

Informational Interviewing

What Is An Informational Interview?

The purpose of informational interviews is to ask for advice and insight, not a job. You are building a professional network. Remember, the larger your network, the greater your opportunities. These conversations, with professionals in your field, or a field that you're interested in can teach you about:

- How your major/concentration relates to a specific career and/or industry
- Preparing for a specific career
- Companies and positions that might be a good fit
- Making a career change and learning how to enter a new field

Why It's Not As Scary As You Think

- Most people like to give advice and feel good helping others.
- Most successful professionals have conducted informational interviews when they were starting out, and many will be willing to return the favor.
- The worst-case scenario is that your contact is too busy to meet with you, or never responds to you.

How Do You Find People To Interview?

Do you know someone who works in your field of interest, or who might have contacts in that field? Ask family, friends, classmates, former and present co-workers, and supervisors if they know anyone working in a field related to your interests or check out the OCU Alumni Mentor Database.

Also consider the following:

- Faculty members – who might know potential contacts for you to meet with
- Professional organizations – many of which have student memberships
- Workshops, seminars, conferences – to meet participants and presenters in your field of interest, or a related field
- Online networking – LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter
- Web and print material – professional journals, newsletters and websites



Tip: Referrals – always try to get the name of at least one additional contact during each informational interview by asking, "Is there anyone else you would recommend that I speak with?"

How Do You Contact Someone For An Informational Interview?

By email

If you do not know the person, it is more considerate to make the initial contact via email to avoid contacting them at an awkward or inconvenient time.

By telephone

If you already know the person, you can first contact him/her by phone.

Whether you make the initial contact by phone or email, if you haven't heard back in about two weeks, it is completely appropriate to follow-up. If you don't hear back after this second attempt, just move on to all of your other potential contacts.

Your Meeting

- Remember, you're the one doing the interviewing! You should be ready to lead the meeting.
- Research the individual you're meeting with and look at the organization's website.
- Research industry online so that you're up-to-date on issues, trends, etc.
- Prepare a written list of questions in advance.

Possible Questions To Ask

Decide what you would like to find out from this person. Good, open-ended questions stimulate the conversation.

- Job content - what are the nuts and bolts?
- Could you describe a typical workday or work week?
- What part of your job do you find most satisfying/challenging?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this job?
- Career path - how did your career develop?
- What is the typical career path in this field?
- How did you get your present job?
- Can you tell me about entry-level opportunities in this field?
- Preparation - what does it take?
- What advice would you give to someone who's interested in starting out in this field?
- Do you have any special words of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- Are there any professional associations and/or journals that you would recommend?
- Are there any job hunting strategies that you would suggest to enter this field?
- When do companies in this industry typically do their entry-level hiring?
- Is this a good fit?
- What are some of the top qualities that your company looks for in entry-level candidates?
- Do you happen to know the entry-level salary range for this profession/industry?
- Next Steps
- Is there anyone else you can recommend I speak to for additional information?
- Would you mind if I sent you my resume to review?
- May I send you a LinkedIn connection request?

The Meeting

- Arrive on time, in an outfit appropriate for the organization, and be ready with your elevator pitch and questions.
- Show your interest in, and enthusiasm for, the conversation.
- Do not ask for a job. By asking for a job, you risk embarrassment and ruin credibility.
- Bring a resume, but present it only if asked.
- Keep track of the time. Stay longer only if invited to do so.
- Before leaving, ask for a business card and make sure to ask if they can recommend anyone else for you to speak to.

Follow-up

- Jot down some notes for your contact, date, and useful information or advice etc.
- Write/Email a thank you note after each informational interview and email it within 24 hours.