

Informational Interviews

Why

Informational interviewing is a way to gain real world information, meet people doing work in which you are interested, and start networking in professional situations where you do not presently have contacts. This is a skill that must be done correctly in order to reap the most benefits. This is not about immediate results, but about making future contacts.

What

Find people by using common contacts (relatives/friends/professors) or situations (i.e. school/clubs/organizations), or through social media (LinkedIn, etc.), and ask them questions about their experiences. Email or call the person you'd like to meet. **Do not ask for a job.** Though best done face-to-face and at a person's workplace, informational interviewing can also take place by phone when distance makes an in-person meeting impractical. Focus your attention on the person you are interviewing, not on yourself – this is not a conversation, but an interview. **Do not ask for a job.** Bring your resume but do not offer it. Dress nicely but not as though for a job interview, and **DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB.**

How

- **Practice** on a friend first. They might initially roll their eyes at your request but everyone enjoys talking about themselves to a sincere, intelligent listener. That sincerity/intelligence is the gift you give to the interviewee.
- Find a **commonality** with your chosen contact. Is it UMass? Uncle Joe? Professor Dwight? The more important the connection is to the interviewee, the more likely they will be willing to meet with you. **Don't ask for a job.**
- Do **background research** (electronic stalking): This allows you to ask focused questions. Read up on the field and browse the website of the organization where your contact works. Dress in their everyday wear; carry a folder with your resume, questions for them, and notepaper. Informational meetings are fairly short (15-20 minutes).

Initial Contact Example

Develop a 10 second sound bite to introduce yourself in person or on the phone. Example: "Hello, Joe Serra suggested I contact you. My name is Dana Brown, I'm a University of Massachusetts Amherst junior majoring in History, and I wonder if I could have 15 minutes at your convenience to ask you about your experience as a policy maker in Washington." If sending an email, use only your contact's name in the subject line ("Joe Serra suggested I contact you.").

Sample Questions for Informational Interviews

- Would you describe a typical day or week? Does your work change during the year?
- What do you like best about your job and/or field? Least?
- How did you learn how to do your work? On the job? At a previous job? Formal training? If you were starting out in your field now, would you train in the same way?
- What makes someone successful in your work? (Listen carefully for the skill-based words in their answer. You'll need those terms for your resume).
- As you look back on your experiences, is there anything you wish you'd known? Anything you would do differently?
- Which graduate programs do you like to see on the resumes of job applicants?
- Do people in your field belong to professional associations or organizations? Is there a local chapter? Do you think it would make sense for me to attend a meeting?
- What are some ways you keep current in your field? Do you have recommendations of what I should be reading?
- What advice do you have for someone starting out in this field?
- Can you suggest two or three other people I might contact? May I use your name if I contact them, just to explain how I got their name?

Keep Notes and Maintain Relationships

Collect notes on your conversations, suggestions the contacts made, the dates you sent **thank you notes** (probably short emails, preferably within 12 hours), and any follow-up actions you took. If you want to continue a relationship with a contact, it is up to you to maintain the connection by emailing, phoning or visiting periodically.