



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT CAN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW DO FOR ME?

Informational interviews give you an opportunity to gain a front-line perspective about career paths you are considering as well as an opportunity to expand your network of professional contacts.

Informational interviews are useful at several stages of your career search:

- ✦ If you're in the career exploration process, you can learn a lot from a professional. UCISO major sheets and the Libraries' Career Reference Collection can provide you with extensive background information on careers; in an informational interview, you can get frank advice about a profession or industry and clues about work environments that you will never read in a book or on a website.
- ✦ If you're searching for a job or internship, talking to professionals will help you expand your network. You can investigate a company or organization, get valuable advice about entering and advancing in an industry, and get ideas for locating contacts and job leads within the profession.

WHERE CAN I FIND SOMEONE TO INTERVIEW?

- ✦ Access the Kelley Alumni Group on LinkedIn to locate potential interviewees.
- ✦ Search for individuals using the IU Alumni Association's Alumni Directory. Contacting alums can make your "cold call" a little warmer because you have an IU connection. To access the directory, visit <http://alumni.indiana.edu> and follow the Alumni Directory sign-in link at the bottom of the page. You will be prompted to sign-up in order to receive Alumni Directory access which may take several days to be reviewed and completed. Once you have access, use the "Advanced Search" feature for the most search options.
- ✦ Locate someone to interview through family and friends, professors and academic advisors, and professional organizations. Interviews are easy to arrange; most people enjoy talking about themselves and their experiences.

HOW DO I INITIATE CONTACT?

Sending an email is often preferred, but you can also call. Introduce yourself as a college student, explain how you got the person's name, express your interest in his or her career field, and ask if you can meet for 30 minutes.

Dear Mr. Wilson,

My name is John and I am a sophomore studying Supply Chain and Operations Management at the Kelley School of Business. I located your name in the Kelley alumni group on LinkedIn and since I am seeking to learn more about careers in this field, I would like to meet with you to discuss your experience. Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
John B. Student

Most interviews are 20-30 minute workday meetings; you should rearrange your schedule to accommodate your interviewee. Although you can request a phone interview, meeting in person best prepares you for future professional interactions, lets you see their workplace, makes a more significant impression, and opens the door to a potential job shadow opportunity.

HOW DO I PREPARE?

Understand why it is you are requesting an informational interview. Scheduling an interview for information when you really want a job interview can sabotage the contact's trust in you. An informational interview is different from a job interview because YOU are in control. You get to ask the questions and drive the conversation. DO NOT show up unprepared or expect your contact to keep conversation going. Have some questions prepared to guide conversation.

Informational interviewing should not be a starting point for your career search. It should supplement what you have already learned. Visit the UCSO student help desk to obtain copies of Kelley major sheets, meet with your academic advisor to discuss degree requirements, and visit the Business/SPEA library or a UCSO career coach to learn about the Libraries' Career Reference Collection in order to research the nature of the career, the required education and training, and other basic facts.

Research the field, your interviewee, and the organization for which the person works. Prepare questions about his or her career path, industry, functional area, and the work he or she does. Don't waste your contact's time by asking them questions that can be answered with a simple internet search.

WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING THE INTERVIEW?

- ❖ Be sure to dress appropriately; if you have questions about the standard dress for the company/organization, feel free to ask when you arrange the interview.
- ❖ Arrive early and don't forget your list of questions. During the interview, listen carefully; the interviewee may answer one of the questions you had planned to ask later on.
- ❖ Observe the work environment, the people who work there, and their daily routine. Feel free to take notes and ask for a business card before you leave.
- ❖ Be sure that you don't jeopardize your contact's time and be respectful of their time constraints. If you said 15 minutes, keep the conversation to 15 minutes. They will let you know if they have more time to give.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE INTERVIEW?

