

Informational Interviews

Asking the following questions in an informational interview are a great way to discover much of what you need to know in order to make an informed decision about a job/career. YOU are the interviewer. Because most informational interviews last 30 minutes, you won't have time to ask all of the questions. Choose the ones most important to you.

First it is helpful to build a rapport with your contact person and find out more about his/her background. You may find that some of his/her positions previously held are just as interesting as the person's current position. The interviewee may have additional contacts from previous jobs. Learn about your contact person by asking some of the following questions:

- What has been your career path?
- How did you decide to enter this field?
- How would you describe a typical day on your job?
- What kinds of experiences prepared you for this job?
- What skills do you use in your job?
- What challenges do you face daily and long term?
- What are the frustrations that you experience?
- What are the rewards that you get from your job? What gives you the most satisfaction?
- What does it take to be successful in your job?
- What is your major contribution to your profession?
- Are there opportunities to continue to learn on your job?
- What expertise have you developed?
- Looking back, would you have done anything differently in your career?
- What effect does your career have on your lifestyle and your family?
- Would you enter this field again if you could start over?

You can research the field of work you are investigating by asking some of the following questions:

- What kinds of skills and what type of commitments are necessary to be successful in this field?
- What experiences would be helpful for someone entering this field?
- What type of preparation, credentialing, and training must one have to enter this field?
- Is there growth in the field?
- What is the job potential?
- What are the current needs in the field?
- What can I do, if I enter the field, to make myself more marketable and competitive?
- What are the future directions in the field? What changes are expected?
- Will there be new opportunities for employment as a result of future changes?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in this field?
- What are the typical entry-level salary and benefits?
- What are the opportunities for professional growth?
- How mobile are people in this career? Are there opportunities in a variety of geographic locations?
- What technologies are important in this career?
- What recommendations would you have for an entry-level person considering this field?

It is recommended to do some research on the organization that you will be visiting. If you can easily find out the information on the internet, then don't ask the interviewee. Ask questions that build your knowledge about the organization. Some interviewees may be reluctant to give candid answers to some of these questions. If you sense reluctance to answer a question, don't push, move on to another question.

- How does your position fit into the organization's structure?
- Who are the organization's leaders? How long have they been with the organization? How are the leaders perceived?
- Where does the organizations' funding come from? Is there stability in this funding?
- What is the management philosophy of the organization? Do decisions come from the top down or are decisions made by work groups?
- Are there frequent staff meetings? How do people feel about attending?
- What are the opportunities for growth/ Is there a professional development program? Are people encouraged and promoted from within?
- What is the style of supervision in the organization? What kind of hours do people work? Are the hours standard for everyone or flexible? Is overtime encouraged? Are vacations Encouraged?

Additional question that may help you find out about opportunities:

- Where is the best place for me to find out about openings with the organization? (The web site? The newspaper?...)
- What would be the best way for me to market myself for a position in this field?
- Would you be willing to take a look at my resume? Are there any additional experiences you feel I should gain to help me become a more marketable candidate?
- **Do you know of other individuals in the field whom I could contact?**
- Can I keep in touch with you in case I have additional questions?
- Who would be the best person for me to send my resume if any openings become available?

If you conduct the informational interview on site, make mental observations about the atmosphere of the organization. Do people seem happy to be there? Is the environment friendly? Stuffy? Open? Competitive? Cooperative? What is the workspace like? Cubicles? Offices with windows? Up-to-date technology? What is the dress code? Are employees dressed formally? Note the dress code for future interviews.

Suggestions for follow-up:

- Always send thank you note to your contact person! Send a typed thank-you letter. An email may be acceptable, however, when in doubt, send a letter.
- Call later on or send an e-mail to say how you are professing.
- Keep the door open to future contacts with the person you interviewed.
- Evaluate your style of interviewing. What could you have done better? Make changes for your next interview.
- Keep your notes organized, including all dates of contacts, names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses.