca/english/index.pl?tid=12>

Career Center Guides - Florida State University

<http://www.career.fsu.edu/ccis/guides/infoint.html>

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What Is An Information Interview?

An Information Interview is an appointment you schedule with a particular individual for the purpose of gaining current information from an "insider" point of view.

- Some call it the most effective way to Network.
- Unlike job interviews, Information Interviews do not require you to sell yourself to an employer. While an employer may not grant a job interview because vacancies do not exist, Information Interviews can often be arranged regardless of an existing vacancy.

Arrange Information Interviews with people who can provide direct information or with people who can refer you to others with information. If you are in the process of making career choices, changing careers, or beginning a job hunt, Information Interviews may help you explore your possibilities.

Tip!

An information interview should never be used to sell yourself to get a job. All you want is information, so relax and enjoy the conversation.

Why Do Information Interviews?

The information interview allows you to collect information tailor-made to your specific needs.

- You get first-hand, real information about a career/occupation.
- You learn about a particular organization, how you might fit in, and what problems or needs the employer has. Knowing these things will help you slant your qualifications towards the needs of the organization.
- You can find out facts about earnings, work conditions and opportunities.
- You can see if the career/occupation matches your needs, interests and skills.
- You get valuable information for your job hunting and career planning. It's a good way to "reality check" what you've read, heard and think.
- You build your network, making contacts with people who may be able to help you in the future.
- You get to practice your communications skills and gain confidence for job interviews – gain confidence discussing yourself and your career interests
- You enlarge your circle of "expert" contacts in the area. **REMEMBER, IT IS WHO YOU KNOW – OR GET TO KNOW – THAT GETS YOU A JOB.**
- You can ask for other referrals (i.e., "Can you suggest some other people that I might talk to about careers in this field?") These referrals can lead to a "snowball " of discovery about unknown jobs.

Tip!

People who do information interviews say that they can often result in unexpected job information and opportunities down the road.

Who To Contact

Identifying who to talk to is often the hardest step. ("I don't know anyone in this field..."). Look for people who:



- Share a common professional interest, enthusiasm or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you...or
- Work in a setting you like (e.g. hospitals, textile company, colleges, airlines)...or
- Work in career areas you're interested in (e.g. counseling psychologist, market researcher, public relations)...or
- Work in specific jobs in specific organizations (e.g., counseling psychologist at University counseling center, consumer education representative at Utility Company).



Where To Find These People

- Ask friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and professional colleagues, and former employers...anyone you know for an Information Interview or for a referral.
- Call community service agencies, trade and professional organizations (e.g., women's organizations, Chamber of Commerce, Information Management Association).
- Scan the Yellow Pages, articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals.
- Attend meetings (local, state, regional) for professional associations in your career interest field(s).
- Once you get an interview with one person, ask for names of other people you could call.

Tip!

Try to get as much background information on the career or occupation before you start interviewing. Check out your local library or do a Web search.

How To Prepare



Research Research Research. Remember, people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. **But, don't waste their time or your time – be prepared!**

Know how your interests, skills, values relate to the career field represented by the persons you're interviewing. You'll get the most out of an Interview if you prepare for it.

Tip!

Remember--most people enjoy talking about their work to someone who is genuinely interested in what they do.

Read about the person's career area and organization. Know exactly what kinds of information you want by having a list of questions in mind. Generally, don't ask something routine that is readily available elsewhere.

- First, check out materials in the Library for information.
- If no printed materials are available, you may want to call and ask the organization to send you any literature they might have (annual report, promotional brochures, etc.).
- You can also check the Internet for any web sites associated with the organization or career field in which you're interested. Use the list on the following pages to help in formulating your own.



What to Say – How to Get Started

Starting a conversation with a stranger is a challenge. You may feel shy, or afraid to impose, or worried that the person may not want to talk to you.

