



Education That Works For a Lifetime

Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are a widely-accepted method of obtaining information about careers, job search methods and potential employers. Personal acquaintances, professional contacts, teachers, and family members are potential sources of advice as well as potential resources for informational interviewing. There is an etiquette involved in requesting an informational interview:

- Make contact by telephone or email. Explain your purpose. Ask for fifteen minutes at the convenience of the person you are contacting during which you might visit and ask questions.
- Stress that you are seeking advice not a job.
- Be on time, dress appropriately, and be courteous. Thank the advisor for his/her help and follow up with a thank-you note.

What kinds of questions should you consider asking? The best questions are open-ended, requiring elaboration rather than a simple “yes” or “no”. Here are some ideas....

1. What qualifications or education are required (or useful) for entry into this kind of work?
2. Are there academic programs or colleges/universities that you might recommend?
3. What kinds of experiences are essential?
4. Describe how you spend your time during a typical workday.
5. What skills or talents are most essential for success in this field?
6. When you were in college, what did you think your career would be? What did you major in?
7. What are the toughest problems you have to deal with?
8. What do you find most rewarding?
9. How rapidly is the field growing? How does the future look?
10. What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary work week? Do you enjoy these obligations?
11. How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
12. How well suited would my background be if I majored in “x” for work in this type of field?
13. What kinds of experiences—paid employment or otherwise—would you most strongly recommend?

14. What other career options do you see as being available for someone who majored in “x” outside of the profession you selected?
15. If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
16. What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located? What types of industries are they in?
17. Are people in this field very mobile? Do they change jobs or locations frequently?
18. How would you describe the average earnings in this profession? What do newcomers typically make? Are salaries the only source of compensation, or are there others (bonuses, commissions, stock options, etc.)?
19. How are employment decisions typically made? What factors are most important?
20. How does one find out about jobs in this field? Are they advertised in newspapers (which ones?), publicized by word of mouth, or filled by employment agencies?
21. Is turnover high? How does one move from position to position?
22. What kind of person does well in this type of field? Why?
23. Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to? May I have your permission to mention your name when I contact them?

One last thought: Informational interviewing should be fun. Too often, we treat career decision-making as tedious. Here is an experience that offers no threat and much to be gained. Enjoy yourself and learn!!!

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