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Informational Interviewing

Why Should I Conduct an Informational Interview?

- To learn firsthand about what it is like to do a particular kind of work in a particular organization.
- To get information about what the opportunities are in a given field or organization.
- To develop contacts in key positions with people who hire or who make recommendations to those who do.
- To find out about jobs and career paths you did not know existed.
- To begin to build, or expand, your network of professional contacts.

Who Do I Contact?

Friends, friends of friends, relatives, co-workers of yours or your friends; members of professional associations related to your field; people gleaned from directories of companies, associations, outstanding individuals and alumni; people who are doing work that interests you, who are with an organization that you would like to know more about, who might know someone in any of these other categories; people you admire or respect; people mentioned in the newspaper, magazines or other media; people who would know other leaders in a field, organization or community.

How Do I Approach A Contact?

You are in the process of making some decisions about your career, and you want to learn more about the opportunities in a given field for someone with your skills and experience. There is a lot at stake in terms of your future, so you want the best information you can get. That is why you would like to meet with this person.

Be prepared for a response such as “I think our Personnel Director can probably be of more help”. A possible response on your part might be “I’m sure that would be true if I were just looking for a job. I’d like to talk with you because from what _____ said about you, I could respect your advice, and I would like to get your personal perspective.”

Your basic question will probably be a variation of “Here is what I can do. Where do you feel the best opportunities are for someone with my skills and experience?” Additional questions to help you get the information you need are suggested below.

How Do I Prepare for The Interview?

Prior to setting up informational meetings, it is essential that you do some preliminary research on the companies, jobs, professions, or industries that interest you. A wide variety of resources are available in Counseling & Career Development and UTA Libraries. The information you obtain from your research will form the basis for the questions you ask during the meeting, and your meeting contact will be invaluable for supplementing your research with a “real world” perspective.

How Do I Handle the Interview?

- You are not asking for a job. You are gathering information on which to base some decisions.
- Always make an appointment; this puts the meeting on a business-like basis and helps eliminate interruptions.
- Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional.
- Do not bring your résumé to the meeting unless your contact has agreed in advance to give you feedback on how you are presenting yourself. A résumé can make an informational meeting suddenly feel like a job interview.



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How Do I Handle the Interview? (cont'd)

- Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation – remember you are the person seeking information. Know what you want to ask. Don't ask questions just to show off, or you may end up showing your ignorance. The person you are meeting with will feel it was worthwhile if you ask thoughtful questions, but not if you ask only superficial ones. Having notes with you is fine and can be very helpful.
- Respect the person's time, but don't put yourself down by being subservient or apologetic.
- Towards closure, always ask with whom else you should talk. This is the key to developing more contacts and building your network.
- Keep your eyes open for clues about what kinds of problems or challenges the organization/industry/career field might have, and how you might present yourself as the solution.
- Always write a thank you note that will help you be remembered. Mention what you talked about, what you learned, or who you are going to see at his/her suggestion. If you are interested in pursuing a job with that person, try to keep the door open to get back in touch.

Suggested Questions to Ask

- In the position you now hold, what do you do on a typical day?
- What are the most interesting/challenging/frustrating aspects of your job?
- What part of your work do you consider dull or repetitious?
- What were the jobs you had that led you to this one?
- How long does it usually take to move from one step to the next in this career path?
- What is the step above the one you have now?
- Given your present position and experience, what position do you see yourself in five years from now?
- What is the top job you can have in this career?
- Are there other areas of this field to which people in it may be transferred?
- What are the prerequisites for jobs in this field?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- Are there any specific courses I might take that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
- What types of training do companies give to persons entering this field?
- What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
- What special advice could you give a young person/career changer entering this field?
- Is there a demand for people in this field?
- What are the growth prospects for this field in the future?
- With the information you have about my current education, skills, and experience, what other education, skills, and experience would you suggest I obtain?
- What is the best way to obtain a position that will start me on a career in this field?
- Do you have information on job specifications and descriptions that I may have?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Who do you know that I should talk with next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?