CAREER CENTER
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GET ADVICE: INFORMATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

What is an Information Interview?

An information interview is an opportunity to gather career and industry information from a professional by asking a series of questions related to the aspects of the specific career or job and the professional's experience. An information interview is a learning experience and **NOT** a solicitation for a job or internship. It is a conversation with an objective to learn. The activity typically spans 30 minutes to one hour. The initiation, and corresponding conversation, may take place in-person, over email, or over the telephone. Additionally, you can conduct an information interview with anyone – executives, alumni, supervisors, colleagues, friends, family, or family friends!

Benefits

If you're not sure informational interviews are for you, review the insights and guidance commonly received by those who reach out to conduct them.

- Provides direction in choosing a career field or preparing for a career change with firsthand, up-to-date, insider information,
- Offers insight to guide future job searches,
- Prepares you for an upcoming interview,
- Revises your resume to better fit the specific industry or career field,
- Allows you to assess your compatibility with a particular career,
- Expands your professional network,
- Improves your interviewing skills.

Responsibilities, as the Initiator

By reaching out to a professional contact with the intent to conduct an informational interview, you are responsible for directing the interaction. This responsibility entails the following:

- Demonstrate desire to explore career options, personal skills and attributes,
- Generate your own list of questions addressing specific career-related aspects such as work environment, career preparation, salary, lifestyle, a typical day, problems, referrals, and advancement as well as questions about the contact's personal experiences,
- Provide the host with your polished and professional resume (upon request),
- Maintain professional presence and conduct during the entire interview,
- Coordinate the scheduling of the interview and related details.

THIS PUBLICATION IS AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS UPON REQUEST. PLEASE CONTACT THE ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCE CENTER, D.F. LOWRY BUILDING, ROOM 107, OR CALL 910.521.6695

Let's Begin

Conversations with professionals can take place over email, on the phone, or in-person. Usually, conversations and informational interviews are initiated through an introductory email.

Attempting a "cold call" through email can be challenging, but there are a few techniques that can simplify the process.

- **DON'T SKIP THE SUBJECT LINE.** To ensure an email is not questioned or deleted as spam, make use of the subject line. Use this to address your specific need or intention, such as "Pepperdine Student Requests Informational Interview". An empty or awkward subject line from an unknown email address will be deleted.

- **INTRODUCE YOURSELF.** Take a sentence or two to explain who you are and how you came about getting your contact's email address. This is especially important for referrals or online directories.

- **STATE YOUR REQUEST.** Ambiguous emails leave little room for response. Explain why you are reaching out for help and describe what you hope to gain from the connection. Include one or two specific questions that can be answered in a response.

- **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Write a concise email without attachments. Consider your first email to be an invitation to connect. Once accepted, you can reply with the specifics and offer to send attachments as needed. Do not attach your resume to this introductory email, but have it available if it's requested.

- **CLOSE THE SALE.** Include your contact information and ask for an opportunity to connect again for a more in-depth conversation.

- **SPELLING AND GRAMMAR STILL COUNT.** Many of us have become accustomed to the shorthand used in texting and instant messages. However, emails, particularly in the business setting, still demand a higher level of professionalism. "Plz send info 2moro" is simply not appropriate. Ever. Spell words as they are spelled and use appropriate grammar, punctuation, and tone.

- **OTHER TIPS TO CONSIDER:** To maximize the effectiveness of your introduction, heed the following final tips:
    - Use an appropriate email address. If you wouldn't use it for a job application, don't use it here.
    - Think office memo. Save the smiley faces and jargon for Facebook.
    - Err on the side of formality. Use capitalization and abbreviations only as necessary.
    - Spell check. Spell check. Spell check.
    - Mind your manners. Remember that someone is setting aside time for you; don't forget to say please and thank you.

Thank You Notes

Thank you notes are tools to express gratitude. If you ever think that you do not need to send a thank you note because you thanked them enough in-person, over email, or by buying coffee, think again. The thank you note is a tangible expression of your gratitude and leaves a long lasting impression on your contact. This should never be neglected. Here are a few tips:

- Write a thank you note to your contact within 24 hours of your meeting or interaction.
- Use professional stationery or note cards (avoid kittens, balloons, etc.).
- Write with black or blue ink.
- Write out a draft of what you want to say on scratch paper first.
- The thank you note should be handwritten, neat and legible.
- Be specific in your thank you note about what you got out of the experience or how the experience helped you. Try to point out specific examples instead of using vague, cliché remarks.
- Thank the contact for taking the time to meet with you.
- Send the thank you note to your host.

