

Career Interest Interview

IT IS TIME to figure out what kind of work you want to do when you graduate. Everyone has been asking, and you are wondering how to answer. Begin with what you like to do, and then research an occupation or industry that holds your interest. When you narrow the choices, you are getting closer to the step that provides live information. Your goal is to meet with a person who does work you might consider in the future.



Objectives:



1. Prepare to conduct an informational interview.
2. Identify people to interview.
3. Evaluate the key questions to ask at the informational interview.

Key Terms:



aptitude
benefits
career
informational interview
lifestyle
skills

Informational Interview Preparation

An **informational interview** is a formal meeting with a person in a career of interest to you. The purpose of the meeting is to help you choose career options. When you take part in an interview, you want to understand the career path taken by this person because a **career** is a series of related jobs built on a common foundation of interest, knowledge, training, and experience.

REASONS FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

You are on an exploration to learn about potential careers and to gain an understanding of a specific occupation and industry. This is an opportunity to learn about the educational and training requirements. In addition, it should help you network, polish interview skills, and gain confidence and poise before engaging in a high-stakes interview. You will gain knowledge of the day-to-day tasks that are part of an occupation. You may learn about specialty areas or newly defined jobs emerging in the field. This information may help you determine your career goals.



FIGURE 1. It helps when you find the right person for an informational interview.

INTERVIEW TIPS

During the interview, it is a good idea to bring an agenda. It will keep you organized as you conduct the interview so you do not forget what you want to cover. Note how you want to begin. For instance, you may want to acknowledge that the person you are speaking with is an expert in the field. (This usually results in the person talking.) Plan to jot down the time your meeting begins so you can stop and ask if it is okay to continue should you exceed the agreed upon time. Close the meeting by asking if you can make contact again by phone, via email, or in person. For instance, are there others who would be available to talk with you? Can you have a tour of the workplace?

Identifying People to Interview

Before you can identify people to talk with, you need to be clear about areas that interest you. If you are not sure, enlist the help of a guidance or career counselor. There may be someone at school who can assist you. The person you are seeking will be able to help you reflect on your interests, skills, values, and personality to provide career options. After you have decided which careers are of interest, you are ready for firsthand information.

You probably know people who can help you identify potential people to interview. Make a list of friends, family, neighbors, fellow students, co-workers, and alumni. Tell them what you

are working on, and ask if they know people you might contact. If the people you know cannot provide help or their information is limited, other resources are available. The phonebook can be a great place to start identifying businesses in a particular industry. You do not need a company name; just define the industry. Online, you can enter a geographic location. In either form, companies in the industry are listed. Related industries will be listed as well.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Professional organizations can be helpful. For example, if you are considering accounting, you might contact the American Accounting Association. A professional organization can help you identify people or a company to contact for a tour, interview, or additional information. Your local Chamber of Commerce, trade magazines, and journals can be helpful. When you are stumped, try contacting your school or local librarian for additional resources.

SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS

Once you have conducted some research, it is time to schedule an appointment. An introduction by a mutual acquaintance can expedite the process. People usually respond when they know someone. After the connection is made, it is up to you to follow up and call to arrange a date and time for the interview. When someone answers the telephone, say, “Hello” and then his or her name. Always ask, “Is this a good time to talk?” so you are not interrupting. When he or she answers with a positive response, state your purpose for the call, and arrange for a meeting.

If you do not have someone to assist with an introduction, sending a letter is easiest. You can introduce yourself and your objective in a short first paragraph. Mention that your meeting is intended to be brief to respect his or her time. In the second paragraph, clarify your reason for requesting the informational interview and state what you hope to achieve. Mentioning how you learned of this person or company adds credibility. The last paragraph should be about when you will follow up. Consider adding “thank you for considering my request.” Be courteous, and remember to proofread your letter before sending it. Although calling is faster, you are more likely to receive a positive response when there is more than one form of contact. Calling often results in a voicemail, so leave a message of introduction that also states your purpose. Send a letter also.

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Mr. Gordon Gray:

Your neighbor, Mr. Tim Thomas, suggested I contact you. (If that is not applicable, begin with: My name is Jacob Jones. I am a student at the local high school and am in the process of

deciding my future. An informational interview to learn more about the work you are doing would be helpful. I have a few questions that will probably take 15 to 30 minutes.

After assessing my interests, skills, and values, I realized that computer programming is something I want to know more about. Since you do this work, I wondered if I could receive firsthand information to enable me to decide if this is a career path I would like to pursue.

I will follow up on Thursday, March 25 at 4 p.m.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name Signed Here

Key Questions to Ask

It is easy to find questions to ask. Enter “informational interview questions” on the Internet, and a whole list appears. Some of the questions will work at every interview, and others will not. The time for the interview will be limited, so selecting key questions will maximize your opportunity to gain information.

BASIC QUESTIONS

Give thought to formulating questions that relate to the work you want to learn more about. Research is essential. More preparation results in a better interview. Basic questions will get you started, such as asking about the duties, functions, and responsibilities in a typical day. Then ask about required **skills**—what a person knows how to do; abilities. Also, ask about **aptitude**—the potential for learning a certain skill, training, and educational job requirements. A question about industry growth and decline can lead to a more complete picture



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Mastering the Informational Interview

Informational interviewing is a skill you will be able to use throughout your career. It will be helpful when you want to advance at a company or when switching to a related or new career. Even if you do not switch immediately, it will enable you to build relationships with people you want to stay in touch with and expand your network. It is the start of a network you want to keep active during your entire career. Realize you are not asking for a job lead. Your goal is to learn something about a job, career, company, or industry. Always follow up with a thank-you note. For more detailed information, go to:

<http://shiftingcareers.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/29/mastering-the-informat>

about the future. Since interviews are granted because a person wants to be helpful, ask one or more questions about his or her career path. If time permits and it seems appropriate, you might ask questions about the company and the **benefits**—employment extras (e.g., health insurance, paid vacations, and retirement plans). In addition, you may ask how work affects **lifestyle**—the way a person uses his or her time, energy, and resources.

Once you have job, company, and industry information, you are ready to start creating questions. While you may start with upwards of 25 questions, it is best to whittle it down to six. A minimum number of key questions are intended to get the person you are interviewing talking. Most interviews run from 15 to 30 minutes, so have a few questions you want answered. Then have an additional three back-up questions should they be needed.



FIGURE 2. You will ask better questions when you are prepared for an informational interview.

Summary:



With today's competitive job market, it is important to discover what you would enjoy doing in the world of work. You are more likely to excel at work you enjoy, so an informational interview can be a shortcut to discovering your preferences. Perhaps the most important part of the process is gaining interview skills and building confidence and poise. This improves your ability to network and gives you the practice needed for an actual job interview. By the way, always remember to send a thank-you note after each informational interview. You might send a note to a person who provided an introduction.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is the purpose of an informational interview?
2. What are some ways of identifying people to interview?
3. How would you define a career?
4. What is the difference between aptitude and skills?
5. What are employment extras, such as health insurance, paid vacations, and retirement plans called?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



To check particular industries or companies, consider databases many libraries access. Libraries pay for the databases and make them available to patrons at your local library or within the cluster of libraries that work together and share books and information. One example, Reference USA, is a good resource for company information. There are other resources a librarian can identify for you.

Web Links:



Informational Interview Sample Questions

http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interview_questions.html

Organize an Informational Interview

http://www.ehow.com/how_4905648_organize-informational-interview.html

Prepare for an Informational Interview

http://www.ehow.com/how_4579151_prepare-informational-interview.html

Thank-You Note

http://ehow.com/how_a4576702_write-informational-interview-thank you.html