

AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW



An informational interview is a one on one interview with a person who belongs to a particular field or an organization that interests you.

Seeking career information from an expert is very important, even if it seems awkward to contact a person you barely know. This can prove to be the most useful job search tool for you. If you have a genuine interest in a career field and you reach out to a professional, he or she will be very happy to guide you. Professional people usually like to talk about their careers and achievements so you have to step in their shoes.

Informational interviews can be helpful;

- To determine if a career field or organization is right for you
- To discover new possibilities
- To get to know about new trends
- To learn industry-specific vocabulary
- To make a network of contacts
- To land a possible interview

USING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW FOR MAXIMUM BENEFIT

1- Self-Evaluation

You know yourself better than anyone and that is why this is a perfect opportunity to put things into veracity. Identify your unique traits, strengths, and skills that you think are exceptional. This will help you to see what are your priorities and this way, you will be able to find a career that matches your ambition. You can always get in touch with your career counselor who can help you get started with your goal-setting process.

2- Career Preferences

Now that you have your goals and ambitions set and you also have an idea about your career direction, this is the right time to explore a few organizations and industries. This exploration will seek questions that you want answered and can be perfect for your informational interview. The person you are interviewing is a busy person and you don't want to waste their time by asking questions that you could have easily found answers to on the internet. Use the internet to filter out resources that are actually helpful.

3- Potential Contacts

Shortlist people who you want to interview. It is not necessary that all the people belong to the same field; the diverse the list, the better. Start the list with the people you know; this can include close family, friends and even neighbors. These people may be working in the organization you are interested in or can help you get an interview using a reference.

4- Contact the Professional

Use the right medium to contact a professional for an interview. Use phone, email, letter, or you may even pay him/her a personal visit.

By Phone

If you are using the telephone, make sure you respect their time and set venue and time slot that you both mutually agreed upon.

Sample

“Hello, my name is (enter name here). I am a student at West Virginia University and I will be graduating soon.”

“Your career field is the one that I am researching to pursue as a career for myself. (You can always add a sentence or two to explain why you are interested in this particular field.)

“I would appreciate if you could spare half an hour so I can ask a few questions. Would that be possible if you are free?”

“I would like to extend my thanks to you for your time and I look forward to meeting you in person at the (appointed time).”

By E-mail

An email request should likely include:

- Name of the person you want to interview
- Your introduction
- Why are you writing this letter?
- Why are you interested in a particular field?
- Why have you chosen this particular individual?
- When will you contact him/her?

Email Request Sample

Dear Mr. /Ms. (Name),

Your name was recommended to me by (give referral's name and in two lines explain the relationship with the reference). Mr. (name) suggested me to get in contact with you when I showed interest in this (specific) field. I am right now on crossroads and confused about the field to choose from. I want to gather as much information about the field as possible so that the decision making process is a little easier for me.

I would appreciate it if you could take out 30 mins from your busy schedule to answer a few of my questions that are mostly about your career and how you found your vocation. I am currently enrolled in West Virginia University and a little help from you will help me make a decision regarding my career.

I will contact you in two weeks' time (date) to arrange a meeting if that is convenient for you. Thanking in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Your Name

5- Prepare A List of Questions

Since you are the one who is looking for answers, you should be capable enough to drive the interview. Your questions should be broad and cover all areas of the particular field. It is better if you divide your questions into distinct categories to avoid jumping from one topic to another.

6- Utilize the Interview Process

Develop Network

Consider the person you are interviewing as a contact who is investing time in you. Keep in touch with them even after the interview is over; he might like to be kept in the loop in the future.

Get a Referral

Don't expect your interviewee to offer you a job, but he/she might know someone who could employ you. It is a good practice to ask your interviewee at the end of the interview if they could refer you to someone. It is recommended to ask for their permission to use their name.

Share Information

It is important for you to share your information, but you shouldn't dominate or overtake the interview. This interview is about the other person and not you. Speak as much as you need to in order to keep the interview conversational.

Listen

Be open to whatever your interviewee is saying, listening is very important in an informational interview.

7- Thank You Letter

It is important that you send a Thank You Letter a few days after the interview to show gratitude. Tell the interviewee that the interview was really helpful and you may contact him/her in case further guidance is required.

HINTS

- Ask the questions you want to ask but give the other person time to answer your questions. In this process, there are chances that you might discover unexpected stuff.
- Make sure to leave a good impression.
- Dress as you would go to your workplace.
- Show passion towards the profession.
- Maintain good posture and eye contact.
- It is better to maintain a polite and informal tone during the interview.
- Do not confuse this interview as a job opportunity; don't trouble your interviewee for a job position.



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