

Informational Interviews

When used for career development purposes, an informational interview will provide you with an opportunity to speak with a professional who shares similar career interests with you, in order to gain career information and advice.

RESEARCH THE PROFESSIONAL YOU WANT TO CONTACT

When you identify a professional you plan to contact, prior research will help you formulate questions that you will want to ask. Being prepared for your informational interview will also ensure that you present yourself as a career oriented and motivated student.

- Research their career field and job title
- Visit their company website

MAKING THE INITIAL CONTACT

WRITE AN EMAIL

In general, people feel most comfortable writing to their contact to request an appointment for an informational interview. This gives the contact person a point of reference for your later phone call/meeting and will help you to be perceived as businesslike and professional.

If you contact people by email, you must maintain the same high standards of grammar and punctuation as you would in any business correspondence. Your email should tell the person who you are, where you got their name, what you want (Career information and advice – *never* ask for a job or internship) and when you will call.

CALL DIRECTLY

If you would like to call without sending a letter, you will be making essentially the same request, but will need to ask if they would be willing to speak with you either in person, or at an agreed upon time. (Note: it is best to assume that they are not available to speak at the time of your initial phone call)

When setting up the appointment, bear in mind that you are asking busy people to give up time to talk to you. Be as flexible as you reasonably can be as to time/date/location of the meeting. Also, be prepared for interruptions and last-minute rescheduling.

MEETING WITH A PROFESSIONAL

Even though meeting with a networking contact is not the same as an interview, it is best to treat the meeting in a similar manner. Be sure to:

- Confirm your meeting a few days in advance and arrive on time
- Dress and act professionally
- Bring your resume for feedback, if appropriate
- Takes notes, but be sure to ask permission to do so first
- Ask for a business card if available - be sure to get their address so you can send a thank you note

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Questions asked during an informational interview will vary according to your career interests, the industry, and the specific background of the alumnus. Informational interview questions generally fall into 3 categories – questions concerning the individual, questions about the organization, industry or profession and questions about your match to the career field and suggested follow-up.

In addition to the general questions below, be sure to develop questions specific to the alum's career field, industry and employer.

Questions about the Individual:

- How did you get into this field and how did you decide this was the kind of work you wanted to do?
- What was your educational background and how has it helped or hindered you?
- What are your responsibilities and what do you do during a typical day or week?
- What skills, talents and traits are useful and necessary to do your job?
- What are the satisfactions and challenges of your work?
- What do you like best and/or least about your career field?
- What's the typical career progression in this field/what options might your position and background lead to?

Questions about the Organization/Industry or Profession:

- How would you characterize this organization as an employer?
- What are the goals of your department within the organizational structure?
- What are the requirements/skills sets for entry jobs?
- What's the current demand for people in your field? Geographic considerations?
- How is the market for entry level opportunities?
- What salary range might one expect at an entry vs. experienced level?
- What forces or trends do you see currently affecting your job or industry; future trends?
- What are the best sources for learning more about your career field, organization, and/or industry?

Questions Regarding your Match and Action Steps:

Ask for the person's feedback on your background and "match" to the field. Summarize some of the major points that were discussed and how you feel you meet the entry qualifications. Share your resume and/or highlight your strengths and achievements:

- Can I give you a brief summary of my background?
- Have I developed the qualities, skills, and experiences that are important in this field?
- Where would you see someone with my background and strengths fitting in?
- What should I do to improve my qualifications?
- What suggestions do you have to gain experience?
- Does your organization or others that you know of offer internships or summer positions?
- If so, how would you suggest I follow-up?
- What suggestion do you have for identification and follow-up on entry full time opportunities?
- Are there other professionals or organizations that you suggest I contact?
- In contacting other people, is it okay for me to say that you referred me?

THANK YOU

- Thank the alum and let the alum know the discussion has been extremely helpful
- Always send a hard copy or email **thank you** note after receiving assistance
- Follow-up on any advice that was given – send a resume for his/her review, follow-up on any suggestions that were made, etc.
- Keep in touch with your contact(s) to let him/her know about your progress, and/or seek advice, as appropriate.

SAMPLE EMAIL

From: jstudent08@providence.edu (your providence email address is suggested)
Sent: February 15, 2007 10:35 AM
To: suealum@xyzemployer.com
Subject: PC Student Seeking Career Assistance

Dear Susan:

As a current Providence College junior majoring in History and Business Studies, I am exploring future career options and would like to speak with you to gain your insight and advice on careers related to Sales and Marketing (*reflect the alum's field here*).

Based on my interest in your field, I was excited to find your name listed in FriarLink (the PC alumni-student career network) as an alumnus willing to provide career advice and networking help. At your convenience, I would be very interested in setting up a brief telephone appointment or a workplace meeting to learn more about your field and strategies to prepare for, and enter the field.

Although I recognize that you are a very busy professional, I am hopeful that we might be able to connect to further discuss this request. Please feel free to respond to this email, or call me at the cell phone number below (*be sure you have an appropriate cell message!*). Should you prefer that I contact you by phone at work or home, please advise me and I will be happy to follow-up.

Thank you in advance for your assistance!

Sincerely,
Joe Student '09
(203) 111-1234