

Informational Interviewing

What is it?

Informational interviews are short, pre-planned conversations that you initiate with people employed in your field of interest in order to obtain:

- Specific information about possible career paths
- Advice about résumés or job search strategies
- Networking or job leads

Why do it?

Informational interviewing allows you to gain insight into a specific career field from a person who has personal knowledge of it and who can share his or her knowledge with you at no risk to themselves. Because you determine the direction and pace of the interaction, you are able to present a focused, clear image of yourself, and because no job is on the line, you can project confidence.

Before you reach out:

- Identify clear objectives and realistic expectations of the conversation.
- Do background research to learn as much as possible about the field you'll be discussing. O*Net (www.onetonline.org) is a great place to do this.
- Prepare questions based on what you really want to know and based on what you have learned through your research.
- Identify possible individuals to contact.

Set up the conversation:

- Ask for a meeting with specific time limit (usually 15 - 20 minutes)
- Make your goals clear: "I would like to ask you about..."
- Be prepared to talk at when you make first contact if they have time, or to suggest other possible times and/ or locations.
- Be flexible!

NOTE: Asking your contact for advice is great! However, don't ask for a job or internship in an informational interview. Make it clear right away that that is not your purpose in contacting them.

During the interview:

- Remind the contact of the promised time limit: "Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. As I mentioned, I'll only keep you for 15 minutes."
- Ask permission beforehand if you plan to take notes or record the person.
- Ask questions you have prepared, but be ready to change your focus if he or she steers it in other related directions.
- After a sentence or two off-topic, it is appropriate to gently bring the conversation back to your questions.
- Be sure to follow-up with a specific question if you need more information or if something is unclear.
- If necessary when approaching the end of your time limit, point out the time and ask if it is okay to ask a few more questions (but keep them brief).
- If appropriate, ask for suggestions of other people to contact (and for a way to contact them).
- Ask permission to use this contact's name with future contacts and for an address for follow-up.
- Thank the person you have interviewed.

After the interview:

- Enter details into a contact log so you can keep track of the people you have reached.
- Write a thank you note.
- Follow up to let them know if something comes of their advice!

Courtesy is key

Express your appreciation. Even if alumni contacts are not in a position to offer you a job or internship, they may be in contact with someone who can. Keep them updated on your progress; they are genuinely interested in helping Hanover students and fellow alumni.

(See reverse side for possible questions.)

Possible questions to ask

About the job:

- What is a typical day like?
- How well does the job satisfy [my work values] (e.g. need for independence or guidance, variety or predictability, challenge, flexibility, etc.)?
- What would you change about your job? Have there been any special problems? Special satisfactions?
- What are the hours, overtime requirements, working conditions, etc.?
- What is the employment outlook? What about job security?
- What opportunities for advancement are there? What is the pay range in this region?
- Are there international opportunities in this field?

About the consultant:

- What was your first job after graduation?
- What has your career path been? Has it been typical for the field?
- Did your major help you with your career?
- If you were starting over, what would you do differently?

Planning a strategy:

- How do I find jobs in this field? Where are openings listed?
- Are internships available?
- Is prior work experience necessary?
- How might I get related experience?
- How much education and training are required? Do you need a particular major?



Informational Interviewing:

Tips to Connect
with Alumni