

The Informational Interview

The informational interview, as a job search tool, is an excellent way to answer questions you have about your job search and/or career choice. An informational interview is a chance to sit down with a professional in a position, company, or industry that interests you, and talk with them about your goals and what you should do to get into that position, company, or industry.

Remember to stick to your time limit and always thank the employer both in person and by sending a follow-up letter. You will also want to dress professionally, arrive on time, take notes, and make a good impression. You never know where an informational interview may lead you!

As you are discussing your career goals rather than interviewing for a specific job, you should **NOT** bring your resume to the appointment.

To conduct an informational interview:

A job seeker makes arrangements to meet with an employer and comes prepared to ask questions concerning his/her career choice and job search. Information about a certain company, career, industry, and trends in employment is obtained. The following information outlines how to use the informational interview as a way to begin your job search.

- WHO
 - A job seeker might begin contacting friends and family members who are affiliated with or know someone affiliated with, those industries and/or companies that interest you. Ask them to provide you with names and phone numbers of their contacts.
 - Also, a job seeker can inquire directly at companies of interest by making cold calls. After choosing targeted companies, ask the receptionist/switchboard operator for the name of a contact person who does the hiring in your area of interest. Attempt to set up an informational interview with this contact person.
- WHEN
 - The best time to conduct an informational interview is during the early stages of the job search because it may set the stage for the rest of your job search process. If you employ “winning” informational interviewing techniques, your experiences will allow you to hone the interview skills necessary for the job search process.
- WHAT
 - When you contact the employer, there are four key steps to setting up an informational interview:
 - Introduce yourself.
 - Explain your purpose for seeking an appointment is to obtain information.
 - Arrange a mutually convenient meeting time.
 - Let the “interviewee” know that you will take only 20-30 minutes of their time, and make a mental note to stick to that limit!
- WHERE
 - Ideally, try to meet in the work environment. If you are interviewing someone you have never met, you will likely meet with him/her at a location convenient for them.
- WHY
 - Job seekers benefit by speaking with hiring executives because they learn more about employment trends and expectations. Employed individuals considering a move might use an informational interview to compare their current position to others. Unemployed job seekers simply expand their contacts. Everyone who conducts an informational interview has the opportunity to make valuable networking contacts.

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POINTS TO CONSIDER

This is not a job interview. Don't worry about bringing your résumé to an informational interview. If you go into an informational interview seeking a job offer, the person you are interviewing may be on their guard, and you won't get the information you are looking for. If you approach the conversation as an opportunity to get more information about an industry or career path, your "interviewee" will likely be much more relaxed and willing to help you.

Information to Obtain from an Informational Interview

1. Training and/or education needed for the career you are pursuing.
2. Clarification and evaluation of your expectations of that company, industry, and/or position.
3. Referrals to other employment opportunities or networking contacts.

Questions to Ask

Below is just a small sampling of questions you will want to consider for an informational interview. You may also want to ask other questions more specific to you and your job search. Bear in mind the goal of an informational interview is to gain knowledge about potential careers and job options.

1. What is the normal career path for someone interested in starting off in a (name the position you are pursuing) _____ position with this company?
2. What type of education or training is required to be considered for a _____ position (again, insert the position you are pursuing.)
3. Do you feel my education and experience is appropriate for the career I am pursuing? If not, what am I lacking, or what other experience or training should I have?
4. What would you estimate is an accurate starting salary for someone with my background and education?
5. What would an average day be like for someone in a _____ position (name the position you are pursuing) with this company?
6. Could you tell me something about this company/industry?
 - a. History
 - b. Industry trends
 - c. Details on product or service lines
 - d. Financial status, etc.
7. What is the hiring process for someone seeking employment with your organization?
8. What types of qualities are important in order to be successful in this position?
9. Is there anyone else you might recommend I speak with regarding my job search or career choice?
10. Would you be willing to give me the names of three other contacts who work in this field? (This information is often volunteered by the interviewee since they realize you are there to NETWORK).

Follow-up after an Informational Interview

Be sure to send a thank-you letter within 48 hours after the interview. This gesture will be perceived as considerate and professional. It gives a positive impression of you.