- Write out a "script" that you would be comfortable saying.
- Practice your "script" ahead of time. Think of it as a rehearsal and say the "script" until it feels natural. Try it out on a family member or friend.
- Make sure you identify yourself and why you're calling.
- Let the person know that you need only 10 or 15 minutes of his/her time.
- Make sure it's convenient time for your interview. If not, ask if you can schedule another time.



Starting-Off – Script Suggestions

Approach A:

"Hello, my name is _____, and I understand that you are a (or work as a) _____. I'm currently exploring this career/occupation as a possibility for the future. I wonder if I could take about 10 minutes of your time to find out more about what you do (your career field)."

Approach B:

"Hello, my name is _____. A mutual acquaintance, _____, suggested I give you a call. He/she said you would be the right person to talk to about working in your career field (occupation). Would you be able to talk to me now? I only need about 15 minutes of your time."

Approach C:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I understand that you are a (or work as a) _____. I'm looking for advice about entering your career field (occupation). Could I take a few minutes of your time to find out what you would say to someone who wanted to get into your line of work?"



What if You Get A Negative Response

Chances are, you won't. But just in case not everyone will be willing to help you, **DO NOT** quit. Try these responses:

Worker: "I'm too busy right now to talk to you."

You: "Thank you for your time. Could you recommend anyone else to speak to?"

Worker: "I'd like to help you, but I have too much work to do right now."

You: "I really appreciate your interest and I understand you're busy. Is there a more convenient time that we could talk?"

Tip!

Don't use one rejection as an excuse not to try again!

How To Arrange The Interview

- Phone or write to explain your request and obtain an appointment.
- Introduce yourself using a personal referral. If possible, have a mutual acquaintance or your contact. (e.g., "I'm Jessica Long, I received your name from James Davenport at SPU).
- Explain your request to schedule an appointment for gathering information about their career. If questioned, indicate clearly that you are not seeking a job from them but merely conducting career research which will help you make better decisions.
- Schedule a 20-30 minute appointment in person or by phone at their convenience. If the present time is too busy for the person you contact, ask when would be a better time in the future.
- If your intent is to make a personal interview appointment (which is best), do not let your phone call to schedule the appointment turn into the actual interview. Be sure and ask for directions and parking information.
- Letter requests for appointments are most effective if followed up by a telephone inquiry to confirm an appointment time.

You've Arranged an Information Interview – Now What?

What to Wear

- "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Don't show up dressed too casual.
- Dress codes can vary greatly from one industry to another, so **do your homework** to research appropriate attire. (Hint: You wouldn't wear a three-piece suit to Microsoft.)
- By all means, your clothes should be clean and presentable

Should You Bring A Resume?

- Bring a few copies of your resume!
- Will help you to reinforce the "sound bite" you give about yourself.
- If your information interview is going well and you have established rapport with your contact, ask them to critique your resume at the end of the interview.
- If that goes well, the contact may want to keep several copies to pass on.

Tips on Handling the Information Interview

- Do not exceed your requested time, but be prepared to stay longer in case the contact indicates a willingness to talk longer.
- Dress as if it were an actual job interview. First impressions are always important.
- Get to your appointment a few minutes early and BE COURTEOUS to everyone that you meet - secretary, receptionist, etc.
- Take the initiative in conducting the interview. The interview is in your ball park. You ask the questions, you interview the person. Ask open-ended questions which promote a discussion and cannot be answered with one word responses.
- Once inside the organization, look around. What kind of working environment is there – dress style, communication patterns, sense of humor, etc? Is this a place you would want to work?

What Questions to Ask?

Tip!

- Write down your questions before you start.
- When the interview starts, tell the person **briefly** about your interests and skills so he/she can offer you relevant information.
- Take notes if you can.

Choose any of the following questions that would best suit your purposes.

Questions About a Specific Job

- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- What personal qualities or abilities are successful in this job?
- What are the ideal qualifications for someone in this job?
- What kind of education/training is needed for this position?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- How did you get your job?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
- Is there a demand for people in this occupation?

