

## What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview provides you the opportunity to speak with someone working in a job, field or industry you are considering for your career. The premise is simple: If you really want to know what it is like to work in a specific job, field or industry, you should talk to someone actually working in that industry and get a first-hand perspective. However, please be aware that an informational interview should never be used to directly inquire about jobs/internships at your interviewee's place of employment.

## Why are Informational Interviews Important?

Informational interviews are great ways to get the inside scoop on the career paths you are considering, develop your network of professional contacts, and get advice that will help you make better career decisions. There are four primary objectives for informational interviews:

1. **To gather information** about a job or career area you are considering in order to make a sound decision as to whether or not you wish to pursue that career path;
2. **To seek advice** on how you can best prepare to enter or advance in this field/profession;
3. **To ask for assistance** entering or advancing in the field/profession; and
4. **To request referrals** to others in the field/profession that might be valuable contacts for your career search.

## How do I Set Up an Informational Interview?

**Step 1: Create a list of the types of jobs and careers you wish to explore.** Your interests, skills, and career goals should guide your list. Need help exploring what those are? Make an appointment with a career advisor or visit the Communication Career Services website for career search resources.

**Step 2: Identify potential interviewees.** Start by contacting your friends, family members, professors, parents of friends, etc. You can also locate potential interviewees on professional social media sites such as LinkedIn by joining relevant professional groups or using the LinkedIn alumni tool. Other sources to identify potential interviewees include industry directories, professional association and other industry-specific websites, professional association meetings, trade journals, conferences, panel discussions, guest speakers, and alumni directories.

**Step 3: Contact potential interviewees.** Make sure you are asking for something specific. Do not ask for too much time (ask for no more 30 minutes). Do not turn an informational interview into a job or internship interview. Remember, you are interviewing them; they are not interviewing you. Examples of how you might ask for an informational interview include:

- *I am a UT student who is trying to learn more about search engine marketing and search engine optimization because I hope to work in that field when I graduate. I am going to be in New York March 16-20 during our Spring Break. Would it be possible for us to meet for coffee while I am in town?*
- *I'm a journalism student at UT and I want to work in the magazine industry in layout and design. Could I visit with you briefly to get your advice and perspective on the industry?*

**Step 4: Prepare for the interview.** Research the company to help you develop questions, and then compose those questions in advance. The only way to learn about specific career paths is to ask specific questions that will yield answers you can use. Sample questions might include:

- *Would you tell me how you got into this profession/field?*
- *What are the most important skills/characteristics one needs to be successful in this profession/field?*
- *What do you like most about working in this profession/field? What do you find most frustrating about working in this profession/field?*
- *What do you advise I do while I am in college to be prepared to enter this field/profession?*
- *What do you wish someone had told you while you were still in college/starting your career?*

**Step 5: Conduct the interview.** Be prepared, professional, and respectful of the interviewee's time. Take notes. Prior to concluding the interview, make sure you discuss and confirm your next steps in staying connected with this person. Here are two good questions to help you define the terms of your professional relationship with this person:

- *I really appreciate the advice you have given me today. Would it be alright for me to contact you periodically to get your advice on my career?*
- *I would like to stay in touch with you. Would you mind if I connected with you on LinkedIn?*

If you have established rapport and credibility with your interviewee, you can also ask for referrals to other individuals who might be good resources. For example: *Thank you for your advice about <subject>. If I would like to learn more about <subject>, whom else would you suggest I contact? May I tell them you referred me to them?*

**Step 6: Follow-up with the interviewee.** After the interview, send your interviewee a thank you note to show your appreciation for the time he/she invested in you. It will then be your job to stay in touch and maintain the relationship. Depending upon the individual, you may touch base once a month, every few months, or just once or twice a year. You may be seeking additional advice, sharing an interesting article, referring a friend or colleague, or seeking direct assistance.