Informational Interviewing is a research method that serves to give you a better sense of the challenges, qualifications, opportunities, demands, benefits, and drawbacks that working in a particular field might present. It is often considered the most effective way to network and is a highly effective career exploration technique that helps you learn about professions, build contacts, and market yourself.

Benefits of Informational Interviewing include:
- Increased knowledge of a job market
- Discovery of career opportunities that you did not know existed
- Awareness of new resources and professional associations
- Enhanced candidacy by presenting yourself well
- An opportunity to build your confidence and gain self-knowledge
- A safe forum to define and modify your career goals
- Trying on a career before you decide
- Opportunities to establish and expand your networking contacts

Requesting an Informational Interview:
When you request a professional’s time for the purposes of an informational interview, be sure to appropriately introduce yourself by stating your educational background and career goals. Share with the individual how you obtained his or her contact information. Explain your intentions. Remember, you are not looking for a job, but are seeking information about a profession to help you make an informed career decision. If you have a mutual acquaintance, you might allow that person to initiate the appointment. You might want to precede a telephone call with a letter.

Preparing for the Informational Interview:
It is essential to adequately and appropriately prepare for your discussion. Don’t assume that because it isn’t a job interview, that preparation is not necessary. If you approach the meeting unprepared, you will miss an opportunity to impress a valuable contact.

Research – Prior to the discussion, research yourself and the organization. Assess your preliminary career goals and know what you have to offer. Researching the company enables you to ask informed questions and ensures that you do not waste the time of the individual extending his or her time.

Prepare your resume – Provide a copy of your resume to the person you are interviewing. You might consider asking him or her to critique it and offer feedback. Reviewing your resume allows the individual to become more familiar with your background. Ask what experiences you might be able to add to your resume to enable entry into the profession. Providing your resume allows them to refer you to other contacts.

Attire – It is important to make a good first impression. Be sure to inquire about the dress code of the organization that you will be visiting. Dress conservatively and appropriately for the environment. Your clothes should be clean, neat, and presentable. Business professional or business casual dress is suggested.
Guidelines for Informational Interviews:

✓ Assume that most people in professional roles are generally willing to talk with others who are enthusiastic and interested in them, what they are doing, their job, and their company.
✓ Spend some time establishing rapport. Find a common interest, a similar background, or a common relationship.
✓ Take control of the meeting by setting the agenda. State your objective. Make sure that the person you are meeting with understands your true situation – you are looking for information to help you make a career decision. You are not doing a leisurely survey, but neither are you going to ask them for a job.
✓ Provide your “commercial.” Briefly summarize your educational and personal background, highlighting your assets and goals.
✓ Ask for advice about your resume and campaign strategies. Ask how your skills and experiences fit with their professional field. Solicit referrals to others that might be able to share information.
✓ Ask open-ended questions. Launch the conversation with prepared inquiries to help focus on the information you are seeking. Start by asking the person to tell you a bit about his or her own career path.
✓ Remember your agenda, which is to:
  • Get the information for which you came.
  • Be remembered for your skills and abilities so that you will be thought of when a job or referral opportunity comes along.
  • Don’t ask for a job. If one comes up during the conversation, simply ask “How would I formally apply for that?,” get the information, and move on.
✓ After the discussion, write down key information that you want to remember, including contact information, key issues discussed, and anything about your approach that you might want to adapt in the future.
✓ Write a thank you letter after each informational interview. Share what parts of the visit you enjoyed or were most helpful. Tell him or her what you plan to do with the information that you gained.

Questions to Use in an Informational Interview:
Questions About the Career Field:

• What jobs are available in this field?
• In general, what is the nature of your work as a ________________?
• Describe a typical day or week.
• What skills and abilities have you found most important in this type of work?
• What are typical entry-level job titles and functions?

Questions About the Organization:

• In what ways is a career with you company better than one with a competitor?
• What types of training does this company provide?
• Please describe the culture of this organization?
• Given the dynamics of the industry, how do you see the company evolving over time?
• Who are your competitors?

Questions about Career Progression:

• What is the typical pattern of career development in this field?
• What is the future outlook of this profession?
• How long does it take to move from one step to the next?
• What is the highest position that someone can hold in this career?
Lifestyle Questions:
- What are your working hours and schedule like?
- Does this occupation promote life balance?
- What are the typical salary ranges for someone doing this type of work in this geographical area?

Questions about Preparation for the Career Field:
- What advice would you have for someone starting out in this profession?
- How did you prepare yourself for this type of work?
- How can I acquire the required skills?
- Is a graduate degree or certification/license needed or preferred?
- What are the books, journals, and magazines that I should be reading to better understand the field?

Job Search Advice:
- How can I find a job related to this field?
- What types of employers hire people in this type of work?
- How can I identify both advertised and unadvertised opportunities?
- Do you have any advice on developing new job leads?

Resume Review Questions:
- How might I improve my resume for this career field?
- Is this an appropriate approach for the type of job I will be seeking?
- What experiences could I add to my resume to be more competitive in this area?

Questions for your Contact:
- Tell me about your specific job duties and responsibilities.
- Describe some challenging situations you have faced in your job.
- What do you like most about your work?
- What are the drawbacks of your profession?
- Tell me about some projects that you have been involved with that are interesting.
- Which other departments, units, or levels do you regularly interact with?

General Advice and Referral Questions:
- Do you know of other people whom I might contact?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- Given my experiences, do you think I’m on the right track? What advice would you have for me?
- Am I missing anything to be competitive in this field?