



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

An informational interview is a conversation between a person (like you) who is interested in a particular occupation or field and someone who already works in that type of work or knows a lot about the field. The length of the meeting may vary, but a reasonable amount of time to request is 20 to 30 minutes. Remember, you're not asking for a job. You are just gathering information which will help you decide if this type of career fits your interests, values and personality.

Specifically, the interview can help you:

- Learn more about the realities of working in a particular occupation;
- Decide among different occupations or choose a specialty within an occupational field;
- Fine tune career goals;
- Discover careers you never knew existed;
- Uncover your personal strengths and challenges;
- Learn different ways to prepare for a career;
- Provide an inside look at an organization in which you might like to work;
- Polish your communication skills and receive feedback *before* the high-pressure job interview.

SOUND SCARY? Ask yourself this: "Would I be willing to be interviewed by someone considering a job like one I've had in the past?" If the answer is "yes", why wouldn't someone else help you?

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Step 1. Decide which occupations interest you.

- Check out the job information resources in the Century College Counseling Center, Room 2410 West.
- Take one or more of the many career tests available to you at a nominal cost through the Counseling Center.
- Make an appointment with a Century College Counselor to help you in your search.

Step 2. Identify a person or persons, or an organization to interview.

- Think about people you know or know of who work in jobs that seem interesting and challenging to you. It may be someone you know well, or someone you've only seen on an occasional basis.

- Ask friends, relatives, co-workers, teachers or counselors if they know of any contact people in your fields of interest. Be sure to ask how you might get in touch with these people (better yet, ask the person who knows them to contact them on your behalf!)
- Contact companies or organizations that employ people in jobs you think you'd like.

Step 3. Contact the person by phone, letter, or e-mail. (See sample phone script, letter and e-mail below.)

- Make it clear you are looking for *information, not a job!*
- If someone referred you to this person, mention the referral source by name. This adds credibility to your request for the interview. People are usually more willing to speak with someone with whom they have a connection; a mutual friend or acquaintance can be that connection.
- If you are sending a letter, this gives your contacts the chance to check their schedules before responding to you.
- If you call – which is faster, but often more stressful – mention right away how you got the person's name. Then, get right to the point of your call. (Many experts suggest practicing once or twice before making the call.)
- Be prepared to meet resistance! Reassure the person that you are only exploring careers and not looking for a job. Try to balance your request: don't be too forceful, but make your request sincere. If a face-to-face interview is denied, request a phone interview, either at that time or at a time when the person to whom you are speaking has an opening.

Step 4. Preparing to Interview

- Research the company or organization so you have an idea how to formulate your questions. Websites or company literature can give you fast, concise information. More in-depth material can be found in a company's annual reports or in trade magazines and journals.
- Create a resume to share during your interview. Although you are not seeking employment, your own information can give you more to talk about with your new contact. And who knows? What you've already done in your life might impress this person more than you expect! (Some say not to bring a resume, since you haven't decided what field to pursue. A possible compromise might be to have the resume with you but ask before producing it!) Check the "Resume" section in the "Marketing Yourself and Finding a Job" area of the CareerPlan.

Step 5. Develop questions

- Composing and writing down the questions you want to ask is critical! Informational interviews should be relaxed and informal, but they also need to be focused and organized for you to get the best information in a reasonable amount of time.
- Ways to formulate questions might include:
 - What do you want in a job?
 - What preconceived ideas do you have about the job?
 - What can you find out about specific job tasks, working conditions and career preparation?

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW SHEET
(Duplicate and take with you to the interview.)

NAME OF COMPANY: _____ **DATE:** _____

TYPE OF COMPANY: _____

CONTACT PERSON: _____
PHONE: _____

Questions about the Job

1. What kinds of tasks do you do on a typical day or in a typical week?
2. What types of tasks do you spend most of your time doing?
3. What excites you most about this job?
4. What are some difficult or frustrating parts of this career?
5. I really like doing _____. Do you do that type of work in this career?
6. What characteristics does a person in this job need to have?
7. Do you usually work independently or as part of a team?
8. What types of decisions do you make?
9. How does your work fit in to the mission of the organization?
10. What types of advancement opportunities are available for an entry-level worker in this area?
11. I read that _____ is an issue in this occupation. Have you found that to be true?
12. Is this career changing? How?

Questions about working conditions:

1. What kind of hours do you work?
2. Is your schedule flexible or set?

3. Are those hours typical for most jobs in this occupation, or do some types of jobs have different hours?
4. Does this career include or require travel?
5. Do you have any health concerns associated with your career?
6. How does this career affect your life style?

Questions about training:

1. How did you prepare for this career?
2. How did you find this job?
3. Do you have any advice on how people interested in this career should prepare?
4. What type of entry-level job offers the most learning opportunities?

Questions about other careers and contacts:

1. Do you know of any similar careers that also use _____ or involve _____?
2. I know that people in this career specialize in _____ and _____. Do you know of any other specialties?
3. I think I really like the career. But do you know of similar jobs that do not have this _____ characteristic?

NOTES:

INTERVIEW DAY: WHAT TO WEAR, WHAT TO DO:

1. **Dress well.** Dress how the person you are interviewing would dress on an important workday.
2. **Be professional.** Arrive on time, but no more than 15 minutes early.
3. **Be friendly.** Smile and shake hands. Do not use first names unless invited to do so. No slang, tobacco or chewing gum! Be comfortable without being sloppy.
4. **Lead the interview.** Mention your goals and interest and then listen. You are there to learn.
5. **Watch your time.** Be mindful of your host's time and bring the interview to a close at the appointed time, unless you are invited to continue.
6. **Say thanks.** Shake hands at the end of the interview and show your appreciation.
7. **Say thanks again. It is very important to send a thank-you note to your host, the sooner the better!**

SUMMARY:

1. Briefly record your thoughts and feelings about the workplace and the person you just visited.
2. What did you learn in the interview?
3. What did you like? What didn't you like?
4. Did you uncover concerns or advantages to this occupation?
5. What advice did you receive?
6. Did you discover another occupation to explore?
7. How was the work environment?
8. Do you think you would be happy in this occupation?

SOME FINAL TIPS:

1. Don't base your entire career decision on one interview, one company or one person. You need at least five interviews to really get a good picture.
2. Consider getting further involved with job shadowing, internships and volunteer work.

REMEMBER: EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION MEANS A BETTER-FITTING CAREER LATER!