



The Art of Informational Interviewing

Identify People to Interview

Brainstorm a list of people whom you may want to interview. Think about:

- Who do you already know? (name, title, department, your “connection”)

- Who could direct you to other people?

- What types of positions/organizations do you want to explore? (think “pipeline” positions too)

- Who and what are your additional resources? (think outside the box)

Prepare for the Interview (select questions)

Review and choose potential questions to ask. Do not ask all of these questions. Choose your questions wisely and modify them appropriately for the person, the position, your goals, your style and your available time.

Sample Informational Interviewing Questions

Setting the stage/background

- How long have you been working in this field/at the university/in this department?
- How did you get into this occupation?
- What were the jobs you had previously that helped you get your current job? What steps did you take?
- What do you love most about your position?

Job exploration/job search process

- What was your job exploration and job search process like for you to find your dream job?
- What were some of the things you learned during the job search process?
- What are your suggestions for making a career change or shift?

Present aspects of job

- What is a typical day like for you? What are the responsibilities of your position?
- What are the most interesting aspects of your work?
- What courses/training/certifications/degrees would you recommend in order to get into this field?
- What positions are helpful in transitioning into your occupation?
- What aspects of a career in this field do you consider most reward? Most challenging?
- How would a person with my current background fit into this field?
- What are the most common challenges in this department/occupation?
- How does your job compare with others in the same department?
- Who are the experts/authors/thought-leaders in this field?
- What professional associations are there in this industry? In your occupation?
- What websites/blogs/social media/authors do you follow to stay current in your field?
- Who else should I talk to about this occupation?

Future

- Where do you see a position like yours leading to within the university/within your department?
- What other areas in your industry do you find yourself interested in and that relate to your areas of expertise?
- How do you see jobs in this area changing over the next few years?
- What do you do to keep up with these kinds of changes?

Evaluate the Informational Interview

Assess the success of the informational interview. Look for what went well (strengths) as well as ways to develop further for your next informational interview. Since your main reason was information gathering, ask yourself questions, such as:

- How does the person I just talked with use the skills I want to use?
- What would it take for me to be qualified for a position like theirs?
- How well do I understand what the job entails?
- Would I enjoy working in this capacity?
- What additional ideas did I get for alternatives?
- What impressions do I now have about this specific area of work?
- What would I enjoy about working in this person's field/organization?
- What are the goals (needs, concerns, problems, issues, etc.) of this area of work/organization?
- How could I help meet those needs or accomplish those goals if I worked in this or a similar organization?
- Which of my strengths would serve me best in this field/organization?

Set your Informational Interviewing Goal

- "I will complete _____ informational interviews by _____, and the names on the top of my list are _____."*