



career guide

informational interviewing

ASU Career Services offers a comprehensive on-line Career Guide designed to help you evaluate career options, learn about internships and launch your career. The Career Guide includes detailed information about cover letters and resumes, interviewing, business etiquette, portfolios, graduate school admission processes, effective job and internship search strategies and more. Visit The Career Guide at asu.edu/careerguide.

Informational Interviewing Defined:

The process of talking to people who do what you think you would like to do, is called informational interviewing. It is a meeting to get advice and information only: it is not a way of getting in to see someone to ask for a job. After you have made a decision about the career, the contacts you have met through informational interviewing may become helpful in your job search, but keep in mind, informational interviewing is for advice and information. Be very clear about your purpose before going and be truthful with the person you are interviewing with about your purpose.

Reasons to Conduct Informational Interviews:

- To investigate and gain insights into a specific career field.
- To learn the jargon and important issues in the field.
- To receive information that is current and logical, and you get a good sense of the workplace.
- To gain information in the interview that can form the basis for making a career decision. It may be used to expand options or to eliminate some preliminary choices.
- To receive candid information that may be difficult to otherwise obtain.
- To learn from knowledgeable people about how to best prepare for particular careers.
- For future job seekers, it is a good way to prepare for job interview questions.
- To develop a new professional contact that could be helpful for you in the future.

Preparation:

- Identify your skills. Understand the complexity of your skillset and know your capabilities in great detail. Consider where and how you would most like to use them.
- Learn as much as you can about the organization through research - look at brochures, annual reports, employee handbooks, etc..
- Have your questions written down.
- Learn about the career in general - look at salary, working conditions, promotional possibilities. Check out the many research resources available through ASU Career Services.

Typical Questions to Ask During an Informational Interview:

The applicability of these questions may vary from one occupation to another. Similarly, some of the items may be more important to you than others in your own career planning and decision-making.

- What are the major satisfactions the individual derives from working in this field?
- What are some of the frustrations that may characterize this type of work? Are there certain kinds of problems that recur?
- To what degree is there pressure on this job? How could that pressure be described?
- What advice would the individual offer someone planning on entering this career?
- To what extent does the individual feel her experiences are typical of others?
- If they were starting out again, what might the individual do differently?
- Could they give you names of other people who might be able to provide additional information? May you use their name as a referral?

How long has the individual been employed by the organization and for what length of time has she held her current position?

What was the career path of the individual from college to present?

What are the major responsibilities of the position? What are the specific duties performed? How do they spend 80% of their work day?

What do they look for in hiring an individual, i.e. - what skills, values, etc." Does the company have a 'profile' of the ideal employee?

What are some of the different kinds of organizations that employ people in this occupation?

What skills are most important for this kind of work? Are there other fields in which the same types of skills are used? What might be some related occupations?

What are the educational requirements for this career? Would they recommend graduate or professional school training after college?

Are college graduates with limited work experience employable in this field? If so, what types of positions would they most likely hold?

What would be the expected progression of positions if one were to enter this field and make it a career?

What might the accompanying salary scale be?

Is it possible to project future needs for workers in this field? What factors might determine these needs?

What are the criteria used to evaluate performance in this field?

What is the typical "chain of command" in this field?

What are the time demands that accompany this type of work?

What abilities and personal qualities are of primary importance in this occupation?

Would work in this field be likely to exert any impact on one's health?

Is there a prevalent lifestyle among people engaged in this career? If so, how might it be described?

Can the individual suggest others who may be valuable as sources of information?

Are there internships, part-time, and or volunteer work related to this position that they would recommend?

Could they recommend sources for additional information such as special books, trade publications and professional journals?

Find Someone to Interview:

Think of all your contacts, then expend your list by speaking to and researching:

friends and family members

contacts made through friends and family

college instructors

previous employers

co-workers

alumni

speakers you have heard

religious affiliations

career advisors

chambers of commerce

trade or professional journals

phone book or yellow pages

personnel directors

officials of unions and professional organizations

people mentioned in newspapers, radio or TV

community service agencies

corporate directories

public relations officials

people in the information business - librarians, resource centers

Approaches to Arranging the Informational Interview:

There are 4 basic methods of making contact with prospective subjects for your interview: telephoning, writing an email or letter, drop-in and by referral. Whichever you choose, explain your purpose in requesting the interview. It is important that you are specific in your request. Give an estimate of the time you believe it will take to conduct the interview (usually 20 to 30 minutes)>

Telephoning

Call a business and ask for the name of the person who works in the job or the department in which you might be interested. Tell that individual you are doing career research and need additional information in order to make a career decision. Make an appointment with that person during work hours, at the lunch hour, during a break, or during off-work hours. Informational interviewing is most successful when done in person rather than over the telephone. Be flexible, and be prepared for “no thank you”.

Email and Letter Writing

Obtain the name of the person you wish to interview and write an email or letter that clearly states your reason for wanting to meet. A letter requesting an information interview should:
name the person to whom you are writing.

Identify why you are writing.

Indicate that you are not looking for a job.

Drop-In

“Drop in” on a prospective interviewee whom you have identified as a good resource. Depending on the type of career research, this may or may not be an effective method of informational interviewing. For example, if you are researching the auto mechanics field, you may be welcome on a drop-in basis. On the other hand, most business professionals prefer appointments. Use your judgment.

Referral

Call someone you know, or someone who has been referred to you by a friend, and ask that individual for an appointment. (Often this is the most successful method).

Helpful Hints:

If you have never done an informational interview before, practice with a friend.

Write out a script for the initial phone contact.

Always make an appointment and have your calendar handy. If possible, meet in person rather than interviewing by phone.

When making an appointment, if you're a student, say so, and tell the person a variation of the following:

“I am in the process of making some decisions about my career and want to learn more about opportunities in my field for someone with my skills and experience. I was told by _____ that you might be a good person to talk to. May I set up a time to meet with you at your convenience?”

Be prepared for a response suggesting you talk with Personnel or Human Resources. Let the person know that you are looking for information about careers, not job vacancies.

Be on time, prepared and dress professionally!

If you have a resume, bring it with you. Often you may leave it with the person.

During the Interview:

Respect the person's time and be prepared to hold up your end of the interview.

Its OK to let your interviewee digress a bit, but make sure your questions are answered.

At the end of the interview, always thank the person for their time and always ask them if they know anyone else you could interview. This is the key to developing your network.

Follow Up After the Interview:

Evaluate your style of interviewing after each meeting. What could you have done better?

Consider the career information you received from your interviewee. What are your positive and negative impressions? Take notes during the interview and refer to them later on.

Observe the job setting and general atmosphere. How did they match up to your expectations?

Always write a thank-you letter. Refer to your conversation, mention what you learned, and who you are going to call or see at their suggestion. Make sure the letter is in business format. If you didn't leave a resume with them at the interview, feel free to include it with your letter.

Keep the door open for further contacts. Call later to say how you are progressing.

Keep records of who you interviewed. Note the name, address, telephone number, date you met, details of your conversation, who referred you to that person, and contacts that individual may have provided. The person may be helpful to you in the future.

Remember - informational interviewing means gaining valuable knowledge, access, and referrals not only to individuals but to the industry. Effective informational interviewing requires more than just making contacts. The process involves leveraging those contacts so you can derive the full benefits of your networking as you begin your career search.