



## **Center for Student Experience & Career Development: Informational Interview Guide**

### **WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?**

An informational interview is a conversation in which you gather information from an individual who is or has been employed in a career field of interest to you. It is not an employment interview.

#### **Through informational interviewing you can:**

- Seek knowledge about careers to help you make informed career decisions.
- Learn about job opportunities and career paths.
- Begin or expand a “network” of contacts.
- Visit and evaluate a variety of work settings and environments.
- Become more confident about your interpersonal skills.
- Establish the first link to your potential job targets.

### **HOW DOES IT WORK?**

#### **Prepare, Research, and Plan in Advance**

Prior to your meeting, do some research to get a basic understanding of the industry, profession, position, etc. Also, know your interests, skills, and values and how these relate to the career you are investigating. You can meet with a staff member in Career Development to clarify these.

**Contact Someone:** Initiate an informational interview by emailing or calling the individual. Let that person know that you are a student who is gathering information to assist you in career decision making.

Sample email

Explain how you obtained the person’s name.

Mention your hope of arranging a meeting to discuss the industry/job description/company/etc. Be sure to convey genuine interest and enthusiasm!

**Prepare for the Interview:** Generally, you will be expected to lead the conversation, so prepare a list of questions. Be sure to select questions that will elicit the information that will be most useful to you. During your conversation, listen carefully and ask for additional information when necessary.

**During the Interview:** Always present yourself professionally. Even if your job search is several years away, an informational interview can be a great opportunity to make a positive first impression. Be prompt and do not take up too much of the person’s time. Dress appropriately for the setting. Usually, conservative business attire is the norm. Be enthusiastic, shake hands confidently, and be polite. Bring a copy of your resume. A resume will offer an overview of your background. Consider asking your contact for advice on preparing an effective resume for an entry-level position in a specific career field.

Dear [prospective interviewee’s name],

Jo Jones has shared your contact information with me. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me to discuss your experience and position with the Department of Public Health. I’m currently a sophomore at Framingham State University majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology. I’m hoping to learn more about career options in my field and am interested in hearing about your professional experiences and background. Please let me know your availability at your convenience. I’m looking forward to connecting.

Thank you,  
Samuel Sample

**Follow up:** Send a thank-you email in which you refer to any especially interesting or useful information. Also, keep notes of your meeting including helpful comments and the names of any referrals. If your contact suggests you reach out to one of their contacts and provides information, be sure to reach out and make that connection as well. This is how networking happens! Lastly, if you have a well-developed LinkedIn profile, connect with the person to help you stay in touch and informed.

## MORE TIPS

### **Target individuals at various levels of responsibility and length of work experience.**

Talking to those at the entry-level will give you current information about how to get that job and make the transition from college student to new professional. Those at higher levels and with years of experience have a broader perspective and can often speak about management's point of view on the industry, organizational strategy, and work expectations.

**Try to meet your contact in person.** That way you can see the work space, check out the environment, assess whether it appeals to you, gather company literature, and possibly meet others in the organization. If a face-to-face meeting is impossible (i.e., the contact is across the country), a Zoom appointment is fine. Mark it on your calendar. You should always offer to be the one to set up the meeting. If your contact prefers to set up the meeting, so be it. If going in person, arrive a few minutes early. If you are running late and will arrive more than a few minutes late, call and let your contact know.

**Listen carefully to what you are told.** Allow yourself to hear the negatives as well as the positives. Try to read between the lines. Some contacts will be unwilling to say anything negative but there's always a downside to every job and organization. It won't help your cause to only hear the good side. Develop your ability to elicit the whole story from your sources. Consider asking, "What would you change about your job?" or "What do you wish were different?" as these questions can help you gather more information.

**Follow your contact's lead.** If they offer to give you a tour or have you speak to someone else there, great! If they seem hurried and wrap up a bit early, don't take it personally. They may have been given a pressing assignment just before you arrived and need to get working on it.

**Ask for feedback.** Show your contact a draft of your resume if you want a critique. Ask questions like "How easy is it to read?", "How competitive am I?", "What skills or knowledge am I missing if I decide to work in this occupation?", "Would you interview me if you had an entry-level job opening?", etc.

**Don't overstay your allotted time.** Get the person's business card before you go. Thank your contact for their advice, referrals, and time.

**Evaluate the meeting.** First, how did you do? Were your networking skills up to par? How can you do better next time? Second, did you like what you heard? Do you have a better understanding of what's involved, the organization, your potential to fit in it, etc.?

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. How do you spend a typical day/week?
2. What was your career path to this position?
3. What aspects of your job are most/least satisfying?
4. What are the major responsibilities of your position?
5. What training/education/background is required?
6. What are some current issues in your field?
7. What are the job prospects for someone entering this field now?
8. Are there any field-specific resources you might suggest?
9. Could you offer the names of one or two other individuals with whom I should speak?
10. What advice would you offer to someone about to begin a career in this field?