

Informational Interviewing

An informational interview is a meeting initiated by you. The purpose is to obtain information about a position, an organization, or an industry. This information can then help you in making a career decision, or in seeking a position. It is an important tool in the networking process. However, it is not a job interview.

How do I find someone to interview?

- **Network.** Consider faculty, friends, family, fraternity/sorority contacts, co-workers, former co-workers, supervisors, and classmates -- if they themselves can't help you, maybe they know someone who can!
- **Professional Associations.** Become involved with professional associations in your field. Consider attending conferences, workshops or seminars.
- **Publications.** Journals or newsletters that relate to your interests may mention names of visible people in the field.
- **Alumni.** Contact the regional RAA Club Presidents to identify alumni living in geographic areas that interest you.

The Interview

Each time you have an interview, be sure to ask, "Is there anyone else with whom you think I should speak?"

Pre-Interview Preparation

Think about what you want to know about this field or organization. Conduct research prior to the meeting so you can use the interview for questions that cannot be easily answered elsewhere. Develop a list of open-ended questions that will give the person a chance to talk about his or her job. Avoid "yes-no" questions such as, "Do you like this line of work?" Use the following list of possible questions as a guideline. Choose your questions carefully since you have limited time.

How Do I Make Contact?

If you already know the person, then it is acceptable to make first contact via telephone. For instance: "Hi Mr. Smith. As you know, I am a senior at Rensselaer and am considering looking for a position in finance. Would you have a half hour to speak to me about what you do and to give me some recommendations on how to begin my search?"

If you do not know the person, it is best to send an introductory letter first, then follow up with a phone call.

Use this simple letter as a guide:

*Your Address
City, State Zip
Date*

*Name of Person
Title
Organization Name
Address
City, State Zip*

Dear _____:

Explain who you are, why you are writing, and a short description of your work and educational history.

Request a meeting of about thirty minutes to allow time for topics such as educational preparation, responsibilities, organizational culture, lifestyle and career path.

Give the day that you will telephone him or her to schedule a time that is convenient for both of you. Express appreciation for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Your Full Name Typed

If you make contact via e-mail, you can write a note similar to the sample letter. Because of the limitations of this type of communication, it would be best to introduce yourself via e-mail and then ask the contact person would be willing to talk by phone or in person.

Possible Open-Ended Questions...

Information About the Field: What do you like and dislike most about what you do? What are the essential skills for effectiveness in this job? Describe a typical work day, week, or year.

What are some possible career paths in this field?

What are the current issues in your field? Are the jobs in this field concentrated in certain geographic areas?

How much work do you take home? How many hours do you work each week? How much do you travel?

How often and for how long? What are some of the toughest situations you have encountered in your job?

How much flexibility do you have in your dress, hours, vacation, place of residence, etc.?

Information on Preparation: Are there certain courses that I should take if I plan on entering this type of work? How did you enter this field? What do you look for when making hiring decisions? What are the qualifications needed to enter this field? How well suited is my background for this type of work?

Advice: What kinds of job hunting strategies would you suggest to enter this field? What do you wish you had known before you entered this field? Are there any professional organizations and journals you would recommend? Is there anyone else with whom I should speak for additional information? If I am unable to secure a position in this field, what related fields would you recommend?

The Interview Itself...

When interviewing in person, dress professionally, as you would for a job interview. If conducting the interview by phone, be sure to set a specific time to call. Present yourself on time. State why you requested the meeting/phone call. You are the person conducting

the interview, so be prepared with your list of questions. Show your interest and enthusiasm. Communicate the importance of this meeting in both your verbal and non-verbal behavior. Remember that your purpose is to interview and learn from a professional. The information will help you investigate and explore careers. **An informational interview is not an appropriate time to ask for a job.** You may consider asking the professional to look at your resume to offer feedback. Take responsibility to keep to the time you mentioned in your letter or over the phone. Stay longer only if invited by the person you are interviewing.

Before leaving, ask if the professional knows someone else you might speak to about the field or job. Thank the person for his or her time.

After the Interview...

- Keep an accurate record of interviews. Be sure to keep copies of correspondence.
- Write a thank you note after each interview. Mention one or two things that you learned at the meeting.
- Be sure to follow through on any additional leads or contacts you are given. Keep your original contact informed of the results.
- Analyze the information you obtained from the interview.

Ask Yourself...

- Did I get answers to questions I need to clarify?
- What did I leave out? Has the interview changed my mind about this occupation, firm or industry?
- Do I need to see more people to get a more objective plan?
- What characteristics did this successful person have that I should develop?
- Did I find out how to get the job I want?
- What new strategies can I use that I have neglected so far?