



# Career Services and Industry Partnerships: Informational Interviewing

## What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is a conversation with someone who is knowledgeable about a job or career that you want to learn more about. You conduct the interview by asking this person questions for which you are seeking answers.

## Why use informational interviews?

As you gather information through this method, your views and beliefs about your career decisions will solidify. The more experience you have talking with people in careers that interest you, the better prepared you'll be to make an informed career decision.

- Collect information about a career, occupation, or organization that interests you
- Learn about job opportunities and career paths in a given field
- Develop a network of contacts with key people
- Enhance your confidence by speaking to a variety of professionals
- Visit people in various work settings to gain insight into different environments
- Find hidden job markets

## Where do I find contacts?

A good informational interview starts with research. After you decide what areas you are interested in, you need to figure out who has the information you need. Start with a list of people you know: *professors, former teachers, friends, neighbors, alumni, coworkers, supervisors, former/current employers, and even family members!* Tell them what you are interested in. Consider them as potential interviewees and ask for appropriate referrals.

Online job boards, such as Indeed, Monster, and SimplyHired, as well as professional networking sites like LinkedIn, offer a variety of possible leads. Review these websites for organizations and names of people working in areas that interest you. Consider also checking out the Yellow Pages. Use the index to search for headings of obvious interest and browse other sections to find connections to your interests.

- Personal network (i.e. family, friends, alumni, current/former professors, teachers and employers)
- Online job boards (i.e. Indeed, Monster, CareerBuilder, SimplyHired, ect.) and Yellow Pages
- Professional networking sites (LinkedIn, Focus, industry associations, ect.)
- Company websites (search the 'About Us' or 'Who We Are' sections)

## How do I make the contact?

Why should people, especially strangers, be willing to give you their valuable time and information? Most people like to help others and will be flattered that you asked for their advice. Be appreciative and thank them. As you set up your informational interview, be sure to say something such as, "Thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me."



**Phone Script:** Calling people is the easiest way to connect with contacts. You may be a bit nervous, but remember you have nothing to lose. Write out your ideas and rehearse what you want to say. Sound upbeat and positive. Stress that you are not applying for a job, but rather seeking career information.

Briefly introduce yourself, explain how you received their name, and ask if it's a good time to talk:  
*Hello, may I speak to [insert name of person you're contacting]? Hello, my name is [insert your name] and I am currently a student at Benjamin Franklin Institute Technology, studying to earn my [insert type of degree] in [insert major/program of study]. I received your contact information from [insert explanation of how you came to receive their contact information]. I'm reaching out to people in the field to gather some information, do you have a few minutes to talk?*

If *no*, ask what might be a good time to call back. If *yes*, explain that you'd like to set up a 30-minute informational interview:

*I am doing research to become more informed about opportunities in this field, and I wondered if you would be willing to meet with me for a 30-minute informational interview so I can ask you a few questions about your field and seek advice as someone who will be looking for entry-level positions when I graduate [insert graduation date]. Would you have availability to meet in person or talk over the phone?*

If *no*, thank them for their time. If *yes*, set a date, place and time. Ask for directions and make sure you have their correct contact information and give them your name and telephone number in case the person needs to reschedule.

**Email Script:** Emailing people is another way to connect with contacts. Provide enough information so they understand who you are, how you got their contact information, and why you're reaching out to them. Stress that you are not applying for a job, but rather seeking career information.

*Dear Mr./Ms. [Insert Last Name]*

*I am currently a student at Benjamin Franklin Institute Technology, studying to earn my [insert type of degree] in [insert major/program of study]. As part of a school project, I'm looking to interview professionals in the field in order to gather some information about my field of study. I have been introduced to you by way of [explain who suggested you reach out to them OR where you learned of them], and want to know if you be able to answer a few of my questions for 20-30 minutes. I could meet you in person or talk with you over the phone or email, which ever method would be most convenient for you. Alternatively, if you have someone else you'd recommend I should contact, I would appreciate any direction you can provide me in my search to get more informed.*

*Thank you very much.*

*Sincerely,  
[Insert Your Name]*

## **What do I do in the interview?**

Before the interview, decide what it is you want to gain. Prepare a list of questions and bring a pen and notepad to jot down responses. Always prepare more than you need, and make sure to first ask the



questions you are most eager to get answered (the amount of questions you will have time to ask will vary, so prepare at least 10 questions).

Dress for success—like you might for an interview, or perhaps slightly more casual. As a rule of thumb, it is better to be overdressed than underdressed, but make sure your outfit is appropriate for the environment (e.g. if you're going to an auto body shop, you probably wouldn't wear a business suit, but you should look polished and put together.) NOTE: Never wear jeans, sweatpants, a t-shirt, or a hat.

Arrive promptly, give a firm handshake and introduce yourself with confidence. If someone referred you to this interviewee, mention the person's name; it's usually a good icebreaker. See the next page for sample questions to ask. Listen carefully and maintain eye contact when you're not jotting down notes. Towards the end of the interview, if there is time, you may want to ask if they will take a look at your resume and give some constructive feedback. Be sure to close on a positive note. Thank them for their time and information.

- Prepare questions ahead of time
- Dress to impress and arrive early
- Bring your list of questions, a notepad, pen, and (just in case) copies of your resume
- Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and a confidence voice
- Ask your questions and make sure to end the interview on time (be respectful of their time)
- Thank them and be sure to ask for their business card and if it would be ok to stay in contact

## **Suggested Questions:**

- What do you do as a \_\_\_\_\_?
- How do you spend the day/week?
- What problems do you deal with or decisions do you make?
- What do you find most/least satisfying your job?
- Tell me about this career field.
- What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
- How did you enter the field, what has been your career path?
- What are typical entry level jobs? Is there a definite career path in this field?
- What are the "hot issues" in this field today?
- What is it like to work in this organization?
- How does your job fit into the organization/department?
- What are the toughest challenges you face in this organization?
- What is the corporate climate? How do you balance company demands with everyday life?
- Can you give me advice on how to break into this field?
- What skills, education and experience is required?
- Can you suggest anyone else I can contact for additional information?
- What are the professional journals/associations in this field? Do you participate?
- If I wanted to apply for a job, whom should I contact in this organization?

## **What's the best way to follow up?**



Within a week of interview, send a short, typed or handwritten (only if you have nice penmanship) thank you letter to the person you interviewed. If the career still interests you, say it in your letter. Your thank you letter leaves a positive reminder of you.