Sample Thank You Note

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, answer my questions and for providing insight about your career field. Our informational interview was beneficial to me because I now have more in-depth industry information about the opportunities available and the steps I need to take in order to move forward. I also feel more confident about my career goals thanks to your direction. I appreciate all your help and look forward to speaking with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Shannon L. Blackwood

Follow-Up and Give Thanks

Email has provided new opportunities for introductions and networking. Making new connections has become less intrusive than a phone call and more convenient than a letter. But while it is a swift and efficient means of communication for us, we often overlook the basics. Whenever someone offers guidance or support, we must always remember to thank them. Sending a follow-up note of appreciation goes a long way; forgetting can seem ungrateful and disrespectful. Effective networking depends on the ability to create connections with people. Networking through email requires follow-through.

Professional Presentation

When appearing for an interview or meeting, you always want to put your best foot forward. Presenting yourself in a professional manner will help you to show that you mean business. If you are not certain about the specific workplace expectations, ask your contact when you schedule a meeting.

Dress

When you meet in-person to conduct a professional informational interview, present yourself in a way that puts your contact at ease. This means, dress appropriately. If you are meeting at a coffee shop, you may dress casually in comparison to meeting in a corporate conference room. To measure the degree of casualness for your wardrobe, however, take a hint from your context and use sound judgment. For example, appropriate dress for a coffee shop in Lumberton, NC, on a Sunday afternoon is very different than appropriate dress for a coffee shop in downtown Charlotte on Monday morning.

Tips for dressing in a professional environment:

- In general, dress more conservatively than not.
- Men should wear dark pants with a tie (with or without jacket).
- Women should wear dark skirt or slacks with a blouse, and closed-toe shoes.
- Keep your outfit simple. For a distinctive accent, accessorize with a tie or a beautiful scarf.
- No matter how carefully you select your wardrobe, the effect is spoiled if what you wear is anything less than fresh, clean and in impeccable repair. Starch and iron all clothing. Consider having cotton shirts laundered. Your clothing needs to fit you; avoid attire that is too large or too tight.
- Your personal grooming is also key. Come to your meeting freshly showered, with your hair well attended to.
- Dress a notch above what you think someone in the profession might wear.

Presentation

Your personal presentation is like the cover of a book. It may not be the most accurate representation of its contents, but it's the source of a first impression. Do not neglect the importance of making the best first impression. Here are a few tips:

- Carry a professional portfolio that contains a notepad, pen and copies of your polished and professional resume. Use a professional looking pen and pad of paper (i.e. avoid using a purple pen or stationery with glitter on it).

- Use a professional, conservative looking handbag or shoulder bag to carry your personal items. The bag should match your outfit. Preferable colors would be black, dark blue, or brown.

- Use professional body language and mannerisms when interacting with the contact. Introduce yourself by shaking hands. Sit upright and attentively when meeting with the contact to demonstrate that you are listening.

- No matter how carefully you select your wardrobe, the effect is spoiled if what you wear is anything less than fresh, clean and in impeccable repair. Starch and iron all clothing. Consider having cotton shirts laundered.

- While you are meeting with the contact, take the time to observe the dress and professional expectations of the workplace. Be aware of how employees communicate with one another and how they conduct themselves in the office.

- In a phone call meeting make sure you remain attentive, do not have music or other loud distractions in the background. To be safe, make your call indoors in a controlled environment.

- In communicating through email please use professional language, refrain from using shortcuts in writing (i.e. btw, thanx).

Sample Email: Initial Contact, General Purpose

Dear Ms. Smith

It was a pleasure to read your LinkedIn Profile as one of our leading alumni. I was impressed with your accomplishments as a Biologist at Lab Corporation.

I am a junior at the University of North Carolina Pembroke majoring in Biology. I am interested in learning more about your laboratory research. I could also use your advice about how to enter the biology field.

Would you be willing to talk with me? I would like to learn more about your career path and your recommendations for how to enter a laboratory research career.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,
Joe Student

Sample Email: Initial Email, Organization Interest

Dear Mr. Stevenson,

I received your name from the University of North Carolina Pembroke Career Center. I am completing my Management degree with a concentration in Marketing. It was impressive to see your accomplishments as a Brand Manager for Proctor and Gamble.