Questions About A Career Path

- What are the various jobs available in this field?
- What is the employment outlook? How much demand is there for people in this career?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions?
- What entry-level jobs offer the best opportunities for learning?
- What skills or personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this industry?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
- What are the basic education/training/experience prerequisites?
- What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
- What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- From your perspective, what are the problems working in this field?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why?



Questions About Your Contact's Specific Career Path

- In what way did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What are related jobs for which your background would prepare you?
- Where do you go from here in your career?
- Where do you see yourself going in a few years? What are your long term goals?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

Questions About Organizational Culture

- What do you like most about this company?
- What kinds of behavior are rewarded?
- How would you describe the atmosphere at the company? Is it formal or more laid-back?
- What values are most treasured here; what is the company's vision statement?
- How does the company recognize the contributions of outstanding employees?



Questions About Opportunities for Advancement

- What are the advancement opportunities?
- How long does it take to move from one step to the next?
- What is the typical career path for someone in this field?
- Where could I expect to be in three years/ five years?
- What is the highest position that someone can hold in this career?
- Is turnover high?
- How does one move from position to position?
- Do people normally move to another company/division/agency?
- What is your policy about promotions from within?
- How are employees evaluated?

Questions Seeking General Advice and Referrals

- Do you know of other people whom I might contact who have jobs similar to yours?
- What do you wish you had known before you entered this field?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of the requirements for this field?
- If you were conducting a job search today, how would you go about it?

Other Questions For The Information Interview

- **Life Style:**
 - ✓ What obligation does your work put on you outside the work week?
 - ✓ How much flexibility do you have in terms of vacations, dress, work hours?
- **Advice:**
 - ✓ How well-suited is my background for this field?
 - ✓ When the time comes, how would I go about finding a job in this field?
 - ✓ What experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend?
 - ✓ What suggestions do you have to help make my resume more effective?
 - ✓ What education might help me become more qualified?
- **Demand:**
 - ✓ What types of employers hire people in this line of work?
 - ✓ Where are they located?
 - ✓ What other career areas do you feel are related to your work?
- **Hiring Decision:**
 - ✓ What are the most important factors used to hire people in this work (education, past experience, personality, special skills)?
 - ✓ Who makes the hiring decisions for your department?
 - ✓ Who supervises the boss?
 - ✓ When I am ready to apply for a job, who should I contact?
- **Job Market:**
 - ✓ How do people find out about your jobs?
 - ✓ Are they advertised in the newspaper (which ones?) by word-of-mouth (who spreads the word?) by the Personnel Office?
- **Referral to Other Information Opportunities:**
 - ✓ Can you name a relevant trade journal or magazine you would recommend?
 - ✓ What professional organizations might have information about this career area?
- **Referral to Others:**
 - ✓ Based on our conversation today, who else should I talk to?
 - ✓ May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?
- **Do you have any other advice for me?**



How to End the Interview

Make sure you don't take up more of a person's time than you asked for and he/she agreed to.

- Thank the person for their time and help.
- Tell them you've learned very useful information and want to know more.
- Ask the person: "Who do you know that I should talk to next?"
- If the person gives you another name and number, ask: "**When I call him/her, may I use your name as a reference?**"



Tip!

Think of the end of an information interview as a way to expand your network of contacts.

What to do After the Interview

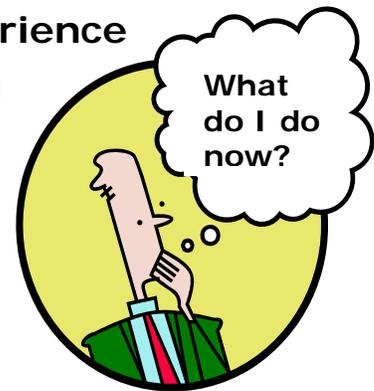
- Fill out a card or Network log with the interviewee's name, contact information, and the names of his/her referrals.
- If you took notes, attach the card to your notes.
- If you didn't take notes, jot down the information you learned on the card.
- Keep all the information from your interviews in one place. You never know when you might need a person's name or information again.

