

Informational interviewing is a method of gathering information about career options, industries and employers. It is an opportunity to learn about a particular job from someone already in the field. It is *not* a job interview.

The advantage to informational interviewing is that you can develop strong communication skills, build your confidence, gather resources, learn the industry jargon and identify possible job leads. Often, the biggest obstacles for people are fear of rejection and difficulty finding contacts to speak with within a specific industry. Here are a few recommendations for finding professionals in your chosen field.

- Seek assistance from everyone you know – friends and social groups, family, professional associations, previous supervisors, present co-workers, alumni, faculty and acquaintances. It may surprise you to see who is connected to whom. Let people know what type of information you want. Building these types of contacts will help you to build your network and obtain further information.
- Contact department heads and other administrators who may have additional suggestions of people to contact and information on companies that are hiring. Explore company websites for further information.
- Become familiar with newsletters, journals, and specific newspapers that are aimed at the industry or field that you are pursuing.
- Join student organizations, professional associations, attend seminars, conferences and workshops that can expose you to others in your field.
- Attend job fairs, ask questions and obtain literature regarding the companies participating in the fair. Remember to pick up business cards.
- Local libraries and area chambers of commerce often collect company information.
- Volunteering your time is an excellent way of identifying resources and contacts.

There are several approaches to contacting professionals in your area of interest. This can be done by cold calling, writing a letter of inquiry or by sending an email. Depending on your own personal style, choose a method that is comfortable for you. If you decide to contact someone by a letter of inquiry or email, be sure to follow-up. Proofread your letter/email to ensure that it is grammatically correct and well organized. If you are referred by someone, be sure to mention their name.

If you decide to use the cold calling method, it is helpful to develop a brief script of what you are going to say and practice that script before making the call. This will help to build your confidence and provide you with a solid phone presentation. Remember, the employer will be assessing you by your enthusiasm, phone manner and professionalism. Below are some helpful hints about what you should say during the conversation.

- Explain who you are, why you are calling and how you found their contact information or who referred you to them.
- Give a brief overview of your academic background and work history, and why you are interested in learning about his/her position, career or industry.
- Respectfully request a 20-30 minute meeting (informational interview).

### **Preparing for your interview**

The goal of an informational interview is to gather information. During your interview, remember to initially restate why you requested the meeting, review your academic background and other pertinent information. In general, most people enjoy sharing their expertise and experiences. It is your responsibility to be aware of the time, stay longer only if you are invited and make sure to ask for a business card before you leave. After the interview is finished, send that person a “thank-you note” indicating an appreciation for their time and assistance.

- Arrive early (10-15 minutes at most)
- Dress professionally
- Speak clearly and listen carefully
- Have questions prepared
- Take notes

Sample questions:

### General/Occupational

- How did you become interested in your field?
- What does your typical workday encompass?
- How did you get into the role you are in now?
- What personality traits are needed for this type of position?
- What are the educational requirements for your position?
- What is your advice for someone interested in this field?
- What are the biggest challenges in your job?
- What are the entry-level positions in this field?
- What is the entry-level salary range in this industry?
- What strategies can you suggest to enter into this industry?
- What are the challenges confronting this industry?
- What professional associations do you suggest I join?
- What professional newspapers or magazines should I subscribe to?
- Can you recommend someone I can speak with for further information in this industry?

### Company Specific

- What are the major challenges in your company?
- Where do you see your company heading in the next five years?
- What are the expectations of a new employee?
- Describe the types of projects a new employee would be assigned?
- What is the typical path of promotion in your company?
- Do you offer professional development opportunities?

### Evaluation and Reflection

As with any interview, it is important to assess the information that you have gathered. Review your experience and gauge the progress you have made by asking yourself a few questions.

- What did you learn from the interview?
- What would you do differently the next time?
- Do you have enough information to take any further steps?
- Did you collect any resources from the interviewer?

Take the time to consider your next steps and review the information you collected. Remember that the goal of informational interviewing is to get a balanced view of an industry. Here are a few recommendations to consider as next steps.

- Creating a network is a process. Review the information you gathered, continue to set up informational interviews, join a club or an organization and volunteer in your area of interest.
- Review the skills required in preparation to enter your chosen field.
- Participate in internships to continue to build your skills and test the reality of whether you would enjoy working in your chosen field.
- Obtain a part-time job in your target industry or ask to observe and interact with a professional for a day to gain further insight into the industry.
- Target and attend classes, workshops, and seminars that will enhance your knowledge about the field, industry jargon and other pertinent information.
- Join a professional association and participate in their committees, projects and future conferences.

**Sample E-Mail/Letter**

January 19, 20XX

Mark Jones, Vice President  
Lock Incorporated  
6 Smith Street  
Cambridge, MA 01238

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am currently a sophomore at Salem State University pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Geology. I am enjoying my classes and I am in the process of exploring career options within this industry. In an effort to continue my career exploration, I recently joined the Geology Society and MASSPIRG here on campus. Over the summer, I volunteered for several community clean-up projects in my neighborhood.

My professor, Dr. John Smith, recommended that I speak with you to gain a better understanding of what your job entails. I am contacting you to request a half an hour meeting to discuss your expertise in the field. My schedule is flexible and I understand that you are busy. I hope that we are able to find a time that is convenient with your schedule.

I appreciate your time and thank you in advance. I am looking forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,  
Type your full name

**Why Do It?**

- Gain inside information from someone in the industry.
- Develop a more thorough understanding of a particular industry/job.
- Helps you to make a decision - is this what I want to do?
- Learn about the different paths others have taken to get to where they are.
- Build your network.
- Inquire about job opportunities that may be available.
- Learn which organizations/associations professionals from this field are actively involved in.