

Informational Interviewing Tip Sheet

An informational interview is a low stress **in-person** conversation to help you make informed decisions about your career. **Never directly ask for a job during an Informational Interview.** The focus of the interview is on gathering information, advice and referrals. It is meant to accomplish all or some of the following:

- Explore and gather information about areas of the company (or market) which may be of interest to you
- Ask for advice, suggestions and guidance in your exploration process
- Inform your contact of your interests, abilities and qualifications
- Obtain feedback on your resume
- Gather one or more referrals to others who might be willing to talk with you
- Be remembered for future opportunities

Steps to conduct an informational interview

1. Send an email as your first point of contact. It's less intrusive. Below is a generic template you can revise and modify to fit your needs.

Subject line: Referred by Joe Smith

Bob,

Joe Smith suggested I contact you. I am in the process of exploring different areas of the company which interest me and would like to learn more about your organization. My expertise and interests are in _____ so I'm targeting my efforts in this area.

I am **not** looking for a job. I am just gathering information and would like to learn about your particular area, what you do, and your advice, suggestions, or guidance.

I'm wondering if you would be open to a short conversation in the next few weeks? If so, when would be a convenient time?

Thank you in advance.
Regards,

(Your name)

Tips on your email:

- Do not enclose your resume
- If you don't have a personal referral, begin with something like: "I am contacting you because of your experience/work in _____."
- Emphasize the fact that you are **not** asking for a job (asking for a job presents an obligation for help that they most likely cannot provide and is the surest way close the doors on your request for a conversation)
- Always offer to meet the person on their terms, preferably in-person.

2. Prepare for the Interview. Before the interview, take time to prepare some questions for your interviewee. Below are some sample questions for your consideration. Always prioritize your questions since you won't likely have time to ask all of them.

- Would you be willing to look over my resume? Perhaps you could make suggestions for improving it? (Optional; this depends upon your intention of this interview. For example, if you are completely uninterested in what you learned and realize this kind of work is NOT what you want to do, then you probably wouldn't give the person your resume for feedback. On the other hand, if you are very interested in the work, by all means ask the question.
- What are the most interesting aspects of your work?
- What are the least interesting?
- What was your career path in getting to this position?
- Can you give me an example of the kinds of projects you work on?
- How does this group fit into the larger organization?
- What trends do you see coming down the pike? (Is the organization/work/skill area positioned to expand, merge with another, or shrink?)
- In your view, are job prospects good, stable or competitive?
- What skills and abilities are most important?
- What's involved in (insert skill area or job title/position here) in terms of regular tasks and activities?
- What kinds of interactions with others are expected or necessary in performing the job? (For example: Is there a lot of coordination across teams or does most of the interaction stay within one team?)
- What is the work environment like in terms of pressure, deadlines, routines, new activities, etc?
- How much of your time is spent at the computer, meetings, coordinating with others?

3. At the interview:

- Remind them of why you asked for the meeting.
- Ask them if it's OK to take notes but don't let it interfere with the flow of the conversation.
- Listen, listen and listen! You are there to gather information. Let them do most of the talking. If they ask you about yourself, be very concise about your experience, your strengths and what kind of work you like. Then direct the conversation back to them.
- Pay attention to how you are feeling. For example; Are you feeling bored and can hardly wait to get out of the meeting? Are you so interested about the conversation that time just flies right by? This will help inform your decision making process.

4. At the end of the interview, always cover these 3 points:

- Is there anything else that would be important for me to know?
- Do you know others like yourself who would be willing to provide me with additional information?
- Thank them for their time and willingness to help you!

5. After the interview:

- Immediately After: Add to the notes that you took during the interview (if you were able to take notes; or now take the time to make notes). Recall the conversation and what mattered to you the most from what was discussed. This important later.
- Always send a thank you note within a few days after your information interview. Keep it short and concise and express your appreciation for their time and assistance. You

may also ask if he or she hears of any opportunities for someone with your qualifications, to please keep you in mind.

- Most people will want to know of your progress, if you contacted their referrals, etc. Make sure you let them know these things and also any successes you achieve.
- Stay in contact from time to time even after you achieve your objective or get a new position. You've built a network, now it's important to maintain it for the future.
- Look over the notes you have, this is the time for you to really consider if this is the direction you want to head in; ask yourself: Is this kind of work the right fit for me? Do I need more information? Is this a field that I am interested in but maybe a different role than the person I met with? Consider your thoughts at this point as information to either re-direct your path or confirm that you are heading in the right direction.

6. Continue the informational interviewing process and build your network.