

Informational Interviewing

Skillfully used, the informational interview is one of the most valuable of all sources of occupational information. While it may cover some of the same ground as printed materials, it presents opportunities for an intimate and flexible inspection of the job field or major unmatched by written sources. The great majority of professionals are very willing to help students learn about their career; it is important to them and they usually like to talk and give advice about it.

When you call for an appointment, make clear your status as a college student and the explicit, informational purpose of your interview. When calling business people, state that you are not looking for a job, but are interested in finding out more about the occupational area.

Treat the informational interview as you would a job interview. Be punctual. Know the name of the person with whom you are meeting and the person's title/position in the organization. Be prepared to take notes, and follow up with a thank-you note.

Questions to Ask During the Interview

Highlight questions from the list below to ask during the interview. You may wish to add to the list. Prepare in advance and know specifically which questions you will ask. Be respectful of the person's time.

Questions about a College Major

1. What courses are required for this major?
2. What special abilities are necessary to do well in these courses?
3. What elective courses are students encouraged to take along with required courses?
4. What personal qualities seem most important to successful completion of this major?
5. What kinds of jobs can a graduate with a bachelor's degree or certificate get in this field? a master's degree? a doctorate?
6. What additional course work or work experience might make a graduate more likely to find an appropriate job in a related field?
7. What kind of work experience would employers look for in a job applicant? How might a student obtain this work experience?
8. What other steps are necessary to enter this occupation (e.g., test, join a union)?
9. What are the opportunities for advancement? Is an advanced degree needed? If so, in which area?
10. What are the different work settings in which people in this occupation may be employed?
11. What are some related occupations? Are there occupations doing similar work, but at different levels, such as assistant, para-professional?
12. Are there professional organizations I should join?

Questions about an Occupation

1. What does a person in this occupation do on a typical day?
2. Which educational program is recommended as preparation for the job? Distinguish between what is desirable and what is necessary.
3. Which degree or certificate do employers look for? In which fields?
4. Which skills are particularly important?

Prospects of the Career

1. How does a person go about finding a job in this area?
2. What are current employment prospects in this city? Elsewhere?
3. What future trends do you see?
4. How will these changes affect the plans and training for people interested in this career?
5. What difficulties do you think a person entering this field now can expect to encounter?

Personal Aspects of the Career

1. What satisfaction do you find in your work? What are the rewards, both tangible and intangible?
2. What are some of the dissatisfactions you find in the work? What are some of the stresses and frustrations? Did your training prepare you for these?
3. What are some of your joys and challenges about the setting you work in, its structure, its facilities, the people you work with?
4. Does your career permit you to lead the kind of life you would like to live? How does your career affect your style of life --- the amount of work required, the amount of time required, your time for leisure, your material needs?

Information about Your Career

1. Are there recent publications, either reprints or references, characteristic of your work?
2. Can you suggest others who might be willing to talk with students about their career?

Questions to Ask Yourself after the Interview

1. Which aspects of the job would I like?
2. Which aspects of the job would I dislike? How long could I tolerate them?
3. What is my reaction to the conditions (e.g. stress, anxieties) of this occupation? Could I handle them?
4. What is my reaction to the amount of freedom or leeway the worker has in determining what he/she does on the job?
5. How do I feel about working with the kind of people that I have met in this field?
6. Do I have (or could you acquire) the skills and personal characteristics necessary for this job or career?
7. How do I feel about the duties described in relation to the kinds of activities I presently enjoy?
8. Can I meet the educational and other requirements?

Next Steps

- List the names and contact information for others suggested for additional information.
- List the names of resources that were recommended.
- List some skills or qualities that you may need to acquire or develop.
- List possible sites for an internship or volunteer experience.
- List the most significant piece of advice or information that you learned from this informational interview.
- Be sure to send a thank-you note and stay connected to your new contact.