

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

CONNECTING WITH PROFESSIONALS IS AS EASY AS
1. SELECT – 2. PREPARE – 3. FOLLOW UP

The purpose of informational interviews is to ask for advice and insight, not a job.

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

All of this information can help you **make career decisions, find information about specific opportunities, and market yourself more efficiently** when kicking off a job search. In addition to gathering information, you are building a professional network. Remember, the larger your network, the greater your opportunities.

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

1. HOW DO YOU FIND PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW?

Do you know someone who works in your field or area of interest or who might have contacts in that field? Ask family, friends, classmates, former and present coworkers, and supervisors if they know anyone working in a field related to your interests.

Also consider:

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

 *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 TO CONNECT?

By Email

If you do not know the person, it is more considerate to make the initial contact via email to avoid catching them at an awkward or inconvenient time. In the email, explain who you are, why you are contacting this person, and how you found their name. Additionally, give a very brief description of your work/education history and why you're interested in speaking to him/her, and then request a 20-30 minute meeting to get information about his/her career, field, or organization.

By Phone

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 your other potential contacts.

Email subject line ideas: OCU Career Mentor Request, Informational Interview Request

Dear Ms. Professional,

I am a junior at Oklahoma City University majoring in marketing and was given your name by Professor Hurt as someone who could provide me with some career guidance. I have been considering a career in the nonprofit sector and am intrigued by your company's profile. I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you to learn more about how you entered the field, as well as gain some insight into the profession. Additionally, I am considering a leadership program this spring and would be grateful for any advice that you could provide. If you are available, I am able to connect by phone, by email, or in person, whichever is more convenient for you. My email is [email] and my phone number is [phone number]. I hope to hear from you soon. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely, *Annie Studentino*

2. PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

Remember, you are 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 the industry online so that you're up-to-date on issues, trends, etc. Be gracious and thoughtful, and prepare a written list of questions in advance.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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 work day 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?
- 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 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?
- 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?
- 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. Remember, you indicated that you were looking for advice and information when you contacted them. 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.
- After the interview, say thank you and ask to stay in touch.

3. FOLLOW UP

- Jot down some notes for your contact, date, and useful information or advice, etc.
- Write a thank you note after each informational interview and email it within 24 hours.
- Express your appreciation for the assistance you received and mention one or two particular points.
- Follow up with each referral and/or new contact you receive from the people you interview with.
- When you request an informational interview with those new contacts, make sure to note who referred you (both in the subject line of the email and in the body).
- Once you have the informational interview, make sure to follow up with your original contact to let them know how it went.

Dear Ms. Professional,

Thank you for your time to correspond with me this week. Your insight and answers to my questions were extremely helpful. Your advice regarding my application to the leadership program and decisions about summer internships has proven to be invaluable.

Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,
Annie Studentino