

Informational Interviewing

(804) 289-8547 | careerservices.richmond.edu

Office Hours: M-F, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. | Walk-in Hours: M-F, 2 to 4 p.m.



Alumni & Career Services

An informational interview is a meeting requested by you to ask for advice and/or information about a field, company, or position type. Keep in mind that the interviewee's purpose is to provide information about their career field and organization, NOT to provide an interview or a job offer.

HOW CAN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW HELP ME?

- Gives you an opportunity to gather first-hand information about career fields you are considering pursuing in the future
- Expands your network of professional contacts in industries you're considering for employment
- Provides direct advice about a profession or industry and subtle signals about work environments that you will never read on a company website
- Get valuable advice about entering and advancing in a field, as well as ideas for locating contacts or job leads within the profession

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW STEPS

1. **Identify someone to interview:** Use family and friends, professors and advisors, professional organizations, alumni, and the numerous job and internship databases available through Career Services. Get the correct spelling and pronunciation of contact's name and be sure of contact's job title and salutation (Dr., Mr., Ms., etc). **If you are currently interning, volunteering or working you may want to ask your supervisor for permission to conduct an informational interview or ask him/her for potential interviewees for your informational interviews. After you have started forging your own personal relationships within the organization, you will also acquire a sense of the individuals you would like to interview.
2. **Contact:** Call for appointment or write a letter or e-mail to request an appointment; make sure to offer a personal introduction. Be sure to state the reason you are contacting them, how much time you are asking of them (20-30 minutes), why you would like to speak with them in particular (your interest in his or her career field), and explain how you were able to find the contact's name. You can also request a telephone interview (if the person does not live nearby) or a job shadowing opportunity that lasts a few hours or a full day.
3. **Scheduling:** Be prepared to adjust your schedule. Suggest lunch or a coffee break. Ask when is it convenient for your contact to meet with you.
4. **Confirm:** Be sure you have agreed on the date and place of your meeting. A brief note of confirmation can serve as a helpful reminder to you both.
5. **Research:** Research and read about the career field **before** the informational interview. Informational interviews should not be a starting point for your career research – they should supplement what you have already learned. Also, research your contact's place of work/company/organization.
6. **Preparation:** Prepare a list of 8-10 relevant questions. Prepare your resume and take a copy with you in case you are asked for it - but be aware that it may be inappropriate to offer it during your meeting.
NOTE: Let the interviewee determine the formality of the conversation, but be prepared to lead the conversation since you are the "interviewer."
7. **Appearance & Arrival:** Plan what you will wear (dress as if you were working there or even interviewing) and how long it will take you to get there. Arrive 10-15 minutes early. This may give you a little extra interview time.
8. **Thank You:** Ask for a business card and ask about other contacts before you leave and send a short note thanking the person for his/her time. Remember, these contacts can continue to serve as resources throughout your career.

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Sample Informational Interviewing Questions

THE BASICS

1. Can you describe your job and your responsibilities?
2. How did you enter the job? This industry?
3. What does it take to be successful in this field?

WORK ENVIRONMENT

1. How would you describe your work environment?
2. How would you describe a typical day/week/month/cycle – regular duties, projects, etc.?
3. How much flexibility are you allowed in your job (hours, vacations, dress, etc.)?
4. Does the organization have a mission? If so, how does it fulfill that mission?
5. How much autonomy do you have on the job?
6. How are you made aware of supervisory expectations?
7. How much outside or overtime work is required? Nights, weekends?
8. What portion of your job involves interacting with others, including co-workers & clients?
9. What do you like most about your job? What would you change if you could?

JOB REQUIREMENTS AND EXPERIENCE

1. What college courses have been most helpful to you in your position?
2. Is there special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job?
3. What personal qualities do you see as important for success in this job?
4. What is the most rewarding part of your job? Least rewarding?
5. Is much travel involved in your job? If so, how much and what type?
6. Are there other industries, sectors, or roles to which you think my skills and abilities would transfer readily?
7. Describe a typical day/week that you experience in the role of an _____.
8. How do most people enter this field?
9. What type of position in this field might I reasonably target given my background?

ADVICE/LEADS

1. If you were in charge of hiring someone to assist you, what criteria would you use to make your selection?
2. Are there any professional organizations in the field that you would recommend I join?
3. Can you refer me to any other people in the field who might be willing to talk with me about their experiences?
4. Do you know of any internship or summer employment opportunities that would benefit me?
5. Have you heard of any events or developments that suggest a particular company might have a need for someone like me?
6. Are there any particular companies or employers you feel would be good targets for my efforts?
7. Can you think of anyone else I might talk to who has _____ experience or who has done a lot of _____ work?
8. Of the people you know who have moved from staff jobs to management, who do you think might be most receptive to a request for a networking meeting?
9. On what basis are professionals in your field evaluated? How is success measured?
10. What was the best advice you received when you started in this field?

OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

1. What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
2. What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?
3. How is this field likely to be affected by changes in technology/the economy?