

CAREER RESEARCH - INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing (or career conversations) is a simple technique for gaining information about a particular career field or company by interviewing someone who is working in the field or for the company you are interested in exploring. Conducting informational interviews requires some research, preparation and a strategy.

It is important to state truthfully that you are doing a career study or are researching possible future careers. If you are very clear about this, the employer or professional is much more willing to talk with you and give you advice.

Make a good impression to someone who may one day become a valuable professional contact, dress professionally and be prepared! Spend time researching the organization and career field so that your questions are strategic and well thought out; write out your questions and practice asking them before the interview. Bring your prepared questions with you.

Ask your prospective interviewee for 20-30 minutes and keep the meeting within that limit unless you are clearly invited to stay longer.

HOW TO GET INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

1. Think about the career field that you are interested in and identify companies you want to target.
2. Find out the name of the person you wish to interview. Do this by using your network; ask people you know, do a search on LinkedIn, use the company's website or do a Google search.

Tip: Start by asking someone you know. They may not work in the career you're interested in, however they may work at an organization in your career field of interest. Leverage your existing contacts; ask family, friends, or instructors for ideas or recommendations.

3. Call or email with an introduction and ask for an opportunity to conduct an interview for career research. Prepare a brief self-introduction; describe your background, education, relevant interests and goals. Explain your reason for contacting them, and why you would like to meet. Keep it simple, but be persuasive.
4. If you are turned down, ask them if they have suggestions for another person that may be open to meeting with you.
5. If you are calling over the phone, and interact with an assistant or receptionist, explain your purpose and reason for contacting them, and try to make the assistant an ally. Be persistent, but respectful. If you get an interview, be sure to write them a thank you note.
6. If you arrange a meeting, be sure to verify the address, and prepare your commute accordingly.
7. After the interview, always send a thank-you note (email or regular mail).

SAMPLE SCRIPT:

Good afternoon, my name is _____. I (was given your name by) (found your company through) (understand that you are an expert in) _____.

I'm currently conducting some informational interviews as part of my career research in _____, and feel that by talking to people who are currently working in the field, I'll be able to find out what the jobs are actually like. I was wondering if you would have about 20-30 minutes to answer some questions about what it's like to work in the field of _____.

Would it be possible to arrange for some time to meet with you at your convenience or would you prefer that we chat over the phone?

Tip: If they say they are too busy, ask if you can call back at a more convenient time. If they still decline, politely ask for names of people they are aware of who might know of professionals in _____, doing _____ kind of work.

Conclude your email or phone call with a kind thank you for their time. If emailing, make sure to include your full name and phone number, so they can easily contact you.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE INTERVIEW

(Be selective; keep the list short if time is of concern)

- I'm interested in the field of _____ and would like to know how most people get started in the field.
- What is a typical day like for you (also, describe any unusual hours, working conditions, hazards)?
- What do you think is the best educational preparation for a career in _____?
- What skills are required of a person in this field? What personal attributes are essential?
- Are there particular classes that might be important for me to consider taking before graduation?
- What do you enjoy most?
- Which areas of the job do you find the most challenging? The most frustrating?
- Which professional organizations or networking opportunities related to this field would you suggest I know about?
- What experiences have you had that you think have been invaluable to you learning how to be successful in this type of work (or company)?
- How did you arrive at your present position with the company?
- What job search tips would you have for someone trying to find a job in this field?
- Considering what you know of my skills, education and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I know about that could help in my decision making process?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

Always ask this question at the end of every informational interview/career conversation:

- Do you have any recommendations for other people with whom I could talk to about this career field? May I use your name when contacting them?