

Guide to the Informational Interview

An informational interview is different from an employment interview. Don't mix up the two!

In an employment interview:

- You are being interviewed and
- You are trying to obtain a job with the person interviewing you

In an informational interview:

- You are interviewing the other person and
- You are trying to obtain information about the person's job that will help you decide if you are interested in that kind of work as a possible career choice

Below are some guidelines for arranging an informational interview.

- Identify someone working in the profession in which you are interested.
- Check with family, friends, professors or Alumni Affairs for contacts.
- Call the person and indicate that you are a student interested in learning about his/her career.
- Ask if you can interview him/her for information to learn more about his/her career field. Indicate that you will only take 15 to 30 minutes.
- If you are invited to her/his workplace, accept graciously; you will learn more about the work environment.
- For some very busy professionals a telephone interview may be all the time she/he can give you. Accept this alternative graciously as well.

The following questions are suggested to get you started. Feel free to ask other questions that will help you get the information you need.

Background and Training

- What kind of education and/or training prepared you for your current position?
- What other jobs have you held? How were they related?
- What skills are the most important for this field? How did you acquire them?
- What has been the most helpful to you in reaching your present position?
- What other occupations did you consider before you chose this one? Why did you choose this occupation rather than one of the alternatives?

Present Position

- What types of activities do you complete during an "average" day or week? What percentage of your time is spent on each?
- What types of interaction do you have with other people?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What do you like most and least about your position and about the industry?
- What professional associations are related to your industry?

Other Questions

- What would you do differently if you were just starting college?
- What advice would you give someone like me who is considering the field?
- What kinds of opportunities do you think this field offers new professionals?
- What do you think is the best education, training or experience to enter this field?

USING HOLLAND CODES IN INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

Your Holland Code can help you ask questions which are related to your interests and personality.

Look below for sample questions applicable to your Holland Code.

If you are a **Realistic** type, you may want to ask your contact:

- Are there tangible goals to work for? Will I see concrete results when the job is done?
- Does this job produce a practical, useful product or service?
- Are there clear lines of responsibility?
- Will I be working with tools or machinery?

If you are an **Investigative** type, you may want to ask your contact:

- How flexible is this position? How structured is the environment?
- Will I be free to pursue projects independently?
- Is there opportunity to exercise research and analytical skills?
- Will I be able to learn new skills and concepts or be challenged intellectually?

If you are an **Artistic** type, you may want to ask your contact:

- Will I have the opportunity to be imaginative, creative, inventive, or curious?
- Is the environment flexible?
- Will I be able to pursue projects independently?
- Will I have time for consideration or contemplation?
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If you are a **Social** type, you may want to ask your contact:

- Is there emphasis on group work and social interaction?
- Will I be helping people by training, teaching, guiding or mentoring?
- Will I be able to share my feelings and intuitions as well as my responsibilities?
- Does this position advance ethical or humanistic goals?

If you are an **Enterprising** type, you may want to ask your contact:

- Does this position have a good possibility for advancement?
- Will I be able to assume a leadership role?
- Is there opportunity to exercise skills in speaking, selling, negotiating or persuading?
- Is this a dynamic or competitive work environment?

If you are a **Conventional** type, you might want to ask you contact:

- Is the environment well organized and efficient?
- Are the lines of responsibility clear?
- Will I be able to exercise my own judgment and control my schedule?
- Are the hours regular and the duties consistent?

Adapted from Sall Brew, Ph.D., "Use of Occupational Codes in Informational Interviewing," Career Development Guide for Use with the Strong Interest Inventory (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist Press,1988)

“ SHADOWING” FOR CAREER INFORMATION

“Shadowing” describes an activity in which you spend an extended period of time observing a person in her/his job environment. The objective of the experience is to learn as much as possible about specific activities involved in an occupation. Through “shadowing” you will become familiar with the environment, amount and kind of people contact, knowledge required for performing tasks, etc.

Below are some general guidelines to follow when planning this kind of experience.

- The first step is to identify someone in an occupation that interests you. Sometimes you may know this person through friends or family.
- Conduct an informational interview prior to requesting a shadowing experience. During the interview be sensitive to how busy the person seems to be and/or how busy the work environment is to determine if the person might be receptive to your request.
- If requesting the experience seems feasible ask if you might observe the person at work for a day or part of a day. Tell the person what you want to gain from the opportunity. Your goals may include knowledge of the different kinds of tasks performed, types of people involved, amount of teamwork, degree of pressure, time constraints, etc.
- Some occupations involve confidential information such as a counseling session. If this is true of your field of interest, add this statement to your request: “I understand there may be a particular situation that would not be appropriate for me to observe. Are there any other activities or people I could observe during this time?”
- After you have made the arrangements for “shadowing” confirm the date and time in a brief thank you note that you write following the informational interview.
- On the day of the “Shadowing” experience, arrive on time and appropriately dressed for the work setting. Bring a notebook to gather information that interests you and to record the names of people you will thank later.
- While on the job site, stay out of the way as much as possible; be quiet and considerate of others. Also, be sensitive to situations in which you may want to leave the room without being asked, e.g. the person you are observing becomes angry during a conversation with another person or on the telephone.
- Write down questions as they occur to you, ask them at convenient times
- Before you leave, review the experience with the person you “shadowed.” If there is not enough time, include specific observations and insight in your thank you letter.
- Always send a thank you letter. You may consider inviting the person you shadowed to lunch as a thank you gesture.