

Information Interviews



Why do an information interview?

Informational interviewing is the process of systematically researching your career field through a series of in-person workplace visits with people already employed in jobs similar to those in which you are interested. It is one of the most valuable career development tools. It is essentially a conversation with someone who has work experience in a job, field, or industry that you are considering and is a great way to get an insider's perspective and find out more about specific careers.

What are the benefits of an information interview?

Informational interviewing can assist you to:

- Demystify the field or position in which you are interested
- Clarify whether this is an appropriate career choice for you
- Provide you with explicit job description information that you will need to develop a sharp and focused resume
- Contribute valuable personal contacts for your job search networking - which is the time-tested, surest route to a good job

STEPS TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW

STEP 1: Establish your goals

- Conduct a self-assessment through 'Adult Directions' (Melbourne Careers Centre online tool) – understand your strengths, interests, key selling points and how to articulate these.
- Assess what the purpose of an information interview is for you (Find out more about industry/career/jobs, build a network)

STEP 2: Research and identify your contacts

Research and identify industries, organisations and job titles

- Linked In (explore alumni connections and pathways)
- Industry websites/brochures
- Web resources such as Graduate Careers, My Future.
- Online job websites (such as seek.com) for past employment advertisements containing job profiles and selection criteria. Learn to analyse job descriptions and job advertisements related to your career and industry – identify technical skills, transferable skills and personal attributes.
- Careers Fairs and Employer Sessions
- Professional Associations
- Publications such as Graduate Opportunities
- Yellow Pages
- ASX information

STEP 3: Assess your current network

Find contacts. Ask people in your network for contacts in a field, company or job that interests you:

- Friends
- Co-workers
- Friend's parents who may work in business or industry
- Professional organisations
- Professional meetings / conferences etc
- Lecturers

Speak to anyone who may have a contact or the name of someone in the field that you may approach for an information interview.

STEP 4: Make contact and schedule meeting

The workplace is the ideal location as you have the opportunity to observe the work environment and meet other people working there. However if meeting in person is not feasible, conduct your interview via telephone or email.

Make an explicit appointment for a short period of time (say 20 minutes); be on time, and leave on time. Remember that they are generally busy people so you will need to be flexible with your time. When requesting an Information Interview by phone, ask to speak directly with the person of interest (from your research, you should know the name of the person you wish to see and the title of his/her position). Always confirm the address, phone number and date of the information interview and make a note of these details.

- If they are too busy to speak to you initially, enquire about the most convenient time for you to call back (don't expect them to call you).
- When you get through to your contact person, introduce yourself, state where you are from (e.g. a student at The University of Melbourne), explain that you are conducting personal research in their career field and would like to meet with them for 20-30 minutes to find out more about that field / occupation.
- Explain that you are trying to obtain first-hand information to aid in your career exploration and decision-making. **YOU ARE NOT ASKING FOR A JOB**
- Ask for a time that would be convenient for them, and be prepared to fit in with their schedule.
- Sometimes the contact person will ask you to conduct the interview then and there. It is important that you have your questions ready in this event, because this may be the only chance you will have to obtain the information that you are seeking.
- If your contact is unable to grant you the time, ask whether they would suggest another contact for you. Take the names and numbers down and always be polite and professional. Remember to ask your contact if you can use their name.
- When contacting the referral, explain that the first contact gave you his/her name and suggested that you call them to request information.
- Be strategic in your choice of prospective interviewees. You may wish to include some people who have the power to hire you should a position become available.

When requesting an Information Interview by **e-mail** your request is less immediate than a phone request and possibly less effective as it does not require a response. You may need to follow-up with a polite phone call.

- Treat your written request as you would a cover letter- make it professional and impressive.

- Make it short, succinct and relevant.
- Explain who you are, what your key selling points are and why you are writing to this person. **(YOU ARE NOT ASKING FOR A JOB)**.
- Request a 20-30 minute appointment to enable you to interview the person and gather information.
- State your flexibility and ability to fit in with their schedule.
- Close with a thank you and a pro-active statement that you will contact them the week beginning date (----) to set up a mutually convenient time.
- Follow-up on your commitment to set the time in the nominated week.

Sample template - requesting an information interview via email at the end of document

STEP 5: Prepare questions and rehearse interview behaviours

This is where your preparation pays off. Remember that you are in this position to collect information about a possible career, and to become a more competitive job candidate.

- Remain calm and stay focussed – you only have 20-30 minutes.
- Stick to your time limit! This will be viewed favourably.

Although an information interview is not a job interview, you still need to present yourself as if it were. It is possible that you will uncover employment opportunities during the interview that will need to be followed up after the interview is over. For **sample interview questions** see the list at the end of this information sheet

Here is a short checklist to help you prepare:

- Dress well – Business attire is appropriate: decide what you are wearing ahead of the interview day.
- Prepare your questions – have them presented in a clean professional folder.
- Practice your questions on a friend or family member before the day.
- Remember to be polite and professional when seeking information.
- Be prepared to take notes (ask permission) have a neat, clean notepad and pen prepared as you may need to take down the names and contact numbers of referrals.
- Prepare a copy of your latest resume – tailored to the company and position as you understand it but distribute only upon request.
- Re-confirm your appointment the day before.
- Know your way to the office or building.
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Plan to stick to the agreed time limit for the interview.
- Be confident and enthusiastic, after all you are the interviewer.

