

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 right in order to reap worthwhile rewards. Finding contacts at a career fair is a great way to start.

How: Find people by using common contacts (people) or situations (i.e. schools, clubs, orgs) and ask questions about their experiences. Write, 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 – that's how you are able to get the other person's time and energy. **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.**

What to Do:

- Background Research: allows you to ask more focused questions. Read up on the field and browse the website of the organization where your contact works. Dress how that environment dresses everyday and practice your best professional etiquette. Most informational meetings are fairly short--15-20 minutes.
- Sound Byte: develop a 10 second sound byte to introduce yourself. Example: "Hello, my name is ___ and I'm a University of Massachusetts Amherst junior majoring in Public Health Policy. I'm interested in how government regulations affect health care issues such as stem cell research. I'd like to hear about your experience as a policy maker in Washington."

Sample Questions for Informational Interview:

- Can 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?
- If you were hiring, what graduate program would you like to see on your candidates' resumes?
- What makes someone successful in your work? (Listen carefully for the skill 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?
- 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?
- How do you keep current in your field?
- What should I be reading?
- What advice do you have for someone starting out?
- Do you have any job search strategies you'd like to share with me?
- 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 names?

Keep Notes and Maintain Relationships: collect notes on when your conversations took place, suggestions the contacts made, the dates you sent **thank you notes** (preferably within 24 hours), and any follow up actions you took. It is up to you to maintain the relationship by emailing or phoning periodically.