An informational interview is a conversation with an individual who can give you advice about an organization, a field of work, or a particular job that interests you.

Though it may seem awkward to approach someone you do not know, seeking career information is a very valuable job search tool. Remember, most people are more than happy to discuss what they do for a living. It is through your genuine interest in their job and career field that your questions will be answered.

Informational Interviews can help you to:
- Determine if a career field or company is right for you.
- Uncover new possibilities in a career field.
- Gain insight into future trends.
- Learn the jargon of an industry.
- Develop a network of contacts.
- Organize your future job search.
- Help improve your resume or gain an interview.

Step One - Self Assessment

Evaluate yourself so that you can better understand your unique combination of interests, values, personality traits, and skills. The more you know about yourself, the more likely you will be to pursue career choices that you will find enjoyable and rewarding. Meet with a Career Counselor in Career Services to assist you in your self assessment and career goal-setting process.

Step Two - Conduct Research On Your Career Preferences

Once you have some career options in mind, learn as much as you can about that career or organization. As you become more informed about the organization or career field, you will be able to ask more relevant questions during the interview. You do not want to waste the employer’s time with questions that could have easily been answered by doing your homework. There are many resources available to you during your research. Among the recommended resources are each organization’s website, the Career Services website (and its “Recommended Internet Links”), and the Career Services Library.

Step Three - Identify Potential Employers To Interview

Develop a list of potential employers to interview. You can create this list from personal contacts (friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, professors, etc.), the yellow pages or organizational directories, public speakers or almost any person who works within an organization in which you might be interested.
Step Four - Contact The Employer
For An Interview

Establish your interview through a phone call, email, letter, personal visit or through a referral.

By Phone - A phone contact should include a clear respect for an appointment at a mutually agreed upon time and a prepared statement explaining your intent.

In Person - If you would like to request an interview in person, keep in mind that the individual may be busy. Treat the receptionist (and other staff) as resources. They may be able to provide you with additional information.

With Referral - A referral is by far the most successful and rewarding way to receive an interview. All you need to do is call someone you know—or someone who has been referred to you by a friend—and ask the potential interviewee for an informational interview.

By Letter - A letter requesting an informational interview should include:
• The name of the person you would like to interview
• A brief introduction of yourself
• Why you are writing to the individual
• A brief statement of your interests or experiences in the employer’s field or organization
• Why you would like to contact them (for information or advice)
• How and when you will contact the person again

Letter Request Sample

Name, Title of Interviewee Date of Letter
Company Name
Company Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. Last Name,

Your name was given to me by give referral’s name and briefly describe your relationship to them. (if applicable). Mr. or Ms. Person’s last name suggested that I contact you when I told him or her that I am considering a career in career field. I am in the process of learning as much as I can about different career fields so that I can make the best decision about which field I should pursue.

I would very much appreciate 30 minutes of your time so that I can visit you at your work site and ask you a few questions. I am currently a year in school at Texas State University and would appreciate any advice you can provide. I am especially interested in knowing the type of experiences I should gain over the next few years to increase my marketability in this field when I graduate.

I will contact you on date about two weeks later to arrange a meeting at your convenience. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address
City, State Zip Code
Phone Number
Email Address

Phone Request Sample

“Hello, my name is your first and last name. I am a student at Texas State University, and I will be graduating expected graduation date.”

“Your career field is one that I am researching to help make a decision about what career to pursue. Share a sentence or two explaining the reasons you are interested in the field or specific organization.”

“I would appreciate it if I could meet with you for a half hour to observe your work setting and ask a few questions. Would that be possible in the near future?”

“Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you in person at appointed time.”

In Person Request Sample

“Hello, my name is your first and last name. I will be graduating graduation date from Texas State University in your major.

“I would really appreciate any advice you could provide regarding positions and trends in your career field. Would there be a convenient time you could meet with me for a half hour in the next couple of weeks?”

“Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you in person at appointed time.”
Step Five – Develop A List Of Questions

Since you are the one requesting the interview, you must be prepared to guide the direction of the interview. Your questions should cover all of the areas you want to research. However, be flexible if new questions come to mind during the interview. Review this list of possible questions and categories of questions.

Job Duties
- What is your job like?
- Describe a typical day.
- What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?

Training/Education
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- How important are grades for obtaining a job in this field?

Future Potential
- How would you describe the future growth for this field?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?

Personal Experiences
- What do you like most/least about your job?
- Why did you decide to work for this organization?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

Rewards of the Job
- What rewards do you get from your job/career?

Advancement
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?

Potential
- What are the career prospects in this field?

Skills Needed
- What are the most important skills for your position?
- What combination of skills and abilities would be valuable in this career?

Criteria for Hiring
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute the most to success in this field/job?
- What are your recommendations for an entry-level person considering this career?

Advice
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field?
- Can you suggest ways a student could obtain the necessary experience?
- What advice do you have for a student seeking this position?

References: http://www.career.siu.edu and The First Job Hunt Survival Guide (Morton & Fox, Eds.)
Step Six - Utilize The Interview Process

**Network** - Realize that the person you are interviewing is a networking contact. They have invested time in you, and most people enjoy it when their investments pay off. Keep in touch with the interviewee, and make sure to utilize him/her as a contact within the company or field.

**Get a referral** - The interviewee may not be able to help you find a job; however, he/she may be able to refer you to someone who can. Before leaving the interview, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use his or her name when contacting these new contacts.

**Get more information that you share** - Share information about yourself in the interview, but do not dominate the interview by talking about yourself. Your purpose is to get information that will help you learn more about the career field, but you want to keep the interview conversational.

**Listen** - Be receptive and show that the information the interviewee is providing is important to you. Take notes so that you can look back on the information given.

Step Seven - Send A Thank You Letter

Be sure to send a thank you letter within a few days of the interview. In the letter, include:
- That the interviewee was very helpful
- A request that the person keep you in mind if they come across any other information that may be helpful to you in your career research
- A thank you to the interviewee for his or her time

LAST MINUTE HINTS

- Ask what you want to know but allow the person answering your questions to talk. You might acquire information about unanticipated topics.
- Regard any one individual’s information carefully—a broad information base is essential.
- Be prepared to make a good impression and to be remembered by the employer.
- Dress as you would for a regular job interview.
- Do not confuse informational interviews with job seeking (i.e., do not hit your interviewee up for a job).
- Be enthusiastic and show interest in the profession.
- Employ an informal but polite tone during the interview.
- Be direct and concise with your questions and answers. Avoid rambling.
- Maintain good eye contact and posture.
- Be positive in your remarks and reflect a good sense of humor.

AND KEEP IN MIND THAT...

- One person cannot give you all the answers.
- Making an impression about a career option based solely on whether your interviewee was likeable or the surroundings were attractive is not advisable. Maintain perspective.
- You won’t be rejected in an informational interview you can be in a job interview, so ask thoughtful questions and you learn a great deal.