



# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is designed to produce information you need to choose or refine a career path, or to learn how to break in and find out if you have what it takes to succeed. According to Richard Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute*, it is a way to try on jobs to see if they fit you. It is not the same as a job interview, but it is a very effective means of networking, and one that could eventually lead to a job offer. However, it should never be used for the purpose of obtaining employment.

## WHY CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

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Choosing a career is an important decision. It makes sense, therefore, to talk to people in the field you are considering to get a realistic view of what you can expect. Informational interviewing gives you a perspective of work that goes beyond the limitations of job titles, allowing you to see what skills are required and how you might fit into the work setting. Thus, you have greater flexibility in planning for the future.

## BENEFITS

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Informational interviewing is comparatively low-stress compared to job interviews, so you gain confidence in talking with people while learning what you need to know. You have the opportunity to make personal contacts among management-level personnel and possibly gain insight into job opportunities before they are advertised. Expanding your network of professional contacts now will also be of great benefit to you later. Remember, it is who you know (or get to know) that gets you a job. It's never too early to establish contacts.

## STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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1. Identify the occupation or industry you wish to learn about. Assess your own interests, ability, values and skills, and identify the best fields to research.
2. Prepare for the interview. Read all you can about the field. Decide what you would like to learn about the occupation/industry. Prepare questions.
3. Identify people to interview. Start with a list of people you already know – friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. Then move to professional and business organizations, and organizational directories. Public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title or department.
4. Set up the interview. Contact the person by telephone or email to set up an interview. If the appointment was scheduled weeks in advance, you may wish to confirm the interview times, dates and locations on the day before the scheduled interview. Leave your phone number so your interview subjects can reach you if rescheduling becomes necessary. Request an in-person interview preferably, so you can see the work setting and work environment. A phone interview also works, but is less effective.
5. Conduct the interview. Dress as if you are going to an interview (business casual), arrive on time, be polite and professional. Remember, people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. But don't waste their time or your time. Be prepared with at least 4-5 specific questions you would like to know. Read about the career area and organization of the person you'll be interviewing. Generally, don't ask something routine that is readily available online.
6. Remember, should you bring a list of questions with you, ask them if it is OK to take notes. Share your enthusiasm for their story. The more you share your enthusiasm the more they will enjoy telling their story.

## WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW?

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- Background: Tell me how you got started in this field. What was your education?
- Rewards: What do you find most rewarding about this work? What do you enjoy most about this job?
- Work environment: What are the daily duties? Working conditions?
- Problems: What are the toughest problems you deal with?
- Life style: What obligation does your work put on you outside the work week?
- Salary: What salary level would a new person start with? Fringe benefits? Other forms of compensation? (Never ask their salary specifically)
- Potential: Is there a career ladder or opportunity for advancement? How does it work?
- The industry: What trends do you see for this industry in the next 3 to 5 years?
- Advice: How well-suited is my background for this field? When the time comes, how would I go about finding a job in this field? What experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend?
- Demand: What types of employers hire people in this line of work? How do people find out about these jobs?
- Hiring decision: What are the most important factors used to hire people in this field? (education, past experience, personality, special skills)
- Referral: Can you recommend 1-2 other people I should talk to? May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?
- Do you have any other advice for me?

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank you note to your contact within a couple of days after the interview.

## SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT TO SET UP INTERVIEW

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- *Hello. My name is Mariah Doga and I am a college student at SRJC. I'm exploring the field of \_\_\_ as a possible career. I was referred to you by \_\_\_\_\_. I am interested in 15-20 minutes of your time to interview you regarding your career so I can learn more about the field. Do you have time we could set up for a phone or in-person appointment?*

**The person may be reluctant or say, "We have no openings at this time." If so, explain you are not looking for a job. Stress you are in the process of career exploration and want to research this particular field by saying:**

- *I'm investigating various career areas so I can get a realistic view of the local job market or career potential in this field.*

**If an appointment is set, thank them and re-establish the date and time of your meeting:**

- *Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_. I look forward to seeing you Friday at 2 o'clock. May I have the address to your office?*