During the interview:

- Dress for success. Approach all informational interviews as if they were job interviews.
- Arrive thoroughly prepared with questions you want answered. Being knowledgeable about the field or industry will leave a good impression. Bring a list of questions, but try to keep the tone conversational.
- Take a professional style note-pad and several copies of your resume to the informational interview. Jot down any important points, but avoid spending the entire interview huddled over your notes.

- The interviewee may request a copy of your resume for their records, or to pass on to a colleague.
- Always be professional. Although this is not a job interview, there is always the possibility that it may lead to one.
- If you uncover a job opportunity, state your intention to follow up on that when the interview is over.
- Aim to leave with at least two referrals to other people in the field that you can also interview.
- Take down notes immediately after the interview, recording everything you learnt.
- Keep well-organised records of your informational interviewing process.
- Close the interview well. Reiterate your appreciation and thank your contact for their time.

STEP 6: Send thank you note, follow up & stay in touch

One of the biggest mistakes job seekers make with informational interviews is neglecting to follow-up.

Always send a thank-you note. Your interviewee should never wonder how much you appreciated the time they took to share their hard-earned knowledge with you. Remember, you never know what doors could open for you one day.

- Ask if it is ok to stay in touch. Keep your contact person posted on your progress from time to time. They have invested time in you and will usually want to know how you are succeeding.
- Ask the contact to keep you in mind if they come across any information that may be helpful to you.
- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** you can build your network at an information interview so make a good impression and impress!
- They may not have a job for you, but they may know someone who does.

STEP 7: Reflect and analyse your discussion

- Evaluate the information you received. Keep a spreadsheet to record all the details (names contact numbers/who referred you/date contacted/what you learnt etc)
- What did you learn from the interviewee and the process?
- How does what you learnt fit in with your own interests, goals, values and abilities?
- What do you still need to know? What are your next steps?
- Evaluate your style of interviewing - what worked well and what needs amendment?

Sample Questions for Information Interviews

1. What is your background and how did you become interested in this field?
2. How can I make a career in [career area]?
3. How do I get from university into a paid job in this area?
4. What kinds of organisations employ people for this work?
5. Are there any opportunities for volunteer work or work experience/ vacation employment?
6. What is the best way of arranging volunteer work, work experience, or vacation employment?
7. What are the names of the most relevant professional associations? Who do I contact for membership details?
8. Are there any publications (eg. journals, magazines, newsletters) relevant to this work which I should be reading?
9. Do I need a degree in a specific discipline? An honours degree? A post graduate diploma? A Masters degree?
10. Where or how are graduate/entry level positions advertised? If such positions are not advertised, how does one find out about them?
11. What are some of the most common entry level job titles?
12. What are the roles and responsibilities in these entry-level positions?
13. Would I need to accept short-term contract positions initially, or would I be able to go straight into an on-going or longer term contract position?
14. How much on the job training is provided?
15. Are opportunities in this area of work likely to expand?
16. Could you please describe some common career paths?
17. What is the size of the organisation, ie. The number of employees?
18. Approximately how many staff have some sort of educational qualification?
19. What is the structure of the organisation?
20. Are there positions within the organisation which require specific training/qualifications?
21. What are the services provided or products designed/ created/ manufactured?
22. What are the locations of this organisation?
23. How long has this organisation been established?
24. Who are the competitors within the industry or field as a whole?
25. What is the growth pattern within the organisation?
26. What is the organisation's reputation?
27. Who are the parent companies or subsidiaries?
28. What is the financial profile of the organisation?
29. What are the recent developments, new products and projects?
30. Where are the international links/operations?
31. Any other information of direct relevance

Tips for Requesting an Information Interview

- Ensure you use a clear subject line in your email
- Mention any connections you have with the person and how you got their contact email in the subject line and/or first lines of the message
- Give a little background on who you are and why you are interested in talking with this person
- Ask if they might have some time to meet, mention general time windows when you're available, but leave the schedule decision up to them
- Keep it brief
- Don't send a resume with the initial email, but I will sometimes attach it to follow up scheduling emails and say something like "I've attached my resume in case you'd like a better picture of my experience before we talk."

Requesting an Information Interview (email format)

Dear Ms. Jones,

I am currently a Bachelor of Science student at the University of Melbourne, majoring in Food Science, and spoke with you briefly at the Experience and Employment Networking event in August.

Over the last ____ (insert the period of time), I have _____ (insert 1 relevant achievement or a BRIEF description of the work that you have performed). However, I'm very interested in learning more about _____ (insert the person's company/field/industry).

I would greatly appreciate 15 to 20 minutes of your time to ask you a few questions about your position in (insert position), as well as other opportunities in the field.

I'm sure you are extremely busy, so I could meet you at your office or a nearby coffee shop, etc. Let me know what is most convenient for you!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, James Chan

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