

# Informational Interview



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- 5 Easy Steps

# Informational Interviewing

GET THE INSIDE SCOPE ON CAREERS

## Introduction

The concept of informational interviewing will be introduced and explained below, as it relates to making career choices. First, however, let us look at career/life planning.

Career/life planning is a process, not a single decision or event. Statistics show that people follow at least 4-5 career paths in their lifetime. If you view career decision making as a process rather than an event, job hunting and career exploration become less stressful. Viewing it as a process eliminates the stress associated with making the “right” or “wrong” decision.

Career planning is a series of choices and decisions which channel people into a career path. Decisions can be reversible! If a job/career path does not suit you; you have the opportunity and obligation to yourself to change your mind. Thus, the concept of career planning really frees us from the anxiety that surround the job hunting and decision making mentality “this is a one-shot deal, I’d better make the right decision.”

Obviously it is easier to make plans for your future after you have looked within yourself and evaluated your personal skills, needs, values, and dreams as they relate to the job world. Once you have evaluated what is important to you then you need information about the career world ‘out there’. This handout is intended to help you do just that.

You can best make career choices when you explore varied job options, career duties, responsibilities, etc. Skyline College Career Center resources, website and library can tell

you the basic duties, training, salaries, and job outlook for hundreds of job options. Reading this information will make you more aware of the world of work. However, it is valuable to supplement this printed information by conducting informational interviews.

## Purpose

The informational interviewing process is sometimes also called networking or field surveying. No matter what the name, the purpose remains the same: you gather information on interesting careers from people who are or were employed in a professional field to help you in narrowing your career choices. Informational interviewing allows you to personally research a job, the people in a field, companies, and ultimately, find out if you are suited for such a career. Keep in mind that just one informational interview is not enough. You need to conduct many interviews to get a clear picture of a career field under observation.

## Setting Up An Interview

Setting up an interview with the right person is the first step to networking. Be sure to begin by pursuing your own contacts. Even if the people you know are not in your field of interest, they can provide you with contacts in the career field that interests you. Your contacts can include family, friends, employers, and community organizations.

Search websites and call organizations directly for names of people working in your area of interest. Visit the Career Center and use the Eureka computer information systems to gain knowledge regarding professional and trade organizations.

Having made your choice of career areas to explore and acquiring some contacts you are now ready to set up your first interview. Never drop in on anyone unless you want a cold reception. By calling for an appointment the contact person will see you as an organized, responsible person who is considerate of the interviewer's time. Before you call, you should go over in your mind and perhaps on paper what you want to say on the phone.

## **Be Prepared**



When you arrive for your appointment, be prepared. Dress as if you were going to a job interview. Bring paper, pen and questions. Have a resume to refer to in case you are asked **“Have you any particular background for this type of work?”**

## **Listen**

Above all, exercise your listening skills. Often you can find the ‘inside scoop’ about a job or company that job seekers seldom uncover. Stay alert during the interview process and look for signs that the interview is over. Clock watching, paper shuffling, and general nervousness are all signs that the person needs to get back to work. Take the hint and say “You have helped me immensely Mr. X in understanding the job of \_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate your taking time to share information with me, etc.” Do not forget to ask for names of other contacts in this field. Thank your contact and take your leave.



## **Follow-Up**



Be sure to follow-up interviews with a written thank-you. This is an important part of networking, because it reinforces your visit and gives you exposure to people in certain professions. In the future, you may need to use your contacts for job hunting purposes. Perhaps if you decide to seek employment in this field, your contacts may be available to critique your resume. So don't close any doors behind you.

## **Final Advise**

“IT REALLY CAN  
BE FULFILLING  
TO  
INVESTIGATE  
YOUR CAREER  
FANTASIES”

Final advise is to enjoy yourself! Believe it or not people live through the process and many learn to enjoy the power that informational interviewing gives the career seeker. Informational interviewing is an interview process where you are in control of the interview. As you don't pose a threat, you can often ask questions with much greater freedom than if you were a job hunter. It really can be fulfilling to investigate your career fantasies.

As you become skilled in networking you begin to enjoy the chance to gather information that will promote career decisions. Informational interviewing is an investment in your career future. The time you spend exploring will pay off

as you expand your career horizons. For more information on informational interviewing see the 2009 edition of Richard Bolles' book, "What Color is your Parachute" and the official website in the book "jobhuntersbible.com." Career Center staff can assist you in finding this and other helpful books.

## **Sample Conversation**



### **In Person/Over the Phone**

"Hello.

My name is Maria Velasquez and I am a student at Skyline College. I am interested in exploring the field of \_\_\_\_\_. Although, I am currently **NOT** looking for a job, I would like to find out as much as possible about the field. Would it be possible to schedule a 15-20 minute appointment with you at your convenience? I would like to ask you a few questions and to get your advice on how to prepare to enter this field?"

