

INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

What are Information Interviews?

An information interview is a very common and effective way to conduct preliminary career research for an 'inside scoop' on career paths, occupations, industries and job tasks you may be considering from people on the ground right now. Information Interviewing is not about looking for a job, but for information and advice. It puts you in control of the process, where:

- » You arrange the interview;
- » With people you want to talk to;
- » Where you decide questions to ask based on what career/employment information you want to know.

Afterwards, you decide what to do with the information and whether the job or field really interests you or not.

What are the Benefits?

- ✓ Discover what jobs or job titles are considered post graduation entry points for occupations and careers that interest you. Learn what qualifications beyond your degree are required or desired.
- ✓ Find out more about companies in your field of interest, get advice on emerging roles and uncover previously unknown occupational and career options.
- ✓ Learn what is relevant to specific employers. Use this 'professional homework' in future employment interviews to position yourself better as the preferred candidate.
- ✓ See if you are interested in the 'real life' duties that make up particular occupations by getting an insider's view seldom found in books, on the Internet, or in classes. How do duties differ between organizations of different sizes, and in different industries?
- ✓ Obtain inside information about potential career paths, future opportunities and constraints of options that interest you. Learn about different points of view to consider and use the information as a reality test for your beliefs and assumptions about particular occupations.
- ✓ Identify local professional contacts – begin developing a professional network of people. Practice networking by choosing to stay in touch with select people you have information interviewed.
- ✓ Develop job interviewing skills in settings less stressful than a job interview, as no candidate is being chosen and you are in charge of what is discussed. The person you are meeting is usually also more relaxed and willing to share information.
- ✓ Clear up confusion around what program choices are valued by specific occupations and why.

How do I Interview for Information?

- **Once you have an idea** of one to three types of work that interest you, begin by researching as much as you can online. Advance research ensures you do not waste the person's time and allows you to get the most difficult to find answers in the time allotted.
- **Identify the information** you want and companies and departments that would be very familiar with the type of work you are interested in and might have that information.
- **Make a list** of people you know who work at, once worked at, or are connected to those companies. Call these people first to see if they would be willing to refer you to the appropriate person.
- **If you do not know someone** in all the companies you have identified, check your second-degree LinkedIn contacts or other social networks to identify appropriate people. Alternatively, call companies and ask to speak with a person in the position you want to explore or a supervisor who would know how the tasks in that work or the industry may change in the next few years.
- **Speak to people**, not just at the higher ends of the field, but also at the entry and early years for their perspectives. Some may even be MRU graduates.
- **Call and ask** for a meeting. Calling a stranger can be scary but a human connection increases your success. Prepare talking points that will help you introduce yourself and why you are contacting them.
 - » If you were referred by someone or have a contact in common, say so early in the phone call.
 - » If not, explain you are doing career research and would appreciate information.
 - » Ask for the appointment. Ask for no more than 15 to 30 minutes of time and stick to it.
- **If your contact is confused** or hesitant to meet with you, clarify that you are seeking advice and want to learn from their experience. Your purpose is to gather information about position accountabilities, occupations, careers, organizations or an industry. Emphasize you are not looking for a job at this time or selling anything.

TIP:

Don't initially suggest you want to meet for career/industry information, then change the agenda by asking about job opportunities. Seek information – not a job. Ask questions. If you are actively looking for a job, be up front about your agenda. See the tip sheet, *Finding Work – Cold Calling*.

- **Conduct yourself as a professional.** Plan an agenda for the appointment. Dress professionally. If appropriate, bring samples of your work to get industry feedback on their relevance or significance in the industry or work you seek to learn more about. Arrive and end on time.
- **Take notes.**
- **At the end of the appointment**, always ask for the names of other contacts who could further your career research fact finding. If none are offered, be genuinely grateful for the information and suggestions you have received. Take advantage of any referrals you receive. Contact them early to make the most of the opportunity.
- **If your resume is asked for** during the appointment, you may:
 - » Offer a resume you have discretely brought with you and let them know you would appreciate any feedback they may have.
 - » Offer to provide a resume the following day. This allows you to re-organize your resume to better reflect what you have learned about their interests and needs, and provides a second opportunity for you to connect. Thank them for their interest in you in addition to their time and advice.