I would like to learn about your work experiences. Any advice you have about how to enter the marketing profession and work for top tier consumer goods and products organization like Proctor and Gamble would be helpful.

If you can accommodate my request, then when would you be available to meet by phone or in person? I have attached my resume for additional information about my background.

Thank you,
Sarah Student

Sample Email/Graduate Student or Alumnus

Dear Mr. Swanson,

I am completing my Masters of Liberal Arts and preparing for my job search. My background is in medical devices sales, and I would like to transition that experience into healthcare consulting. Dean Michael Morris recommended that I meet with you to get your advice. When would you have time to meet with me either by phone or in person?

Thank you,
Job Student

Informational Interview Checklist

Before the Interview

Strategies	To-Do List
Prepare logistics for the interview	☑ If meeting in-person, develop a list of recommended locations. ☑ Get information about directions, parking, and money for parking.
Research your contact's field	☑ Review current information about the industry and organization of the contact. *Sources include:* Company website, Local newspaper- Citizen Times, National newspapers, Regional business journals (i.e. LA Business Journal)
Research your career interests	☑ Develop your resume and identify your own interests, skills, and values that you seek in a career field.
Prepare topics of conversation	☑ Compose a list of questions to ask the contact, based on your interests, your research, and the "Sample Questions" listed in the appendix.
Research the contact	☑ Learn about the contact's background in advance where possible. What, if anything, do you have in common? What interests you the most? *Sources include:* LinkedIn and Web searches
Identify your goals	☑ Ask yourself, "What do I want to get out of this conversation?"
Dress to impress	☑ Get a pen and pad of paper for taking notes, copies of your resume, and your questions list. ☑ If meeting the contact in his/her place of work, ask about appropriate clothing.
Carry Cash	☑ Always bring cash in case of parking, or if you offer to buy coffee or lunch. Never assume plastic will be accepted.

Interview

Strategies	To-Do List
Getting there on-time	☑ Give yourself an extra 15-minutes to park, and another 15-minutes if you are in an unfamiliar area
Make introductions	☑ Introduce yourself, your goals for the interview, and your proposed structure for the interview ☑ Offer your resume so he/she can become familiar with your experience ☑ Ask the contact to share about him/herself
Begin the Interview	☑ Begin asking questions. A good place to start is with "Tell me about your career journey".
During the Interview	☑ Take notes. Taking notes demonstrates that you are listening ☑ Remember to participate in conversation ☑ Relax and enjoy

Thirty Sample Informational Interview Questions:

What is Your Workday Like?

1. Tell me about your career path and those common in this field?
2. How would you describe a typical day/week?
3. What are the major responsibilities of your position?
4. What kinds of skills and education are required in your position?
5. What hours do you normally work? Is there much travel involved?
6. What do you find most and least satisfying about your job?
7. What are the positive and negative aspects of working in this career field?
8. I'd like to walk through and see your work environment and the organization. Would that be acceptable and, if so, how could we arrange it?

Industry/Career Field

9. What trends and developments do you see affecting career opportunities?
10. What are the most significant changes you've seen in the industry over the past 5 years?
11. What recommendations can you give to someone looking to enter this field?
12. What traits, characteristics and skills do successful people in this field possess?
13. What are the salary ranges for entry-level professionals in this field?
14. What is the corporate culture of your company? Is it informal or formal? Do people work autonomously or in teams?
15. What are the most helpful or prestigious professional associations? Are students invited to attend? Are student memberships available?

Skills and Experience

16. What skills and educations are needed to enter this field?
17. What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
18. What are the entry level opportunities/job titles for this profession/industry?
19. What kinds of entry-level jobs or internships are good training for this industry?
20. Which of my skills and work experiences are strong compared to other job hunters in this field?
21. What do you think of my resume? How would you suggest I change it?
22. Can you recommend any courses or training I should have before proceeding further with my job search?
23. What organizations do you know that might be interested in hiring someone with my back ground?

Money and Advancement

24. What would be my earning potential if I entered this field and was successful?
25. Is job changing or relocation necessary to get promotions?
26. If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way?
27. What is the background of the most senior level executives?

More Information

28. Taking into account my skill, education, and experience, what other career paths would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?
29. If you were me, what would you recommend I do?
30. Who else would you recommend I speak with? When I call, may I use your name?