

The Informational Interview

What is it?

Informational Interviewing is an opportunity for you to gain first-hand insight into what a job, career, company, and industry are really like. Most of us don't truly know how a person in any given position spends his/her workday, so this is your chance to ask them directly. The other benefit of informational interviewing is that you will make a personal connection with someone who could assist you in your job search.

What do you want to learn?

The first step is to determine what you hope to gain from the experience. Here are some things you may want to find out:

- Do you want an inside view on a particular company?
- Do you need to figure out just what exactly a Mechanical Engineer does on a daily basis?
- Looking for a broad overview of the field of Accounting?
- Tips on how to get a job in Human Resources?

Identify a goal and pursue it, but know that any information you gain will be beneficial.

Find people to interview

- Personal connections are the best place to start, so let all of your friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and professors know that you're looking for contacts at your target company or in your specific field. There is a high probability that someone in your circle will know someone that would make a great Informational Interview candidate.
- If you don't have any immediate connections to a certain career or company, that's ok. You can research local companies and individuals using a variety of online tools, such as:
 - Staff Directories or "About Us" on Companies' websites
 - Professional organizations that represent your field
 - Local Business Journals: [Vancouver](#) or [Portland](#)
 - Local Employer Search By Major:
<http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/ss/career/employerdirectory.html>
- Your goal is to have the name, number, and email address of a specific contact, as opposed to calling a company and asking to talk to an employee at random.

Make the contacts & set up the appointment

An initial email may be the best way to get in touch with your contact. Use business formal rules, and suggest that you meet at his or her office, so you can get a clear picture of the work environment. You will need to make it clear that you're not looking for a job, you're just trying to get more information about their job, career, company, or industry. Check out our packet on business correspondence at

<http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/ss/career/businesscorr.html> .

Prepare for the interview

- Do your research before going to any informational interview. Check out the company website, and do an online search of the company to see if it's been in the news. To get a basic summary of the job description, check out www.bls.gov/oco .
- Come up with a list of questions that will help you develop a full picture of the career, and also show your contact that you're interested and invested in what they do. Use the questions listed below for a starting point, but create your own. You can bring this list to the meeting, as it's expected that you'll be taking notes.
- The day of the interview, dress as if you were going for a traditional job interview – you want to make a good impression. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to find the office and arrive a few minutes early.

During the interview

- Keep in mind that since you're the one who called the meeting, you're running the show. If the conversation isn't headed in a direction you want, ask questions that will steer you back on course.
- Also be sure to stick to the time limit. As you near the end, let them know you're aware of the time, and begin to wrap up. If they decide to keep going, that's great.
- Don't spend too much time talking about yourself – you're here to gather information, not sell yourself.
- If the interview is going well and it feels right, you can ask your contact to look over your resume.

Follow up

ALWAYS send a personal thank you note after an Informational Interview. Ideally, this is hand-written, on a small card, mailed the day after the meeting. If your handwriting isn't your biggest strength, a typed letter will suffice.

Sample Questions

- What do you like the most about your work? The least?
- Can you tell me about how you got into this company/position?
- Why do you think you chose this field? How did you get started?
- What advice do you have for someone starting out in this field?
- What kinds of experiences would you recommend I pursue to get started?
- What education do you have?
- What kinds of courses helped you to become successful?
- What other jobs have you had before working here?
- Can you talk about how you spend a typical day here? (duties/responsibilities, problems dealt with, decisions to make, fast or slow pace?)
- What is the most challenging part of your job?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- How do you think this field will change in the coming years?
- Can you describe the working atmosphere at this company?
- What sorts of work-related obligations are there outside of the office?
- How has the economy affected this company? This field?
- If you could do everything over again, would you still go into this field?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you think it takes to be successful in this position?