

Information Interviews

The Benefits of Information Interviewing

The information interview is an indispensable tool in your search for career related information. It can help to:

- Get a reality check about what a career actually entails and decide whether it is an occupation that suits you.
- Gain insider tips regarding what courses to take, what experience to get, and how to market yourself when actively searching for similar positions.
- Develop knowledge of the industry, recent trends and developments, and jargon.
- Build new contacts in your field of interest.
- Develop communication skills and confidence in meeting and talking with new people.

First Things First

Information interviewing is NOT interviewing for a job. It is first and foremost a research tool — a way for you to find useful and specific information that you could not find in books or on the Internet. General information on the company and the occupational area will help structure what questions you'd like to ask, helping you get the most specific information as possible. It is crucial that you do preliminary research before your meeting as the interviewee will NOT be impressed if you waste their time asking questions that you could have easily answered elsewhere. Making a good impression is key because the contacts you make at this stage may later lead to paid work in the area. (Most contacts will not expect you to know everything about their company or occupation).

Occupational and Industry Research

Find out as much as you can about the career area and related associations, conferences and/or trade fairs and anything else that might affect the industry (such as political decisions and economic factors). A good place to start is with the occupational binders located in the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC) Career Resource Library. For additional tips and resources, pick up a copy of the *Career Research* tipsheet at the AA&CC (Room AC213).

Company Research

Your contact will be impressed if you have taken the time to investigate their organization. Researching a company in order to prepare yourself for an interview involves gathering both specific information and general information about such things as the company's organizational structure, or what specific occupations are represented in the organization. Pick up a copy of the *Company Research* tipsheet available in the Career Resource Library for advice and resources.

What to Ask

The easiest way to approach this stage is to write down brief points that you want information on. These points/ideas are mainly concerned with what general information you would like the contact to address such as: "What interested you about this field?" and "What did you study?" This research is invaluable because you have the balance of control and your interviewees will expect you to let them know what you want.

The next step in this stage is to narrow the focus of your questions. This is necessary as some contacts have a very limited amount of time when they are free to speak to you. Incorporate some of your research into your questions to structure your questions so that you get a more detailed answer. Ask open ended questions, not ones that will elicit simply a yes or no. Do not ask questions that are inappropriate, or are not career related. Finally, make sure you have a legible copy of what questions you want answered at the interview!

Sample Questions

1. How did you get into this field? What is your educational background? What was your career path?
2. How did you get your job? Do you know other areas in this field? What are typical entry level positions?
3. Are there any courses/types of jobs/volunteer positions you would recommend as preparation for this field?
4. Do you think this field is expanding/stable? Are there significant changes you can foresee regarding this industry?
5. Can you give me a description of a typical day? What are the challenges and rewards of your position?
6. What skills/qualities do I need to be successful?
7. Are there associations in the field to contact or professional journals that you subscribe to?
8. Whom else might I talk to for more information?

Finding Contacts

How do you find people who will talk to you? Ask around! "Do you know anyone who is working in my field of interest who might speak with me?" This is often called networking and it will be one of the most important steps of your job search when you get to that stage. The following are other sources of potential contacts (for details ask at the AA&CC Resource Desk).

- **Professors, Friends, Family and Neighbours.** You could be surprised by who they know!
- **The Career Centre's Extern Job Shadowing Program.** Shadow someone working in a career area for up to a week.
- **Networking Binder.** Professional contacts who will meet with students.
- **Related Associations and Company Directories.** These resources are available in the Career Resource Library.
- **Professional Trade Journals and Newspapers.**

Arranging the Interview

When calling your contact, explain that you are preparing to make some career decisions by researching potential occupations. Remember, although you are not involved in an employment interview, you will, nonetheless, leave an impression with the person to whom you speak. A good impression will be left if you are courteous, prepared and informed.

What to Do If You're Nervous

Many people feel shy about doing interviews, or even talking to a potential contact over the phone. Here are some ideas: practice interviewing someone you know; have a friend read over your questions; ask for suggestions from parents, family and friends; set up an appointment to meet with a Career Counsellor. While it is more formal than a regular conversation, it is not as formal as a job interview; most people enjoy talking about their careers and are eager to help!

Things to Keep in Mind

- Pay attention to the conversation length; some employers are busy, and can only talk for a specific amount of time.
- Try and pay as close attention as possible.
- Thank the contact for their time.
- Do not be disrespectful on the phone; keep in mind time constraints when deciding how many questions to ask.
- Do not ask to submit a résumé; the purpose is to gain information. If the employer requests it, you can provide one.

Useful Web Resources

Information Interviewing Tutorial — Quintessential Careers. www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing

Information Interviews — Federal Government. www.jobsetc.gc.ca/pieces.jsp?category_id=420&lang=e

University of Toronto (UoT) Career Centre Weblinks — Finding Jobs & Employment.

<http://www.careers.utoronto.ca/weblinks/libweblink.aspx?tr=>