

Information Interviews

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WHAT IS AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Opportunity to get information about a field of work from someone who has some first-hand knowledge.

Opportunity to learn about a particular career.

One way to start building a network.

Provides a non-threatening forum in which to get some practice of an interview.

What are the benefits of an information interview?

Allows you to determine whether the career, industry or company matches your skills, interests and expectations.

It allows you to build up a database of industry contacts that may be able to assist with future job hunting.

Confirms information that you have read and provides information not available in written form

Assists you in organising your future job search by revealing the best ways to get into the profession.

Provides you with tips and information about the job and career field that could be of great value in preparing applications for work and in a job interview.

Gives you an opportunity to see the organisation and its culture from the inside.

Who should you interview?

Someone who is knowledgeable about the field in which you are interested.

Ask friends, relatives, fellow students, your teachers, neighbours, alumni association if they know someone who works in your targeted field. Utilise the alumni search function on LinkedIn.

Aim to contact someone who has your "dream job."

How do you set up an interview?

If contacting someone you don't know: Telephone, or email the person you wish to interview well before the date the interview would take place. You could also contact them via LinkedIn if you cannot obtain an email address. Introduce yourself politely and explain who you are (e.g., a student from TU Dublin doing a research project, a person thinking of changing jobs). Mention how you found the person's name.

State the type of work you are interested in researching, the reason why, and the amount of time it would take to conduct the interview (usually 20 - 30 minutes). If the person is unable to meet with you, ask for a referral.

Thank the person for speaking with you and confirm the date, time and location of the interview. If that person cannot see you, state your appreciation for any referral names given to you.

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What do you need to know before the interview?

Search for information on the occupation – it is useful to know as much about your targeted career in order to get the most out of the interview.

Learn about the person you are interviewing. If your interviewee was referred to you by someone, ask that person about him or her. Also, see what you can find out by looking in local business journals, online and industry publications. For example, was the interviewee recently promoted or did he or she receive some special recognition?

Research that person's employer as well. Have they been in the news? You will be prepared for the interview and therefore make a good impression.

Potential questions to ask:

You should research your career of interest in order to ask intelligent questions. Was there something mentioned in the occupational information you didn't fully understand? The informational interview is a good forum to get that clarified. Here is a small sampling of questions you could ask:

What kinds of abilities, skills and personal qualities are required to do it successfully?

What qualifications are required?

Describe a typical day at work.

How many hours do you normally work in a week?

What do you see as the potential for growth in this field?

What can I do now to help me find employment in this field?

What is your level of freedom to solve problems and make significant decisions?

What are the negative aspects?

What prospects for advancement are there within the job?

How easy is it to develop your career elsewhere having worked in this type of job?

What changes are taking place in this kind of work?

How have advances in technology impacted on your work?

What advice would you give to anyone coming in to a job like this?

Tell me about your working conditions, e.g., physical, environmental, sensory, stress, e.g. what pressures are there, how does it affect your lifestyle, what demands does the job make outside normal working hours?

What specialist knowledge, skills, training, or experience did you have or do you need for this job?

Has the work changed recently due to technology, marketplace, competition, etc.?

What do you like least/most about your job?

How did you get into this line of work?

Who else, doing this same kind of work, would you recommend that I speak with?

How does your work contribute to the organisation's overall goals or mission?

Is there a clear "career path" in your field?

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What threats and opportunities would you see for this field of work in the future?

What is the salary for entry-level and more advanced positions in the field?

Through what media did you see your job advertised and what others would you recommend to find similar positions?

Can you suggest anyone else I can speak with about this field of work?

What selection procedures are used?

What's been the most difficult thing you have had to do as part of your work?

Preparation for the interview(s)

Prepare a target list of individuals to contact with addresses and telephone numbers.

Prepare a brief script for your call to arrange the information interview.

Be clear about your intentions when contacting the person you wish to interview. Explain that the information given is for your own personal use to help in your career planning.

If the person is too busy to have a face to face meeting with you ask if they will participate in a telephone interview at a time most convenient to them.

Remember to offer flexibility on the time and place of the meeting – sometimes potential interviewees will be happier to meet you outside of work hours and in a different location, convenient to you both.

What to do on the day

Dress appropriately – smart casual or formal is best.

Bring a copy of your interview questions with you, pen and notebook.

Arrive on time, keep the interview to the scheduled length, and remember proper etiquette.

Negotiate the amount of time it will take. Thirty minutes should be adequate.

Be friendly. Let the other person talk as much as possible by using open-ended questions, such as “What do you like about your job”, Open-ended questions begin with How, what why....

Do not bombard the person with questions. They should not feel they are being interrogated. Try to let the interview roam freely whilst trying to get all your questions answered. Although you may not get a response to every question, you may pick up even richer information on areas of interest.

Be prepared to ask questions. Be concise so as not to waste the person's time. Allow the person an opportunity to provide additional information.

Ask permission to take notes, or if you have the technology, tape record the interview, but only with prior permission.

Thank them for their time and ask if they can refer you to any other information sources or contacts that might prove useful.

If this is an organisation that you think you might seek work with in the future, leave a copy of your current CV with the interviewee before you depart.

After the event

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Please remember to send a thank you note to show your appreciation. The interviewee has taken time out of what is probably a very busy schedule to help you.

Keep accurate notes of the interview safely

Critically evaluate yourself in relation to the occupation:

What skills does the job require? Do you have those skills and what can you do to develop any that you may be missing?

Do you have the work experience necessary and if not how can you build on what you do have?

What education and training do you have that is necessary and how can you fill in any gaps?

What personal qualities are important – what physical and or personal qualities do you want to put to use?

Which of your interests would the job tap into?

Would the job satisfy your work values and needs including a minimum salary? If not, would you be prepared to try something similar anyway, to gain some valuable experience?

What future prospects are there for this type of work in a given geographical location.- where do you want to work?

What other demands would the job make, e.g. travel, long hours etc.? How would this job affect your circumstances e.g. domestic commitments, finances, lifestyle, etc.?

Would you enjoy this job?

Finally

It can be a good idea to interview a couple of people in your chosen area so that you get a good overview of opinions on the particular career.