



Information Interviewing

A Few Good Words

Information interviews are person-to-person conversations that help you gain information, insight and advice from people who are working in a career or company you are interested in.

Information interviewing is an invaluable career management tool. It can help you grow and develop in your current work role or explore your options. Not only does information interviewing often give you the most reliable insight and data you can get, it also gives you the opportunity to connect with others.

Foothill College Career Center
12345 El Monte Road
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022
(650) 949 – 7229
www.foothill.edu/career

Preparing for the Information Interview

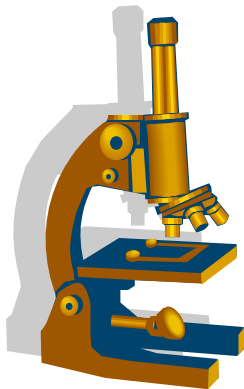
Understand yourself. Understanding your values, skills, interests and preferences is a good foundation to have prior to doing information interviews because it helps give you focus and direction.

HINT #1

Explore Careers

- 1) Explore and research a variety of occupations.
- 2) Read books and watch videos.
- 3) Conduct an informational interview.
- 4) Register in a Career/Life Planning Class.
- 5) Use the resources in the Foothill College Career Center.

Understand the environment. You're doing information interviews because you want information about the work environment. However, doing some research first about the role, function, organization or industry you're investigating will help you ask focused, intelligent question.



HINT #2

How to Research the Environment

- 1) Check out relevant web sites (e.g. organizations, industries, professional associations) or the following work-related web site:
 - www.hardatwork.com
 - <http://content.monster.com>
- 2) Read trade mags, newspapers or journals (like Fortune, Fast Company, Red Herring, Wired)
- 3) Talk to contacts who know the organization, department or group you're targeting.

Brainstorm your contact list. Most people have more connections than they realize. Start with your friends, family, neighbors, instructors and counselors to see where that takes you. Then think about all the people they know and your list will begin to take shape. Remember, help and resources can often come from unlikely sources. Leave no stone unturned.



Prepare your questions. Of course, your question will vary depending on what you want to know. After you know the questions you need answered, prioritize them. Most Information interviews last 20 to 30 minutes, so you'll want to ask your most critical questions first.

HINT #3

Sample Questions

- 1) What skills/training are required for this kind of work?
- 2) What was your career path to get to where you are? What would you do differently if you were starting again?
- 3) How would you describe this organization's work environment and its management practices?
- 4) How might someone with my skills transition into this area of work?

Getting the Information Interview

You're in charge. An information interview is not a job interview. First, you're seeking information about your dream job or occupation. Second, you get to control the pace and tone of the meeting because you've initiated it. And keep in mind, you may have just as much to give as you have to gain in this meeting. Today's world of work is based on connections and building effective relationships with others. At some point the person with whom you're meeting may seek out your opinions and advice.

Prepare your introduction. To increase the chances of getting the information interview, you want to have focus and charity when requesting the meeting. Prepare a 30-second introduction including your name, how to get their name, your current focus, why you'd like to meet with them and the meeting request. It is best to identify yourself as a Foothill College student, and that you are preparing for your career.



Make the call. Even the most outgoing people can feel some trepidation about calling others for help and advice, particularly if they don't know the person they're calling. Here are some tips to help you start dialing:

- Stand up and smile when you make the call. Studies show this can project confidence and enthusiasm even if you're a little nervous.
- Practice your introduction, but don't over-rehearse.
- Call people with whom you're most comfortable first.

When you request your meeting, try to arrange it at the person's work site. Even if you're interviewing someone from your current organization, you'll get lots of great information by seeing the work environment first hand.

If you would like a critique of your resume, ask if they will do this for you and if they would like to receive the resume before your meeting. Make sure to get the address and the fax number.

In the unlikely event that someone would deny your request for information, take heart – it's probably due to circumstances beyond your control (like the person's time, availability, etc.). Pick up the phone and try the next person on your list.

Conducting the Information Interview

Set the stage. As you begin, thank the person for meeting with you and reiterate the time limits (no more than 30 minutes is standard). It's your responsibility to manage the time, even if your interviewee appears to be enjoying the meeting. When your agreed time is up, bring the meeting to a close. If you have lots of questions left unanswered, ask if you could handle them via a brief phone call or e-mail.

