

Information Interviews

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Definition

The best way of finding information about a particular business, field or occupation is to talk to somebody who is working in the industry. By conducting information interviews you gain valuable knowledge on careers, establish contacts in your fields of interest and get the inside scoop on the career or organization that you have a particular interest in.

As defined, an information interview is a **research** interview, initiated by **you**, with an employer or someone in an occupational field that you are interested in.

Purpose

Information interviews are one of the most important tools you will use in your job search. Use them to learn more about the type of job you may be interested in (and suited for), and to obtain advice about what types of companies you should target for job leads.

Your information interview should be with an individual who is directly involved in the career area you are interested in. Often human resource departments rarely know the answers to your specific occupational related questions, so the most effective contact would be the head of the department that you are interested in working for.

Remember: the purpose of information interviewing is to increase your knowledge by building up your network; it is **NOT** to ask for a job the minute after you walk in the door! If you put someone on the spot by asking them about a job during your information interview, you will lose their goodwill and influence. Eventually you will talk about your career path which may naturally lead to a conversation about careers with that contact's company (if that company is of interest to you).

The Interview

How long should your information interview take? Approximately 15-20 minutes is about right. The person you are interviewing is giving up their valuable work time to help you, so show that you respect their time and limit yourself to five to eight questions. Prioritize your questions for the interview so you can get all the information you need in the first ten minutes; you never know when the person with whom you are talking will be interrupted and your interview will come to an end. Some suggest that once you've organized the meeting, email the questions you'd like to cover so that the employer's time is used more efficiently during the meeting. If you follow this approach, send it the day before; if you send it too early, they may reply to all your questions via email and then you will lose the opportunity to meet face-to-face.

**Limit your information
interview to
15-20 minutes.**

Identify Your Targets

Take some time to identify who it is that you are going to target. Below are some suggestions on how to get started.

Occupation

- Investigate the occupations or jobs that interest you. Read as much as you can about the career field, then identify what questions you need to have answered. Check out the “**Careers in Business**” career management guide, available online, for information and resources on various business-related careers and occupations.

Company

- You’ve identified that you are interested in brand management, or real estate appraisal, or transportation analysis. Who are some of the companies that hire for these positions? Find out as much as you can about these companies from their websites and from other sources. Refer to the “**Job Search Strategies**” career management guide for assistance.

Individuals

- Start close to home to identify individuals who work in the career areas or companies that interest you; ask your family, friends, professors, or co-workers. Identify the key managers or executives through your company research. Check with the Career Centre or Alumni Services.

The more you know about the career field, company and individuals, the easier it will be to create your list of questions. You will also display a more confident presence in your approach and during your meetings.

Requesting an Information Interview

By Telephone

Many people are willing to spend 15-20 minutes with a student looking for advice and information on which to base their career decisions, especially if you are respectful of their time and are well-prepared in your approach. The following is a sample script:

Remember, information interviews are for RESEARCH only – do not ask for a job while on an information interview.

Telephone Script Example

Student:

"Hello Mr. Smith, my name is Sue Brown. I am taking my BBA at SFU in the Faculty of Business Administration and focusing in the area of Marketing. At the present time, I am exploring various careers within the marketing industry to grow my knowledge so that I can make an informed career choice upon graduation. As your firm is a leader in market research, I would greatly appreciate meeting with you to discuss career trends within the industry. Would you have a few minutes to meet

Sample Email

Before the Interview

- Conduct your company research!
- Create your list of questions. Ask your contact if they would like to

During the Interview

- Stay focused. Stick with your list of questions but also allow for spontaneous discussion.
- Take notes and pay careful attention to what is being said. Ask questions if something is not clear.
- Show interest and enthusiasm.
- Share some of your background, but don't dominate the conversation. This time is about gathering information about the job, industry or occupation.
- Ask for referrals. Your contact may have suggestions of other people to speak with in other organizations or even in other industries.

“Thank you so much for your time and all the information that you provided; it has been very helpful. Is there anyone else that you know that I may be able to speak to?”

- Don't overstay your welcome! Finish the interview within the agreed time frame. If your contact wants to continue the discussion, it should be his/her choice.

After the Interview

- ALWAYS send a short thank you note or email within 24-48 hours of your meeting. Thank the person for their time and willingness to help you with your career exploration.
- ALWAYS follow up on referrals from your contact.
- Keep in touch with your contact. Update them on your progress every month or so.
- If you learned of projects or areas where you saw potential for you to help through an internship or contract position, follow up by submitting a proposal (see the “**Effective Job Search Letters/Correspondence**” career management guide).

Dear Mr. Blake,

Thank you again for the time that you spent with me a few days ago. Since then I have thought a bit more about some of the challenges you mentioned that your company is facing. I believe there may be some areas where I can help. I have put together a proposal on how I can help and how the project could progress as an internship. Please have a look. I will follow up with you next week for some feedback.”

Once submitted, follow up in a week or two with a phone call.

Hello Mr. Blake. I am just following up with you to see what your

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15. What do you know about similar types of jobs or related fields?
 16. What advice would you give someone who wants to get into this field?
 17. What are some of the problems you encounter in trying to accomplish your goals?
 18. Which professional journals and organizations should I know about in this field?
 19. To further explore this career area is there anyone else you would recommend speaking to?

Student Testimonials

- § *Tell everyone you know you are looking for a job. Spreading the word is important because you never know who they may know. You should explain clearly your skills and what you are looking for to give other people a chance to make connections for you.*
- § *No one owes you a job; you have to create your own opportunities. Initiate conversations in order to help cultivate those opportunities.*
- § *Research the company and the person you are going to meet with beforehand to better prepare for the meeting.*
- § *Be sensitive to other people's time, remember to be polite and most importantly, one never gets a second chance to make a first impression.*
- § *If you're an international student, you will have to make more of an effort compared to other students to achieve your goals.*
- § *Know who the decision-maker; try to contact he/she directly, either by phone or email. It may sound intimidating to contact senior managers directly, but the fact is, it's often easier to deal with a decision maker than with lower level managers.*
- § *Treat the person to coffee or whatever drink he/she prefers.*
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