

CAREERSMARTZ - A brief introduction to Informational Interviews

by James C. Gonyea

One of the greatest skills you can learn!

Learning how to seek out people for the purpose of gaining information is – according to very successful people – one key skill that helped them become successful.

What is an informational interview?

As the name implies, it's an interview that you conduct with someone working in an occupation that you are considering as a career goal. Your objective is to gain insights into the true nature of the occupation. Such interviews are preferably conducted face-to-face, but may also be done via a phone call, online video chat, or even email. The best candidates for interviews are people who have been working in your occupation for at least a few years and who are happy with their career choice.

Don't feel that you're intruding on someone's valuable time.

Many people like to talk about their career, and you will find them if you are persistent. If you encounter someone who does not want to be interviewed, thank them, ask for a referral, and move on to another choice.

What questions should you ask?

Ask the interviewee to speak about the following topics regarding the occupation that you are considering as a career goal:

- Duties
- Entrance qualifications
- Required knowledge and skills

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PDF 8: Informational Interviews

- Work environment
- Future employment outlook
- Salary
- Advancement opportunities
- And other questions or concerns you may have

Ask them to share what they know from their personal experience working in the occupation. Your goal is to verify the accuracy of your understanding of the occupation and to gather additional information your interviewee may wish to share.

Take notes or record the conversation

Take good notes for future reference. If possible, record the interview using your smart phone. However, by law, you must first ask the interviewee if he or she will allow you to record the interview.

How can you find someone to interview?

Use any of the following strategies to obtain referrals. Get the person's name and contact information (phone number and/or email address) for each referral.

- Ask your family, relatives, neighbors, and friends
- Ask your co-workers
- Ask your teachers and professors
- Ask your Guidance Counselor
- Search Google for professionals in your area
- Search various Social Media sites
- Ask a LinkedIn member to search the LinkedIn database
- Check with your Career Center at your school or college
- Contact your Alumni Association
- Post a note on your Facebook page

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How to arrange an interview.

- Contact each referral.
- Introduce yourself and inform them as to how you found their name.
- Ask if you can interview them to learn more about their occupation to help you decide if it's right for you. Inform them that you have several questions that you would like to ask. Be prepared to share your questions if requested.
- Make sure to stress that you are not looking for a job as if suspected by the interviewee he or she may be unwilling to speak with you.

If they agree to be interviewed...

- Ask if they would prefer to meet face-to-face, by phone, via online video chat, or via email to discuss your questions.
- Schedule a date, time, and ,if appropriate, a location for the interview.
- Conduct the interview and record what you learn about their occupation.
- Thank them for their time, information, and assistance in helping you better understand your career options.
- If appropriate, ask for a referral should you wish to interview a second person about the same occupation.

If they prefer not to be interviewed...

- Thank them for considering your request.
- Ask them if they can refer you to someone in the same occupation who may be willing to be interviewed.