PREPARING TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

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.

MAKING THE MOST OF AN INFORMATIONAL 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 “Online Publications and Resources”), and the Career Services Library.

Step Three - Identify Potential Contacts To Interview

Develop a list of potential individuals to interview. You can create this list from personal contacts (friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, professors, etc.), organizational directories, public speakers or almost any person who works within an organization in which you might be interested.

Step Four - Contact The Professional 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.

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].”
By E-mail - An e-mail 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

Email Request Sample
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 Mrs. [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

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. Create a list of possible questions and categories of questions. The categories could include: Job Duties, Training/Education, Future Potential, Personal Experiences, Rewards of the Job, Advancement Potential, Skills Needed, Criteria for Hiring, and Advice.

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.

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.
- 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.