

10 Steps to Planning an Effective Information Interview

The information interview is a low-key situation in which you contact people who have the knowledge you seek about a field or who make hiring decisions. The interview can be used to research companies and positions, and to develop contact persons and job leads.

Preparation is the key to conducting a successful information interview. The steps listed below will help you arrange an appointment and plan an effective interview.

1. Identify an appropriate organization and contact person within the organization.
2. Prepare or review your resume (you never know when someone will ask for it).
3. Research your field of interest and have a general understanding of some potential occupations.
4. Prepare your questions in advance and write them down so you can concentrate on the information you are receiving and are less worried about what you will ask next. It's a good idea to practice with someone else first.
5. Determine whether you want to arrange the interview in person or over the phone.
6. If you are arranging an interview by phone and are uncertain about how to do so, refer to the telephone prompter that is included in this handout.
7. When you are ready to place your call, make sure there are no distractions. Call from a quiet room, not a pay phone if possible.
8. If you are scheduling an interview in person, make certain you are dressed appropriately and act professionally.
9. Arrange the interview at a time that is convenient to your contact person. Be flexible in scheduling the appointment.
10. Get a good night's sleep before the interview, and RELAX. Since you are seeking information and not a job, the interview is yours to control.

Where to Find Potential Information Interviewees

- *The Career Center
- *Neighbors and former employers
- *Employment directories
- *Classroom guest speakers
- *Company literature: annual reports, brochures, etc.
- *Friend working for a company in which you are interested
- *Speakers at conferences, student group meetings, graduation ceremonies
- *Relatives, friends of your parents, and parents of your friends
- *Faculty contacts
- *Alumni
- *Yellow pages
- *Trade journals
- *Newspaper and magazine articles

Information Interview Questions

Below are some questions you may want to ask in an information interview. Make notes of additional questions you may want to ask. Have your list with you for the interview so you can use your time efficiently and be sure to ask the most important questions. It's OK and highly recommended to take notes during the interview.

1. How did you get your start in this career? What did you find most helpful in getting started in the ... field?
2. How did you prepare for entry into this field? What specific training or degree did you obtain?
3. I'm fascinated about the field of ... and would like to know how most people get into the field. How did you become interested in ...?
4. What is a typical work day like?
5. Do the duties change at any time, i.e., each week, month or season?
6. How long is your typical work week?
7. Is overtime required? Allowed?
8. What are some typical entry-level ... positions?
9. What are the short-term career opportunities for this profession? Long-term?
10. What are the qualifications you would look for in a ...?
11. What are the attributes of someone successful?
12. What is the best educational preparation for a career in ...?
13. Would you advise someone like me to go into this field?
14. The ... industry has been going through a lot of change in recent years and I wonder what your perspective is as an insider.

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15. What major problems are you facing right now in this department or position?
16. How does your company compare to your competition?
17. Based on your understanding of my background and interests, what do you see as a potential job for me initially?
18. Where is the best place to get appropriate education, training or experience?
19. What is the entry-level salary range for your field? What is the salary range for higher levels?
20. What are the opportunities for advancement within this field? this company?
21. What skills are most important for your kind of work?
22. My strongest skills are ... Do people in your field have skills similar to mine? What are their job titles?
23. What rewards do you get from your work?
24. What are the most challenging/frustrating aspects of your work?
25. What are some obstacles I should be prepared to face when getting started?
26. Are there good sources of information on this (company, industry, or field) that you could recommend?
27. Considering what you know about me, what other fields/job would you suggest I learn about before I make my decision?
28. What personal advice would you give a person entering this field?
29. Can you give me the names of other people who might provide me with information or who might be helpful?
30. Who do you know that I should talk to next in the field of ...? When I call, may I use your name?
31. After talking with you I would be very interested in being able to see what it's like to work in your setting. Would it be possible for me to stop by ...

Ask your own questions ...

Remember: This is not a job interview, so you can bring up salary and other topics you normally should not ask about.

Telephone Prompter for Researching Occupational Interests

Before you call someone to set up an information interview, practice what you will say. This step in your preparation will allow you to be more relaxed when you place your call, and increase the likelihood that you will get an appointment. Use the format shown below or develop one of your own, but don't neglect this step. Even the most secure speaker needs some practice.

Hello (Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms.) _____. My name is _____. _____ suggested I give you a call regarding information on _____. I'm not looking for a job. I'd just like some information on this field. I'm considering (entering this field, a career change, etc.) and would like to ask you a few questions about ... If now is not a good time, I can call back when it's more convenient. I realize you are very busy, but perhaps we could have coffee or meet for lunch--whatever is convenient for you ...
**If no one referred you to this person, explain how you got his or her name. For example, you might say, "I read an article about you in ..." or "You were the speaker at a convention I attended."

There will be times that you are turned down when you request an appointment to speak with a potential contact. Don't take the refusal personally, and don't get discouraged. Use any refusal as a learning tool. Go back over the conversation to see if you can improve your preparation, strategy or presentation. Then try the next name on your list. In the long run you will have plenty of favorable replies. Note - if you find yourself playing a lot of telephone tag, you might consider writing a letter to introduce yourself and ask for the help which you are seeking.

The Follow-Up

The information interview doesn't end when you say good-bye. To make the most of what you learned you will need to follow-up on names, places, and resources mentioned during the interview.

1. Review your notes.
2. Contact your new leads.
3. Read suggested material.
4. Send a thank-you note.
5. Send your resume, if appropriate.
6. Arrange another meeting in the future, if appropriate.
7. If you find an interesting and applicable item (announcement, newspaper article, etc.), send it to your contact.
8. Report back to your contact regarding any leads given during the interview. Relate what happened and express your appreciation again.