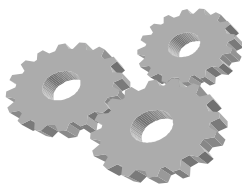
Focus the conversation. A variation on your 30-second introduction is a good way to open the conversation. Ask your most critical questions first and take notes.

If you happen to get an information interview with someone who is a hiring manager, it's a good idea to reiterate your intentions for the interview. Say something like: *"Thank you for meeting with me. I want to emphasize that I'm a student researching my career. I'm not here for a job. At this point, I'm just looking for information about (the role, company, industry, etc.). If you know of any openings here or at other organizations I'd of course appreciate hearing about them, but that is not my purpose."* Making this distinction takes the pressure off both of you.

Ask for other referrals. Ask for additional contacts during the last five minutes of your interview. You'll find you get good results if you ask for specific kinds of contacts. For example: *"Do you have any associates you'd recommend I talk with about my field/major?"*

Ask for feedback. An information interview is a great chance to assess how you're coming across. Save the last minute or two of your interview for feedback. Ask questions such as:

"What questions did I fail to ask that are key to getting the information I need? What problem areas do you see that may cause me particular difficulty? What do you see as my best assets for success in this field? What suggestions do you have for me (on any aspect of the information interview process)?"



Offer something in return. Your contact has just given you a gift of time, information and resources. You can do the same. Most people who agree to do information interviews recognize it is good for them too. It allows them to build their connections – one of the most valuable strategies in career management. Think how you can contribute to them. Save time to ask your contact where they see their career headed. Keep this in mind and over time, provide resources and information to them that may help them meet their goals.

After the Information Interview

Follow-up with thanks. After your meeting, write a note of thanks. This one-page letter should: thank the person for their time and contacts they offered you; express your enthusiasm for their time and assistance.

Build your connections. If you feel like you've made a good connection, stay in touch over time. Send copies of articles you find interesting or let them know about websites you find valuable. Offer to return the favor for them or a friend. Building connections is key to work-life success because it enriches the growth and learning process. Again, you never know when a job or internship may come along. If you presented yourself as a clean, articulate, interesting student – you may get the job!



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

NAME OF CONTACT:

POSITION:

COMPANY/ORGANIZATION:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:

REFERRAL:

DATE OF FIRST CONTACT:

PURPOSE OF INTERVIEW:

RESULTS:

- 1) How did you decide to work in this field? For this company?
- 2) What is a typical workday like? A typical week? Year?
- 3) How many hours per week do you usually work? It is common to take work home?
- 4) Do you travel a lot?
- 5) What is the best training or education to acquire?
- 6) What is your background and education?
- 7) Do you have an area of specialization? If so, what?
- 8) How did you decide in which area to specialize? What are other areas?
- 9) What are the most difficult problems/decisions/challenges you face?

- 10) Is the field growing? What are the various types of employers?
- 11) How secure is employment?
- 12) Do you find certain personality traits make it easier to do this work well? Which traits?
- 13) What is it like to work here?
- 14) What is the hiring process? Is that process standard procedure within the industry?
- 15) What is the best way to find a job in this field?
- 16) If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- 17) What is a typical starting salary?
- 18) Are there professional trade journals I should read? Which ones?
- 19) Do you belong to any professional associations? Can nonmembers attend meetings?
- 20) Would you mind reviewing my resume and making comments or suggestions?
- 21) Can you recommend other people I might talk to?

Example Informational Interview Questions

- What is your job like?
 - A typical day?
 - What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
 - What kinds of problems do you deal with?
 - What kinds of decisions do you make?
 - What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
 - How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- What things did you do before you entered this occupation?
 - Which have been most helpful?
 - What other jobs can you get with the same background?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- What do you like most about this company?
- Do you find your job exciting? Why?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
 - What is the best way to enter this occupation?
 - What are the advancement opportunities?
 - What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What were the keys to your career advancement? How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?

- How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
 - Are there organizations you have joined that are helpful to your occupation?
 - Are there other things you are expected to do outside work hours?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?

- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?