Tips for Informational Interviews

Do background research on the field, functional area, industry, and/or company

Speak to a wide variety of people to gain different perspectives

Use a mutual contact if possible to help set up an informational meeting

Know the purpose of the meeting and stick to it

Do not be overly assertive; the interviewee is donating time to you

Be interested in interviewees; people open up when asked to talk about their experiences

Be open about your career plans and job search activities

Be willing to talk to someone else when the original meeting is not possible

Use the telephone when a face-to-face meeting is not possible

Always ask for additional sources of information and contacts

Always thank the interviewee, both during the meeting and in a follow-up note

Keep in touch with your network contacts

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5 Steps To Set Up an Informational Interview

1. Identify the career fields, industries, and organizations that you want to investigate further. Try to target areas that seem to match most closely your skills, interests, values, and personality style.

2. Ask people you know (relatives, acquaintances, friends, colleagues, past employers) if they can introduce you to someone who works there.

3. Use the *Encyclopedia of Associations* to identify professional groups in your target areas. If there is a local chapter, plan to attend of its monthly meetings to make new contacts. Also, ask if there is a membership directory. You can use this list to target people who are appropriate contacts for informational interviews.

4. Once you have identified the people who you want to meet, you can contact them better by letter or telephone to schedule a convenient time to talk. During your initial contact, briefly tell them who you are, explain why you are contacting them, and ask for a short meeting. If they decline, ask if there is anyone else they can recommend who you can call or write. If the answer is still "no," ask if they have any other ideas about how you might go about meeting people in their field.

5. Before the interview, plan a trip to the library. Read trade journals, annual reports, and other printed materials to glean as much information as possible in advance. Then you will be able to present yourself as a knowledgeable interviewee.

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26 Informational Interview Questions

The following questions are the type that you will want to ask at an informational interview. You may want to write out a list to take with you, then take notes at the interview to help you remember the answers you were given.

1. How did you decide to work in this field? For this company?
2. What is an atypical workday like? A typical week? Year?
3. Do you work under a lot of pressure? Is that expected?
4. How many hours per week do you usually work? Is it common to take work home?
5. Do you travel a lot?
6. Will you be expected to relocate?
7. Are there other responsibilities (such as civic or social obligations) that come with the territory?
8. What is the best training or education to acquire?
9. What is your background?
10. What skills do you typically use? Is there an opportunity to develop more skills or take on additional responsibilities?
11. Do you have an area of specialization? What?
12. How did you decide in which area to specialize? What are the other areas?
13. What are the most difficult problems/decisions/challenges you must face?
14. Is the field growing? What are the various types of employers?
15. How secure is employment?
16. Do your skills and experiences translate well into self-employment opportunities?
17. Do you find that certain personality traits make it easier to do this work well? Which traits?
18. What is it like to work here?
19. What is the hiring process? Is that process standard procedure within the industry?
20. What is the best way to find a job?
21. If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?
22. What is a typical starting salary?
23. Are there professional trade journals I should read? Which ones?
24. Do you belong to any professional associations? Can nonmembers attend meetings?
25. Would you mind reviewing my resume and making comments or suggestions?
26. Can you recommend other people I might talk to?

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