



2438 27th Avenue South, Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55406

MAIN 612.752.8100 | **FAX** 612.752.8101 | avivomn.org

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Informational Interviewing

Reasons for Conducting an Informational Interview

- Explore careers and clarify your career goal
- Expand your professional network
- Build confidence for your job interviews
- Access the most up-to-date career information
- Identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- Remember—you should not ask for nor expect a job offer!

Potential Results of an Informational Interview

You accomplish several things when you go out on informational interviews:

- You obtain a great deal of information about your career field and the skills needed to do that job effectively. You gain a perspective of work that goes beyond the limitations of job titles, allowing you to see not only what skills are required for the job but how you might fit into that work setting. Thus, you have greater flexibility in planning options.
- You have the opportunity to make personal contacts among management-level personnel.
- You gain insight into the hidden job market (employment opportunities that are not advertised).
- You become aware of the needs of the employers and the realities of employment.
- Informational interviewing is comparatively low-stress, so you gain confidence in talking with people while learning what you need to know.
- You are in control of the interview; you decide which questions to ask. Later, evaluate the acquired information for personal use.
- It is an opportunity to learn where you might fit into a particular organization.

Guidelines for an Informational Interviews

- Identify an occupation
- Identify people to interview
- Never ask for a job
- Prepare ahead of time

Scheduling the Interview

- Contact the resource person preferably by **telephone or email**.
- You can also try to have someone who knows the interviewer make the appointment for you.

Preparing for an Informational Interview

- Call to confirm your appointment with the contact person. If you have questions regarding the location of the contact's office, this is the time to ask.
- Arrive 10 minutes early for your interview.
- Carry a small notebook and pen.
- Be polite and professional.
- Refer to your list of prepared questions.
- Stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion.

Dressing Appropriately

- Be prepared to make a good impression and to be remembered by the employer
- Dress as you would for a regular job interview.

Be Prepared to Take Notes

- Be enthusiastic and show interest
- Employ an informal dialogue during the interview
- Be direct and concise with your questions and answers and do not ramble
- Have good eye contact and posture.
- Be positive in your remarks, and reflect a good sense of humor

Bring Your Resume

- Bring a copy of your resume along with you
- If you feel comfortable doing so, you may ask the person you are interviewing to critique your resume

Sharing Information

- Do not dominate the interview by talking about yourself
- Many informational interviews have turned into actual employment interviews. Don't count on it, but it does sometimes happen.
- If it seems that you are being interviewed for a specific job, clarify with the employer so you can make sure you emphasize your functional/ transferable skills and why you feel they relate to this job.

Be a Good Listener

- Listening is half of the communication
- Develop the skill of really listening to what they tell you. Be receptive and show that the information is important to you. You must listen to it and understand it

Ask for Referrals

- Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts.

Be sure to send a thank-you card or letter within one to three days after the interview!

Questions to Ask

- What is your job like?
 - A typical day?
 - What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
 - What kinds of problems do you deal with?
 - What kinds of decisions do you make?
 - What percentage of your time is spent doing what?

- How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- What are the various jobs in this field or organization?
- What do you like most about this company?
- Do you find your job exciting or boring? Why?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- Why do customers choose this company?
- Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
- How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web page, video conferencing, etc.)
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
 - What is the best way to enter this occupation?
 - What are the advancement opportunities?
 - What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What were the keys to your career advancement? How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training

program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?

- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- If your job progresses, as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
- What obligations does your employer place have on you outside of the ordinary workweek? What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?

- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
- How do you think graduation from a private (or public) university is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?