

Informational Interviewing

Samford University Career Development Center

One of the best ways to obtain accurate information about a career field is to talk with someone who is currently working in that area. No one else can give you a better understanding of the rewards and challenges of that occupation. Most professionals have no hesitations about helping an aspiring newcomer as long as you are asking for information and not a job. Here are some tips on how to obtain and conduct an informational interview. If you have any questions, please consult a Career Development Center (CDC) staff member.

STEP 1

Identify occupations you want to explore and people you want to interview. This can be anybody who has a job that you find interesting. Talk to the CDC counselors, your parents, friends, and others around you to see if they know anyone in this field. Also look for alumni on LinkedIn (work with the CDC to learn how to create a professional profile for yourself) and check with your professors to see if they know of anyone in the community or alumni who might be helpful.

STEP 2

E-mail the person(s) you wish to interview. Introduce yourself and explain that you are interested in their career field and are hoping to gather first-hand information about it. It is always good to state how you got their name if you don't know them. Ask if it would be possible to arrange a time for an in-person, Zoom, or telephone conversation to ask them questions about their career field and what they do (in-person is best when feasible). State in your e-mail that you want to respect their time and would take no more than 30 minutes (if it is someone in the medical field, reduce the amount of time). Let them know you would be happy to call to arrange the time, or set up the time meeting time via e-mail, depending what is easiest for them. *Note that this must be a professional, well-written communication.*

STEP 3

If they wish to set up the time via the phone, reintroduce yourself when you call and state the purpose of your call. Be prepared to leave a message if you can't get through to the person you wish to talk to, letting them know you will follow up the next day...and do so. Unless they instruct you otherwise, call during work hours; if following up with them in evening, call before 8:30 p.m.

STEP 4

Prepare for the actual in-person, Zoom, or phone informational interview by researching the organization and career field. What do you want to know? Ask questions that focus on job preparation, the job itself, daily routine, job outlook, job search techniques for that particular field, etc. Dress appropriately for the interview and take notes if you wish. Try to leave the interview with the name of at least one other person to contact. You might ask, "Would you be able to suggest names of other people I could talk with about my interest in this area?" followed by, "May I tell them that you are the person who referred me to them?"

STEP 5

Send a thank you email after your informational interview. This is not optional. This will make your new contact feel appreciated and help keep you in mind if an internship or a job does become available. If you're not confident in this step, as staff member in the CDC is happy to review your thank you email before you send it.

Sample Questions

Preparation:

- What preparation is necessary for entry level jobs in this field?
- How important is graduate school in this field?
- Could you recommend some courses that I should be taking now in preparation for a career in this field?
- How do your education and experience relate to what you are doing now?
- How did you get into this field and into this position? What are some alternative routes into the field?
- What kind of background, training, special programs or other learning experience does one need to enter the field?
- What professional journals, newspapers or publications do people in your field generally read?
- Are any professional associations particularly influential?
- Is there any advice you would give someone just entering the field, maybe something that you wish someone had mentioned when you were starting?

Lifestyle:

- What kind of "lifestyle" choices have you had to make? How many hours do you work in a typical week? Do you take work home at night?
- Is there travel involved in your job and if so, how often are you traveling?
- What is the typical salary range for an entry-, mid-, and upper-level position?
- Do you need to dress in a particular way?
- Has your work experience differed very much from what you imagined it would be?
- In what way?

Job Outlook:

- Do you anticipate employment in this field to grow, decrease, or remain stable?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? Is there a high turnover rate and if so, why?
- What types of employers hire people in your line of work?
- You mentioned that you made a transition into this field from another career path. How difficult was this?

Job Routine:

- Describe how you spend your time during a typical work day/week.
- What major satisfactions do you derive from working in this field?
- What are some of the issues/problems that you must deal with in your work?
- (*If you are interested in the company the alumnus is working for*) Could you tell me a little about the management style here? How are promotions decided? What does one need to be successful in this field?

Job Search Techniques:

- What strategies would you be using if you were in a job search for a position in this field?
- Would you mind reviewing my resume and giving me feedback on it?
- What types of questions should I expect when interviewing for a job in this field?
- Could you give me the names of others who might tell me more about your field? May I say you suggested I contact them?

Do's and Don'ts of Informational Interviewing:

- DO research the field you're exploring so you have questions to ask.
- DO dress as if you're going to a job interview or as professionals in this type of work would dress. You don't want to embarrass yourself or your contact.
- DO schedule about 20 to 30 minutes for the interview and be aware of the time. Watch for cues that it's time to leave, such as glancing at a watch, or winding down a conversation.
- DO pay attention to your thoughts, body signals and reactions during the interview. If you feel energetic and excited, this type of atmosphere may suit you. If you feel bored or tired, perhaps this isn't a match.
- DON'T ask for a job--even if you are bursting to do so! You could, however, say something like this: "I really enjoyed meeting with you and learning about your television station and what a producer does. WGJX is the kind of setting where I would like to work. Do you know of stations with a similar work culture that I might contact?"
- DON'T ask about salary. The closest you can get to that subject is something along the lines of, "What would be the best way to learn what the typical entry-level salary range would be in this industry?"
- DON'T book too many interviews back-to-back. Allow flexibility in case your contact chooses to spend more time with you or to introduce you to others.
- DON'T just talk about yourself. The more the contact talks about the job, the career steps and the field, the more you will learn. In fact, the whole idea is not to focus on yourself, but to talk about the contact.
- DO ask for names of more people to contact, and if it's okay to use his/her name when you contact others.
- DO write a thank-you note within two days of the interview, referring to any particularly helpful or thought provoking information the contact gave you.

***For more information, stop by or call the Career Development Center
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