Always send a thank you letter within a few days of the interview. Thank you letters are more than polite protocol. They are essential for maintaining contact with people who have assisted you. Gently remind interviewees who you are and when you met. Thank them for their time and mention aspects of the interview that were particularly helpful. Remember, they can continue to serve as a resource throughout your career. Many students find it helpful to create a system (e.g., an Excel file) to track their contacts, follow-ups, and thank you letters.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:

ORGANIZATION & DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT TRENDS

- How would you describe the overall mission and goals of your organization?
- What are the challenges facing the department?
- What are the key strategic initiatives?
- What priority projects or services have been identified?
- What are the core activities and services of this department?
- How would you describe internal or external clients? What is important to them? Where do you see growth or change occurring in the organization?

JOB ROLES OVERVIEW

- What skills and knowledge are most critical in this organization?
- What personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this department?
- What are some typical job roles in this department? Entry? Mid-Level? Senior roles?
- What job roles would utilize skills in marketing, presentation, data analysis, negotiating, etc.? What do you see as opportunities for growth and development?

STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

- What is the management style in this organization?
- How are decisions made? Do people feel included in the process?
- Is there a dress code?
- What is a typical day like?
- What are normal work hours?
- Do people work long hours? Is there flexibility? Do people take vacations?
- How does your use of time vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How would you describe the pace and cycle of work in this area?
- Are the time demands of your job specific to this department or would anyone in this career be expected to work similar hours?
- What factors would most improve your capacity to provide quality service to your organization?
- I have built a target list of organizations in this field to research. Would you be willing to look at my list and give me any suggestions you might have?

CAREER FIELD AND PROFESSION

CAREER PATH AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

- What are typical job roles available in this profession? Entry? Mid-Career? Late Career?
- What are typical career paths in this field?
- What experiences, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What did you do to make yourself marketable?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- Is the field growing? If so, in what areas? What are the biggest challenges facing this field?
- What trends would likely affect someone just entering this profession? At mid-career?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
- What changes in demand have you seen in the profession?
- Where do you see the growth opportunities for the profession?
- How does this career affect your lifestyle and work/family balance?
- How can I learn more about the field? Are there any journals, publications, professional associations, workshops, seminars, conferences, etc. associated with this field?
- What special advice would you give a person entering this field? At mid-career? Late career?
- What do you wish you had known about this field or organization before you entered it?

CAREER FIELD AND PROFESSION continued on next page →

SUCCESS FACTORS

- What are the characteristics and competencies of people who are successful in this field?
- What does it take to be successful in this type of career?
- What does it take to succeed in this field, department, division, role?
- What type of person is best suited to the work in this area?
- What specific functional or technical knowledge is critical to this work?
- What sacrifices may be necessary to be successful?

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND SKILLS

- What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in this job? How did you learn these skills?
- What are the educational requirements for this position or field? Is graduate school recommended?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important for success in this field, organization, or position?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What kind of background or training is desirable for this work? Are there certain classes or training programs you would recommend?
- What degree or certification do employers look for?

COMPENSATION

- What are the typical salary ranges in this profession? Entry? Mid-level? Senior level?
- Aside from such tangible compensation as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc., what kinds of satisfaction and rewards does this profession yield?

PERSON AND POSITION

INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION

- What is your background (both academic and professional)?
- How did your background lead you to this position?
- How did you become interested in this type of work and how did you get your present job?
- How long have you worked in this field?
- What is the most challenging/rewarding aspect of your work/career?

JOB CHARACTERISTICS

- How would you describe your day-to-day responsibilities?
- What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of this job role?
- What kinds of problems and challenges do you face in this role?
- What constraints, such as time and funding, make the job more challenging?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- Describe some of the toughest situations you have faced in this job.
- To what extent do you interact with customers/clients?
- With which other departments, functional units, or levels of the hierarchy do you regularly interact?
- How much flexibility do you have in determining how you perform your job?
- Can you manage your own workflow, or does the nature of your work dictate the pace?
- Do you work individually or predominantly in groups or teams?
- How are work teams or groups organized?
- What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? Least satisfying? Is multi-tasking a skill that is required for this job?
- What projects have you worked on that have been particularly interesting?

REFERRAL AND SUGGESTIONS

- Are there other departments or organizations that you would recommend as part of my research?
- Can you suggest others that I might contact? May I use your name?
- Based on my interests, are there professional organizations that you would recommend?