

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

An informational interview is used to gain firsthand impressions about work in a specific field. It has a very different focus than a job interview: the goal here is to learn more about a position, company, or the industry in general. Informational interviews should be approached as a means of gathering information for your own career planning.

BENEFITS FROM INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- NETWORKING** Informational interviews give you a chance to connect with a professional in your career area of interest and learn from them. This also helps you expand your professional network for future opportunities.
- INTERVIEWING SKILLS** Informational interviews let you practice speaking about your skills and about the industry in general. You may get valuable feedback to help you with future interviews.
- INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE** By speaking with a professional in the industry, you will gain valuable insight that you may not otherwise find. You may gain information about what makes their company stand out, who the competitors are, industry trends and projections, etc.
- POSITION INFORMATION** Informational interviews allow you to find out the pros and cons of a position. How does this position contribute to the overall goals of the organization? What are some of the challenges? Having this information will give you more opportunities to point out how you are a great candidate during a job interview.
- BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT** By having interviews with many different people and different companies, you will get a sense of the range of possible work environments in the industry that will inform you of where you want to be.

PRACTICE YOUR APPROACH

Many people in the community are willing to talk and share their experiences with someone seeking to enter the career field. If you feel uncomfortable at the thought of setting up an Informational Interview, you can practice your approach with a friend, advisor, faculty member, mentor, Career Development, or an MCAD alum.

HOW TO SET UP THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

It is best to begin setting up informational interviews before you begin the job hunt or start sending out resumes. You can even do this before you have graduated. If you do not know anyone working in your area of interest, ask everyone you know for referrals.

When you set up the interview, be sure to explain that you would like to learn about the field and explore career options. Make it clear that your purpose is simply to gather information, and be specific about the kind of information you seek. Request a meeting in person so you can experience their working environment and be flexible about meeting times.

DURING AND AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It is important to follow interview etiquette even for an informational interview. This is your first impression of a new company, so be sure to be prepared, dress professionally, and be on time. Research the company and position ahead of time, so you are prepared with questions. You can jot down notes during the conversation or afterward to help you remember what was discussed.

Bring a copy of your resume and portfolio. Toward the end of the interview, ask the professional to take a look at your work and offer you some feedback about what you can change or improve on. This is another way of letting them know your skills and accomplishments without asking them for a job, as well as getting an insider's view on what to change. Remember to get a business card so you have the person's full contact info.

After the interview, it is important to send a brief thank you note or email and follow up on your visit and conversation. You may want to keep the person updated on your career decisions if you found them particularly helpful and would like to maintain a professional relationship.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What are the responsibilities for the position?
- What background is necessary for this position?
- What are the most important skills for this field?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- What do you like most/least about this job?
- How much creativity do you exercise in this position?
- What personal characteristics are helpful in this position?
- What are typical career paths for this position?
- What are the best ways to enter this field?
- Looking back, what would you have done differently regarding your career path?
- How would you characterize your working conditions (closely supervised, supportive management, high pressure, laid back, independent, etc.)? How does this compare to other industries?
- What are the exciting trends, changes, or controversies currently in this field?
- What are some things to avoid or be aware of when pursuing a career in this field?
- What is the typical starting salary range? How does this vary with setting?
- Can you suggest other people I could talk with? Could I use your name as a referral?
- May I add you to my network on LinkedIn?
- What advice would you give to me as I look to enter this field?