



Grossmont College
Career Center / Student Employment Services



Informational Interviewing

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"INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING" is the term used to describe the process of systematically researching a career field through a series of in-person, workplace visits with *people who are already employed in a similar job*. It is one of the most valuable career development tools.

SOME MAJOR BENEFITS OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

1. It DEMYSTIFIES the field or position you're interested in,
 - making it possible for you to speak more knowledgeably about what you want to do, and
 - helping you decide whether or not this is an appropriate career choice.
2. It provides you with explicit JOB DESCRIPTION INFORMATION that you need to develop a sharp and focused resume, and a source of CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM if you've brought a resume *draft* with you.
3. It contributes VALUABLE PERSONAL CONTACTS for your job search networking, which is the time-tested, surest route to a good job.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

1. DON'T CONFUSE IT WITH A JOB INTERVIEW. Be clear, honest and unambiguous about your motive or agenda, which is to OBTAIN INFORMATION, *not a job or a job lead*. (This is the one rule of informational interviewing that is most often broken!)
2. Direct your inquiries to *people who do the jobs you want to do* (your future colleagues) and NOT to those who have the power to hire you. AVOID:
 - your future supervisor, the person in charge, the president or director of the organization;
 - the public relations manager; and
 - the director of human resources.
3. MAKE AN EXPLICIT APPOINTMENT for a short period of time (say 20 minutes); respect your target's schedule: be on time, and leave on time.
4. DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST! Arrive thoroughly prepared with the questions you want answered AFTER you have researched the title through traditional sources, e.g., the Career Center, local library, etc. (Use the research form on page 5 of this packet for help.)
5. LEAVE WITH AT LEAST TWO REFERRALS to other people in the field that you might contact for additional input.
6. SEND A THANK-YOU NOTE right away!
7. KEEP WELL-ORGANIZED RECORDS of your informational interviewing process, using the "Informational Interview Report" and "To Do List" handouts enclosed.

Adapted from: *The Resume Catalog* by Yana Parker and *THE PIE METHOD for Career Success* by Daniel Porot.

How Do I Find People To Talk To?

At this point, you are probably wondering how to go about finding people to interview. Your best resources are people you already know:

- Friends, family, acquaintances (including teachers/professors)
- People you've heard about - lecturers, employers, prominent people in your community, etc.
- Local librarians
- Local newspaper editor
- Chamber of Commerce staff members
- People in professional societies and associations
- Career and Job Fairs are an excellent source.

In addition to actual human beings, you may find possible contacts through print media, such as newspaper articles, magazines and journals. Make a point of being observant for potential contacts.

How Do I Arrange for an Informational Interview?

Although there are a number of ways to get in to see a person, these two are the most common:

1. Telephone the person directly.
Be prepared to explain exactly what it is that you want. Example: "My name is _____ and I am a student at _____. I am interested in _____ (the work he/she does or the area of mutual interest). I wonder if you might have (20 or 30) minutes during which I could speak to you about it."
2. Make contact through a letter and follow up with a phone call.
This approach is essentially the same as above in explaining your interest. For the follow-up, however, indicate in the letter that you will call within a few days to set up a mutually convenient time to meet. Then follow through with the call. This approach is particularly helpful when the person with whom you wish to speak is not in your community.

Another way of contacting a person would be to drop in and ask if she/he would see you without an appointment. Or, if the person is out of town and you have no opportunity to visit, you might write a letter requesting a telephone interview.

Types of Interviews

The important part is to find an approach with which you are comfortable.

Interviewing for information may consist of several stages. Each has a different focus, but differences between them may not always be clear.

1. *Interview role rehearsal*
Purpose: to gain self-confidence and be comfortable talking with people about a mutual enthusiasm (such as a hobby or issue)--not job-related. The focus is on anyone who has an interest area similar to yours.
2. *General informational interviewing*
Purpose: to gain information about the world of work in general, as related to your own skills. The focus is on anyone who can provide work-related information.
3. *Target informational interviewing*
Purpose: to gain information about specific employers--not for a job but for information only. The focus is on the person who would have the power to hire you.

What Do I Ask?

If you're not quite sure where to begin, these questions help to get you started:

1. How did you get into this work? (or) How did you get interested in this?
2. What do you like most about doing this?
3. What do you like least about doing this? (or) What would you most like to change about your position?
4. What education do I need to pursue this occupation?
5. Which educational institutions are most valued/respected within this field?
6. What are the standard required tasks of your position?
7. What skills do I need to do these tasks successfully?
8. Where else could I find people who share this enthusiasm/interest? (Try to get the names, addresses and phone numbers for three people with the same job/interest.)

