

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

One important tool to developing your career, a unique blend of personal, professional, and civic aspirations, will be to have conversations with others about their journey. Informational interviews provide an excellent way to gather more information about your particular areas of interest. You might learn from the mistakes of others or identify with their stories so much that you want to explore those avenues for yourself!

Informational interviews are designed:

- To clarify your personal, professional, and civic goals and explore post-graduate options
- To expand your network and learn from others who have been in your shoes
- To build confidence for interviews of all kinds (e.g., internships, jobs, leadership boards, roommates)
- To access the most up-to-date information about how to prepare and enter your chosen pathways
- To identify your professional strengths, interests, values, and opportunities for growth

Informational interviews give you the opportunity to ask people with experience any questions you might have about their professional, personal, or civic interests, as well as their advice about how you might become similarly engaged. Remember that people want to help and often find satisfaction in passing along knowledge they've learned over the years. Additionally, people are often proud of their work and would love to share it with others.

Preparation for the Informational Interview

- You should always remember that while this meeting is for informational purposes, you are still on display. You will be scrutinized; therefore, you are in a position to make an important and positive impression. You may wish to apply to that same company later as a serious job applicant. This conversation might lead to volunteering opportunities at the organization. The person you're speaking with may refer you to others in their network. Informational interviews are an opportunity to leave a very positive impression without the pressure of an actual interview.
- Informational interviews can be very relaxed affairs, and can be used to find out about certain industries, organizations, lifestyles, the future of a certain type of industry, degrees or training required to do various activities, and how comfortable you feel in certain environments — in short, almost anything you wish to learn. Of course, you need to know what information you are searching for, and you must be brief. Ask questions that can be easily understood, using open-ended sentences (i.e., “Please describe...” “Please tell me about...” “How would you...”). Be specific in what you are asking. “Please tell me about your industry” is too vague. “Please tell me what you like most about your industry” is more specific.

Track What You've Learned

Immediately after the informational interview, record all your impressions and any facts acquired during the interview. Go back over your notes to make sure the information is clear. Make note of any impressions you have from the conversation.

Ask yourself:

- What did I learn from this interview (both positive and negative impressions)?
- How does what I learned fit with my own interests, abilities, goals, values, etc.?
- What more would be helpful to know?
- What plan of action may I take?

ALWAYS thank the interviewer and follow-up with an email or handwritten thank-you note!

Types of Questions You Might Ask in an Informational Interview

This is not an exhaustive list. You are encouraged to think about additional questions that may be more appropriate to your field of interest. Know what you're going to ask ahead of time, and be sure to take notes during the interview.

Culture and Environment

- How would you outline or describe a typical day doing this type of work?
- How much flexibility are you allowed in terms of dress, hours, vacation, etc.?
- What portion of the job involves interacting with others, such as coworkers, volunteers, or the public?
- What do you like or dislike about the work or the industry in general?
- What is the role of social responsibility in this environment?
- Is it possible to do this work full-time and go to graduate school?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle? Your ability to be civically engaged?
- What kind of work/life blend are you able to have in this field?
- Is there a common code of ethics in this field?
- What are examples of things that would be considered unethical in this field?
- How diverse is your workplace? The field in general?

Personal Background and Experience

- What first interested you about this field?
- What did you major in and how does it apply to what you are doing now?
- What courses (requirements, electives) have been most helpful?
- What skills do you find most important to have in this field?
- Is special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job?
- Have you always been interested in this area of study?
- Did any of your co-curricular or civic experiences prepare you for this type of work?
- Did you have any practical experience or training in this field, other than college, prior to doing this work?
- What is the highest degree you've attained? Do you find this degree important in your work? How?
- How did you find your current job? If you had to do it over again, would you take the same route?
- If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?

Outlook

- Are there opportunities for advancement in this field?
- What have you learned in this field that you can now apply to other areas of your life?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in this field?
- What is the current and future demand for people in this occupation?
- What are possible salary ranges and benefits for someone in your occupation? Now? In the long term?

Advice

- Are there any professional or civic groups that I, as an undergraduate, can join that would be beneficial?
- How may I gain experience in this field while I'm still in college?
- What do I need to explain to an employer or potential supervisor about coming from a liberal arts college?
- How might I work in a socially just way in this field/job?
- What skills might I learn in this field that will be useful in my civic or volunteer life?
- Do you know of specific websites, publications, or other sources that would post internships or entry-level positions in this field?
- What is a good starting point for this career path? Is any specific entry point more advantageous?
- What are the important keywords or buzzwords to include in a résumé or cover letter in the field?
- What are some specific skills I should be trying to obtain to succeed in this field?
- From your perspective, what are the challenges you see working in this field?
- What graduate school connections are important before and after having a career like yours?
- If I want to enter this field what should I look for in the organization?

Geographic Considerations

- Is it easier to do a global, nationwide, or a regional search for work in this field?
- What is the best way to find apartments to rent in your region?
- What are the costs of living in your region? What are the demographics in your region?
- What kinds of social justice opportunities are there in your region?
- What services do you find lacking in your region? Which services do you really appreciate?