

# Informational Interviews



## Purpose

Informational interviews are an excellent form of networking and are used to gather information on careers from people who are employed in professional fields which interest you. Informational interviews allow you to:

- Refine your knowledge and understanding of the field
- Develop social skills related to interviewing
- Develop contacts in your field of interest
- Gain insider information and knowledge about positions, companies and entire fields
- Master techniques used in interviewing – which can help with job interviews

Informational interviews put you in the driver's seat, asking the questions that interest you about a field or profession. It is a chance to get an insiders' perspective on companies, careers and may even lead to internships or job opportunities in the future.

## Setting up an Interview

Identify the people you want to interview.

- Talk to family, friends, instructors, counselors and people in the Career Center for ideas
- Google your field of interest and where you are located (e.g. Public relations Santa Barbara)
- Look on LinkedIn for professionals working in your field of interest

Having made your choice of career areas to explore and acquired some contacts, you are now ready to set up your first interview. Before you call, you should go over in your mind and on paper what you want to say on the phone. Informational interviews are best in-person appointment, but if that is not possible request a phone or Skype interview. Ask for about 15 – 30 minutes of time.

## Sample "Script" Initial Contact

Try something like this: "Hello my name is Jane Doe. I am an SBCC student and interested in exploring the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I understand that you are involved in this field. I'm exploring various careers so that I can make more informed decisions about my future. I would like to set up a short informational interview with you or another member of your staff." Explain that you are not looking for a job, stressing that you are only in the process of career exploration and researching this particular field. Set a date and time and thank them.

## Be Prepared

Do some research about the company and person you are going to interview online, in the Career Center, or library. Have a list of questions for the interview (see back of handout for suggestions.) Arrive on time for your appointment and dress as if you were going to a job interview. Bring paper, pen, your questions, and have your résumé to refer to and leave if appropriate. Turn off your mobile phone.

## Listen

Exercise your listening skills. Let your questions be a starting point, most people enjoy talking about their work and career path once they get going. Think of it as a conversation not just an interview with a list of questions. Watch for signs that the interview needs to end - clock watching, paper shuffling, and nervousness are all signs that the person needs to get back to work. Thank them for helping you and ask for names of other contacts in the field if you are interested in further exploration.

## Follow Up

Follow up interviews promptly with a thank you email or written card or letter. In the future, you may be able to use your contacts for assistance in finding internships or jobs, or to review your résumé. Keep in touch, an occasional email or question will keep you in mind if opportunities or leads come up that match your interests.

## Final Advice

Relax and enjoy yourself! Although hard to take the first step, most people find informational interviews to be a rewarding and productive use of time. Informational interviewing is an investment in your career future – and is something most people wish they had done more of when they were students.

## Sample Questions for Informational Interviews

Prepare a set of questions to get the interview going. Choose a few from this list or make up your own. Most informational interview are no more than 30 minutes. Keep in mind that this is a conversation and you may deviate from your list or not get to all your questions. Don't worry, you are creating a relationship and can always ask a question in a follow up email.

1. What do you like most about your job? What do you like least about your job?
2. How did you get started in this type of work? What are alternate ways to enter this field?
3. How would you describe a typical day?
4. What traits are most important to success in this industry or position?
5. What type of training or education would you recommend for someone wanting to enter this field now?
6. What is the outlook on growth and future directions for this field?
7. What is the salary range in this field? Entry level to top salary?
8. What has contributed most to your career success?
9. If you had it to do all over again, what changes would make in your career?
10. What related occupations might I investigate?
11. Can you suggest other people who I might talk to about this field?
12. Do you belong to any professional organizations? What do you get out of membership?
13. Is there anything else about the field that is helpful for me to know?

## Practice

Practice will be the key to handling the interview smoothly and confidently. Be sure to go over your questions out loud. Here are a couple tools to help you prepare and practice.

- **Quintessential Informational Interview Website**  
[http://www.quintcareers.com/informational\\_interviewing.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html)  
(Tutorial takes you step-by-step through the informational interview process)
- Practice interviewing with your cell phone! This page walks you through it.  
<http://www.cacareercafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/sa-conduct-an-informational-interview.pdf>

### Career Center Location and Hours

Student Services Bldg. – Room SS-282, (805) 965-0581, ext. 2331

Hours: Mon. 8 – 4:15, Tues. 8 – 5:00, Weds. 8 – 5:00, Thurs. 8 – 4:15, Fri. 8 – 1:00