

# Informational Interviews

CBU Career Services

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Most people screen jobs or companies after they have already accepted a position. Informational Interviewing allows you to screen your opportunities earlier to make sure you are heading in the right direction. Although they might often result in a job or internship, the Informational Interview is not a job interview. It is an opportunity to speak with an expert, build confidence, develop a network, learn more about a specific career field, gain insight into the hidden job market (employment opportunities that are not advertised) and recognize your strengths and weaknesses. You may be surprised to discover how gracious most people will be, but you must be thoroughly prepared to respect their time and trust. Follow the below guidelines to make sure your Informational Interview is a success.

## SETTING UP THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- 1. Identify a professional to contact in a career field of interest to you.**
  - If you need help in identifying a specific occupations or fields of interest, contact a career counselor or visit the Library at Career Services.
  - If you need help in identifying a specific professional, try the following ideas:
    - Ask your roommate, residence hall friends, and students in your classes for names of people.
    - Ask your professors and other administrators for names of professionals and colleagues.
    - Ask your family and neighbors at home (and other relatives) about people in their network.
    - Ask former supervisors/co-workers. Check with professional organizations, often officers.
    - Utilize the CBU Alumni LinkedIn Group.
- 2. Do background homework before contacting the employer.**
  - Identify specifically why you are contacting this person.
  - Identify specific things or material of interest that this person can provide to you.
  - Do research on the person's career field and organization. Compile a list of 15 questions to ask during the interview. You may not ask every question, so be sure to list important ones first.
- 3. Contact the professional via phone or email.**
  - Speak directly to the person, if at all possible. Or, explain to a secretary why you need to speak with this person and ask what the best procedure would be to contact him/her.
  - Have a written telephone "script" ready (see example) so that you adequately explain why you are calling and what you hope to get out of a meeting with this person.
  - Identify a convenient time for you to meet with this person at his/her work site.
- 4. Prepare for the day of the informational interview.**
  - Call to confirm the appointment the day before the actual interview. Obtain directions and parking information.
  - Thoroughly research the firm or organization of the person interviewed.
  - Identify an outfit to wear to the interview. Men should wear a nice shirt, tie, blazer, and good shoes. Women should wear a dress or suit and hose and heels. Remember, you are visiting a place of employment and need to look professional.
  - Put together a nice notebook with paper and pens and copies of an updated resume to take with you. Be sure to write down your 15 questions in the notebook!
- 5. During the actual interview...**
  - Arrive at least 10 minutes early and announce your presence to the secretary. Be courteous to everyone that you meet, especially secretaries.
  - Shake hands and introduce yourself. Always have your ELEVATOR SPEECH ready to go!
  - As he or she talks, take notes to remind yourself of important facts and impressions.
  - Ask for referrals to other appropriate individuals in the field or in related organizations. Ask if you can use their name in your introduction.
  - Be conscious of time and do not spend more than 30 minutes unless the professional initiates extra time.
  - At the end of the interview, thank the person for his/her time and shake hands as you leave.

6. **Immediately after the interview...**

- Find a quiet place to sit and write down all of the answers to the questions that you asked. Jot down information about any follow-up activities that were discussed or names of other professionals to contact
- Send a thank-you note and keep the individual you have interviewed posted on your progress.
- Evaluate your style of interviewing. What could you have done better? Use what you have learned in your next interview.
- Remember you should not base your decisions on one interview. Make another appointment quickly.

**TELEPHONE/EMAIL SCRIPT IDEAS**

- Provide a brief introduction of yourself for the professional. State that you are a student who is seeking advice and information on this person's career or industry.
- State how you found out about this person (through your professor, through a neighbor, from Career Services, etc.).
- Identify what you hope to get out of a meeting with this person (information on the person's current job? information on person's career? information on general career field?)
- Once the interview date has been established, verify the specific address, location, date, and time.

**Sample:**

- Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I was given your name (or found your name) by \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am a (class year) at CBU and am interested in arranging an informational interview. I am interested in learning more about the field of \_\_\_\_\_ (or your position as \_\_\_\_\_).
- I would like schedule a thirty minute meeting with you at your convenience. Would you be available to speak to me during the week of \_\_\_\_\_? If so, what are good days and times for you to meet?
- Thank you in advance for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me.

**POSSIBLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How did you get started in this field? What was your educational background? What are your major responsibilities?
2. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job, least rewarding? What might you change? Would you choose this career again?
3. What is a "typical" day like for you?
4. What obligations does your work put on you outside of the actual job? What are some lifestyle considerations for this career field?
5. What are some common entry-level positions in the field of \_\_\_\_\_?
6. What kind of salary range and benefits could an entry-level position expect to receive?
7. What kind of an individual (skills and personality) would be best suited for these entry-level positions? What are the most important factors used when hiring?
8. What is the best educational preparation for a career in this field? Which classes and experiences would be most helpful to obtain while still in college?
9. What have you found to be a major weakness of new hires in this field?
10. How high is the turnover? How does one move from position to position or other areas of the organizations? What are typical policies about promotions from within? How are employees evaluated?
11. What is the typical career path from entry-level to top management?
12. How do people usually find out about full-time openings in this field?
13. What is the future outlook for this career field? What are the areas of potential growth and decline? How do you see jobs changing in the future?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would be most helpful in evaluating the field?
15. Can you recommend other types of organizations in this field that I might investigate or contact? Can you recommend any specific person for me to talk with and may I have permission to use your name?