The whole interview can be just finding answers to these questions. But as you gain practice and move further toward targeting your informational interviewing, you will probably think of questions that stem spontaneously from what you want to know and from what the interviewee has said.

Evaluating the Interview

In order to make best use of the information you gather, it is important to evaluate it by asking yourself questions such as:

1. What did I learn from this interview (both positive and negative impressions)?
2. How does what I learned fit with my own interests, abilities, goals, values, etc.?
3. What do I still need to know?
4. What plan of action can I make?

Follow-Up

RECORD KEEPING

In addition to the name, address and phone number of each person you talked with, be sure to record briefly what was discussed and what you learned. This will help you organize and evaluate information from your contacts. A single notebook or some sort of card file system might work well.

DON'T FORGET THANK-YOU NOTES!

These should be sent to any person you talked to at length. They don't need to be fancy or long -- just a few lines to express your appreciation for their time. This basic courtesy is very important!

¹ Adapted from *The Quick Job Hunting Map, Advanced Version*, by Richard N. Bolles, copyright 1975 by Richard N. Bolles and the National Career Development Project. Used by special permission. Those desiring a copy of the complete book for further reading may procure it from the publisher, Ten Speed Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Library Research Results

Position Title: _____ DOT Code: _____

	Like	OK	Don't Like
REQUIREMENTS: --Degrees, certificates, licenses, etc. --Physical requirements			
DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES:			
ENVIRONMENT: --Service, manufacturing, other --Physical surroundings --Location --Commute time			
REWARDS: --Advancement opportunities --Working conditions --Personal satisfaction --Salary and perks --Co-workers			
LABOR TRENDS: --Growing or shrinking field? --Emerging new products/services?			
RELATED JOB TITLES:			
KEY POINTS:			

Collect data from at least three jobs that interest you. Once you believe you have identified your "ideal job" and have completed preliminary research, proceed with the Informational Interview process.

Informational Interview Report

A. *Identification Material*

1. Your Name _____
2. Your major occupational interest(s) _____
3. Name and phone # of person interviewed _____
4. Title of person interviewed (or job duties) _____
5. Location of Interview _____ Date/Time _____
6. Organization this person works for _____
7. Why did you select this person to interview _____

8. Thank-you letter sent? Yes _____ Will send _____ When? _____

B. *Questions Asked/Answers Received* (Note: Questions must be composed *before* the interview; answers can be briefly summarized after the interview.)

1. Question: _____
Answer: _____

2. Question: _____
Answer: _____

3. Question: _____
Answer: _____

4. Question: _____

Answer: _____

5. Question: _____

Answer: _____

6. Question: _____

Answer: _____

7. Question: _____

Answer: _____

8. Question: _____

Answer: _____

Some considerations in composing your questions:

What parts of this person's work particularly interest you?

What skills does this person use that you have or feel you could develop?

How should you prepare yourself to enter this field?

What other types of careers are related to this field?

What needs/problems does this organization have? How might you help solve them?

What attracts you now about this type of work?

What negative impressions do you currently have about this type of work?

C. Other possible contacts:

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

D. Write a short summary of what you learned from this informational interview.

TO DO: *CALLS TO MAKE AND LETTERS TO SEND*

Name	Call or send by (date)	Completed (date)

Quality Questions For The Informational Interview

- ◆ How did you get started in this business?
- ◆ What is your education in this field?
- ◆ Looking back, would you change how you prepared for this field?
- ◆ Would you have gotten more/less education, more/less practical experience?
- ◆ Are there specific educational institutions that are most respected within this field? Which ones are they?
- ◆ Would you have started earlier/later in life? Studied different subjects?
- ◆ How much advanced education do you think is useful/necessary to succeed in this job?
- ◆ What professional associations would you recommend joining?
- ◆ What's the most difficult part of your job?
- ◆ What element of the work do you never get tired of?
- ◆ What personal qualities help you to be good at your job?
- ◆ How do you see this business changing in the next five years? Thirty years?
- ◆ Why should someone get into this business rather than a related field?
- ◆ What's the best advice you can give to someone new to this business?

References

"Informational Interviewing" was created and developed by the Grossmont College Career Center and Student Job Placement Office staff. The following sources were referenced and/or provided authorization for reprinting of educational material for this handout.

Bolles, R. N. and the National Career Development Project (1975). **The Quick Job Hunting Map, Advanced Version.** Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press (*Used by special permission. Those desiring a copy of the complete book for further reading may contact the publisher, Ten Speed Press, at P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707*)

Parker, Yana (1996). **The Resume Catalog: 200 Damn Good Examples.** Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press

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G R O S S M O N T
C O L L E G E



8800 Grossmont College Drive
El Cajon, CA 92020

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