Tip!

Take a few moments to write a note thanking the person for their time. They will appreciate it and may contact you next time an opportunity comes up.

Next Steps & Follow Up – Evaluate Your Experience

- How did you manage in scheduling and conducting the Information Interview?
- How sufficiently did you prepare?
- Did you get the information you sought?
- What information do you still lack?
- Do you need to interview more people in order to get more than one biased viewpoint or additional information?
- What do you need to do next?



Next Steps & Follow Up – Keeping It All Together

Your efforts can get out of control if you don't maintain a record of your contacts, the information that you gained, and the follow-up activities recommended by your contacts. Keep a notebook or a log of your activities to stay organized and on track. Following is a Sample Networking Log to track you Interviews:

Sample Networking Log

Contact Name:	
Company/Organization:	
Address:	
Referral Source:	
Meeting or Contact Date:	
Key Points I Learned: Include both positive and negative impressions; also note if the information helped you to clarify your career objectives	
Suggestions from Networking Contact:	
Thank-You Letter Sent:	
Suggested Contacts:	
Next Steps:	

Next Steps – Follow-Up With A Thank-You Note

Why is this important? Two reasons. First, a Thank You Note will reinforce the positive impression you made during your Interview. Second, following up with your contacts presents you as an organized person who pays attention to details. (Think: they'll be more inclined to recommend you for jobs.)



And, don't just send a single thank-you letter, but stay in touch with your network of contacts to keep them informed of your activities and make a special point to let them know the results of the advice they gave you. Doing this will help them to think of you when they hear of an opportunity that would be perfect for you. Be sure to:

- Thank them for their time and interest as well as cite your conclusions/decisions resulting from the interview.
- You may decide to follow-up now or later with a resume and an application letter or form.
- Record the information that you obtained: names, comments, and new referrals for future reference.
- Make appointments to interview the referrals.

Following are guidelines to use in writing thank-you letters to your contacts.

First Paragraph:

- Begin your thank-you letters by thanking your networking contacts for their assistance, whether this consisted of meeting with you for an information interview, providing you with other contacts, or informing you of job leads.
- "I appreciate the time you gave me to speak with you", "thank you for your assistance in my search for information about opportunities in public relations", or "it was a delight to meet you" are good lead-ins.
- Also, summarize how their advice helped you. For example, "I now have a good base of knowledge about the career of social worker", or "I was able to learn of job openings that are a good fit for my skills and interests".

Second Paragraph

- Refer to specific advice or information that your contact provided to you. Statements such as "your suggestions about how I can obtain a job in biotechnology have helped me to refine my resume and to focus my job search". This serves to make your thank-you letter special by personalizing it.
- Also, you may note why you believe you would be a strong applicant for positions in this career, if your networking purpose is to obtain a job. Additionally, in this paragraph you can inform them of your next steps in your career or job search.

Third Paragraph

- Again, thank your contact for their time and assistance in your final paragraph.
- A nice touch: offer to keep them posted of your progress.
- This accomplishes two important networking objectives. One, it makes them feel good about the time they spent with you because you seem to value the relationship. And, two, it keeps them in your network so you can call on them for future advice and information.

Summary

After doing several Information Interviews you will be more informed. You will be able to make better decisions which are based on accurate, current information.

- You will be more familiar with various career paths.
- You will be aware of position titles, job descriptions and qualifications, types of employers, the skills utilized, as well as the interests and values expressed in several occupations.
- You will be more familiar with potential employer contacts and the hiring process.
- You'll improve your interviewing skills and receive feedback on your resume and job hunting strategies.
- You'll demonstrate assertive job hunting behaviors by selecting, scheduling, participating in and following through interview appointments.