

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a brief conversation with someone working in a job, field or industry you are considering for a career, in order to gain a better understanding about that occupation or industry. Often, the best information regarding a specific occupation comes from people actually working in that field.

Benefits:

- ↺ Get firsthand, relevant, “insider” information about the realities of working in your field of interest/specific organization
- ↺ Learn about jobs/job titles you never knew existed
- ↺ Get tips on how to prepare for and enter a given career
- ↺ Open the door to opportunities like internships, volunteer roles, summer jobs, part-time work, contracts or paid work experience
- ↺ Develop networking skills and make connections with professionals

Who to contact:

It’s often easiest to start with people you know, or to get referrals to contacts from people you know. Start by asking around your current social circles if anyone could connect you with someone working in your desired field. Of course, you can always cold call individuals you don’t know as well, you just may have to call two or three people before someone is able to say yes. Here’s a list of suggestions for contacts:

- ↺ Family, friends, co-workers, classmates, instructors/professors, neighbours, supervisors, coaches, LinkedIn, speakers at events, contacts at conferences or networking events, company websites, or industry directories.

How to ask for an informational interview:

- ↺ Introduce yourself in a few short lines
- ↺ Mention how you found the person’s contact information
- ↺ Be specific in your request. Use the words “informational interview” and let him/her know how long you want to meet (e.g., 20-30 minutes)
- ↺ Offer to meet the person at or near her/his work place during business hours, or perhaps to take the person for coffee at a nearby coffee shop
- ↺ Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for him/her and that s/he won’t be readily available otherwise
- ↺ If the person can’t meet with you, ask him/her to refer you to other people or places to go for more information

Here’s an example:

Hello. My name is Jane Smith and I am currently in my second year of the Business Administration – Accounting program at Douglas College. I’m starting to think about what I would like to do after my program, and my aunt, Helen Smith, whom you know, suggested you as a great

person to talk to about your experience as an investment broker. I've become really interested in the field and I would love to learn as much as I can about it. Would you be free to sit down with me for 20 to 30 minutes for an informational interview, at your convenience? I would love to take you for coffee near your office to ask you a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field.

Sample Questions:

It's important to plan open-ended questions that you would like to ask. Here are some to get you started.

- How did you get started in this work? What has been your career path (i.e. school, training, experience)?
- What do you like most about your work? Least?
- What skills or personal qualities are necessary/helpful in this field?
- What does a typical day look like (i.e. hours, tasks/projects, environment, working alone vs. in a group)?
- What would entry-level work in this field look like? How do you advance?
- What is the work culture like in your industry?
- What, in your opinion, is the employment outlook (changing technology; future trends) for your type of work?
- Would you advise other people to enter your occupation? Why or why not?
- What other occupations are related to your work?
- What is the most effective way to stay connected to current events and news particular to your industry?
- Can you recommend anyone else that it might be helpful for me to speak with?

Tips for Success:

- **Be positive.**
You may think they won't be interested in talking with you, but people in the working world will be supportive and willing to share with you if you show genuine interest in what they do.
- **Remember it's NOT a job interview.**
Emphasize that you're only looking for information, not a job, and be clear with yourself about this as well. Don't be afraid to mention skills or experiences that led you to this field, but don't fish for work opportunities.
- **Do your research.**
You will make a better impression, and make better use of your time, if you do some initial research on the career, field, or organization. Internet and print resources are always a good place to start.
- **Follow up.**
Send a thank you note within 1-2 days of the interview. And keep in touch, especially if it was a great interaction, as the relationship could become an important part of your network (i.e. let them know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result).