The person may be reluctant or say, "**We have no job openings at this time.**" If so, continue to stress that you are **NOT** looking for a job. Explain that you are in the process of career exploration and researching this particular field by saying:

**"I'm investigating various career areas so that I can get a realistic view of the local job market or career potential in this field."**

When an appointment is set thank them and re-establish the date and time of your meeting:

**"Thank you Mr. X. I look forward to seeing you Friday at 2 o'clock!"**

### **Sample Letter Via E-Mail:**

Dear Mr. Watson,

I am a first year student majoring in Business Administration at Skyline College and had the opportunity of meeting you at the Holiday Job fair in November. Although I am not currently looking for a job, I am very interested in learning as much as possible about the common career paths in the field of Business Administration. Can you make additional recommendations as to how I can further develop my skills while attending Skyline College?

I would greatly appreciate 15 to 20 minutes of your time to ask you a few questions about your role as Executive Director of the California Solar Electric Company as well as other type of work in the field.

Thank you for your consideration. I will contact you next week to rearrange a convenient time to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Mark Wang

**Sample Thank You Letter for Informational Interview Via E-Mail:**

Dear Ms. Wallace

I appreciate your meeting with me yesterday to talk about your work as a city council member for the city of San Bruno. I have a clear understanding of the role a council member plays in pursuing a long range political career. It was helpful to learn that leadership skills were required in entry level positions and internships available with the city of San Bruno.

The coming semester I plan to get involved with Student Government at Skyline College and pursue running for office in the near future. I appreciated the opportunity to talk with you.

Thank you again for your time and advice.

Sincerely,

Tamara Jackson



**Questions To Ask**



Keep in mind that practice will be the key to handling this smoothly and confidently. If you can not make the appointment be sure to call and cancel. You want to leave the best impression you can. Someday you may want to use them again as a contact or resource. When you interview a specific person, it is essential that you prepare questions to be answered. We suggest that

you write them down, as this will save time and ensure that you cover all areas of concern. Here are some suggested questions:

“IF YOU CANNOT  
MAKE THE  
APPOINTMENT BE  
SURE TO CALL  
AND CANCEL”

## **Sample Questions To Ask When Information Interviewing**

1. What are common entry level jobs in the field?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. How did you get started in this type of work?
4. Would you describe your present job responsibilities and duties?
5. How would you spend a typical day?
6. What type of training or education did you receive for this position?
7. What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?
8. What do you think are some important things that someone going into this field should know about?
9. Does this type of work have a good future?
10. What future goals do you have?
11. Did any of your past jobs prepare you for this one?
12. What kinds of courses did you need in college to prepare you for this job?
13. How important was college in helping you obtain this job?
14. What has contributed to your career success up to the present?
15. What are some of the problems you have encountered on your job? How have you resolved them?
16. How do you think college contributed to your overall career development?
17. In what way has your present job prepared you for greater responsibilities?
18. How did you choose your profession?
19. Have you had any additional training or education since you completed college?
20. What are your hours?
21. What job benefits do you receive?
22. What kind of vacation do you get?
23. If you had it to do all over again, what changes would you make in your career?
24. In considering joining a company, what are some of the factors you take into account?
25. What are the rewards, challenges, frustrations of your work?
26. What kind of position would you like to be holding in five years? Ten years?
27. Do you belong to any civic or professional organizations or clubs? Which ones? Why did you join them? Did you hold office?
28. What are some common career paths in this field?
29. What current issues and trends affect your work the most?
30. May I have your business card?
31. Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information that will be useful in considering this field?
32. What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level?

## **Review the 5 Steps for an Conducting Effective Informational Interview**

### **Step 1: Identify People to Interview**

- Follow your own contacts: family, friends, professors, former employers, volunteer and community organizations
- Visit the Career Center and research websites and Eureka for lists of Organizations and trade associations
- Read newspapers and magazines articles for potential contacts

### **Step 2: Make Contact**

- Contact the person by phone, letter or e-mail.
- Identify how you got their name (who referred you?)
- Emphasize you are **NOT** looking for a job but for career information.

### **Step 3: Prepare for the Informational Interview**

- Conduct research regarding a particular career field/employer using internet and print resources.
- Develop a 30 second overview speech to introduce yourself including your reasons for contacting the individual.
- Plan to use open ended questions as listed on this Informational Interview Guide.

### **Step 4: Conduct the Informational Interview**

- Dress as if it is an actual job interview, first impressions are very important!
- Get to your appointment a few minutes early and be courteous to everyone you meet in the organization (office assistant, receptionist etc.).
- Take the lead in conducting the interview.
- Ask open ended questions which promote discussion
- Once inside the company or organization look around and observe the work environment , dress style, communication patterns (casual or more formal) etc.
- Examine if this is a place you would want to work.

### **Step 5: Follow-up**

- Take notes, write down what you have observed and learned about the particular career field. Does this field seem like it would be a good fit with your values, life-style, interest, skills and future career plans?
- Send a thank you note by e-mail or mail within 1-2 days.
- Keep in touch their relationship could become an important part of your professional network.

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