What do I Say?

"Ms. Jones, my name is Chris Doe. I was speaking with Joe Smith and your name came up as someone who may be able to help me. I am doing information interviews with professionals such as yourself in (industry/area of interest) for career advice (or industry information or...). I would appreciate if we could meet for 20 minutes. Is there a day/time next week that you have available? Would next Tuesday morning work for you?"

"Mr. Doe, my name is Sandra Jones and I understand that you have previously worked as a _____. I am a student taking _____ and am exploring the work you do as a possibility for me in the future. I was hoping you might be able to give me 20 minutes in the next week or two to meet with me. I am interested in how you see your occupation and your field changing in the near future."

"I'm doing research for career planning purposes and would like to learn from experts like you about the qualifications, experiences, challenges and opportunities in this field. Would you be able to meet with me to help me 'reality check' the information I have already researched?"

DO	DON'T
Conduct research before the meeting so you can ask productive questions.	Don't ask for a job – even indirectly.
When calling for an appointment be clear about the purpose and length of time you need and stick to them.	Don't assume that one person's view is the same as others in the field – speak with more than one person.
Prepare questions and take notes at the meeting.	Don't go to the meeting unprepared.
Be professional before, during and after the meeting.	Don't overstay your welcome.

What Next?

- **Immediately after** each information interview is completed, block off some quiet time to reflect and record what you learned and what your thoughts are. Some things to reflect on and document may include:
 - » In what ways did this conversation change my opinion about jobs, industries or careers I have been considering? What do I wish I had thought to ask?
 - » What did I agree to do/send/provide?
 - » What further research was recommended or would be wise to do?
 - » What impressed me most? What concerned or surprised me most?
 - » What was the best advice I received during this meeting?
- **Send a hand-written thank you note** or card with a personal message immediately after your information gathering interview is over. An email thank you is also acceptable.
- **Keep/update your contacts** file. Make sure to include the date you spoke with them, relevant notes and your documented reflections.



Possible Questions to Ask

Don't be concerned if you do not get all your questions answered in the allotted time. It's better to have too many good questions than too few. You will be information interviewing a number of people and have the opportunity to mix and match questions as you proceed.

- Recently, what has impacted this business most? What changes do you see in the industry in the next three or more years? What trends do you see in the field now? What opportunities and challenges do you see for this field in the future?
- Which professional organizations, journals and news feeds should I know about in looking for more information on this industry or to keep up to date in the future?
- What positions are considered entry points for post-secondary graduates? Are graduate degrees important in advancing? Can you suggest where I might find written job descriptions for positions such as these? Are there typical salary ranges for these positions? What is a typical time people remain in these initial positions?
- What would surprise someone considering this field of work? What would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- Can you tell me about typical working conditions? A typical day? The corporate culture? What lifestyle adjustments are typical for people in occupations such as these?
- What suggestions can you give me about how to gain hands-on experience that is valued in this field? What would you suggest a university student do to best prepare for this type of work? What advice or effective strategies for a new graduate would you recommend to get a foot in the door in this industry?
- What related occupations should I explore? How does the work you do connect to the other parts of the organization?
- How did you get started in this occupation? Would that be similar to market expectations today?
- What is the employment outlook in this field? What is the demand for people in this field? Is that primarily local, regional or across the country? Is the demand growing or declining?
- Is employment in this field predominantly stable or cyclical? Are people hired on contract, for the length of a project or permanently?
- What are common challenges or problems in this field?
- How frequently do you and your colleagues work in the evening? On weekends? Is it typical to travel out of town for work related activities?
- What is the best way to learn about vacancies in this field (or in similar companies to yours)? What are peak recruiting months for summer students? Graduate employment?
- Do people in this field generally work alone or in groups? How are work teams organized? How is performance evaluated? What does 'computer skill' (or other general terms) mean in this industry?
- Is there someone else in the field you think I should connect with before making a decision?
- May I connect with you occasionally in the future?

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