



Education Guide #6

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is an important part of developing your education plan. It can help you more clearly understand specific job titles and define job objectives; it is a practical way to develop interviewing skills; and it is a useful way to build up a personal network of contacts (see Partnership's Education Guide 7: Networking). The suggestions, questions, and sample phone call included here will help you begin to use the informational interviewing technique.

Where Can I Go?

How do I learn about the ins and outs of jobs in my field of interest? Who can advise me? From whom can I get the most accurate information about the field of my choice and what goes on in it? The best career information comes from people who are active, successful, and knowledgeable in your field of interest. Interview them!

Although at first you may feel awkward reaching out to people you may not know well, most people are generally happy to provide advice to someone with an interest in their field. If they like their work, they will enjoy talking about what they do and reflecting on their professional lives. **Also keep in mind the following four points:**

- 1. You are not asking for a job.** You are simply asking for information and advice, so you are not putting this person on the spot.
- 2. You have the right and a responsibility to yourself** to seek advice and information from those who can best help you.
- 3. The most effective action you can take on your behalf is to develop mentors.** Mentors are experts in the field of your choice. They take an interest in you and your professional development, advise you, help you along, and inform you of appropriate opportunities. You will also need to develop professional contacts – people in, or related to, your field that help each other by exchanging information about current advancements or information in the field, including educational training and job opportunities.
- 4. Because you are doing the interviewing, you take the lead.** You prepare. You initiate the interview, you develop the questions, and lead the discussion.

How Do I Find out Who These People Are?

Ask. Begin with people who are closest to you, such as family members, relatives, and friends. Then branch out to co-workers, neighbors, and community members. Ask them if they know someone in your field of interest that is knowledgeable or has current experience. Then ask for an introduction, or ask if you can use their name when you contact the person who has been suggested.

Other ways of identifying reliable contacts is through industry magazines or journals, either online or hard copy. You can also check LinkedIn and professional associations, as well as libraries and career centers.



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The Internet is a priceless tool for gathering career and job related information. You can access the NYS Department of Labor website (www.dol.ny.gov) to obtain facts on various jobs. You can receive in depth information on a wide range of exciting careers in New York State at www.careerzone.ny.gov. You can connect to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and their Occupational Outlook Handbook at www.bls.gov/oooh. The Occupational Outlook Handbook has information on trends of various careers. The Career Mobility Office <https://careermobilityoffice.cs.ny.gov/cmo/> can assist you in finding out about occupational titles and career paths within the New York State Civil Service system.

How can I conduct these informational interviews most effectively so that I get the information I need and also establish a good relationship with this person?

- **PREPARE.** Inform yourself about the field, the organization, and the person you will be interviewing.
- **CREATE** a list of the questions you want to ask and some that you know will be interesting to answer.
- **PRACTICE.** Review the sample interview request template and questions below. Practice interviewing people for information whenever you get a chance to. It's fun. You'll find that people who enjoy what they do really like to talk about themselves and their work.
- **EXPRESS** interest, listen, and show enthusiasm and appreciation. Watch your non-verbal behavior.

Make up your own questions out of the information you have, in your own style, and based on the information you need. These sample questions are simply to give you some ideas.

How Do I Make Contact?

To set up the informational interview, you will want to reach your contact by phone, or in person if you are within proximity. For the actual interview, you can do that in person, by phone, or through the Internet with ZOOM or another Web conferencing platform if your contact is comfortable with that option.

Remember, your contact's time is just as valuable as yours is - 25 to 30 minutes should be the maximum amount of time to set for the informational interview. If your contact offers to extend the time during the interview, that is fine. Otherwise, stick to your original schedule and thank them for their assistance at the end of the agreed upon appointment time.

Suggestions For A Phone Interview Request

Hello ...My name is _____. Mr./Ms. _____ suggested I call you, because you are currently working in the field of _____.

I'm interested in your field (or occupation), and have some questions I would like to ask you. I'm not looking for a job now. At this time I am looking for information and advice. Would you be willing to meet with me? I'll just take 25 or 30 minutes of your time, I can meet in person, by phone, or via a web platform. Please let me know what day, time, and location will work best for you. Thank you.



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Tips to Consider When Making Phone Calls:

- Speak clearly enough to be understood easily over the phone.
- Call when there are no distractions such as music, TV, or loud voices in the background.
- Do not chew gum or make other distracting sounds.
- Be friendly and sincerely interested in meeting with the expert. SMILE.

Is It Appropriate to Send an Email to Ask for an Informational Interview?

It may be appropriate, but here are a few words of caution about using email:

Your email may not get to the right person and it may get discarded. It's easier for the person to say "no" to your email request for an interview. Your sincerity and enthusiasm may not be conveyed as well in an email.

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing

Here are some questions you may want to include in your informational interviews. Some may not be appropriate for the career that you investigate. You may also have some questions that are not on this list. In any case, have your questions ready and your objectives in mind.

- How do you like your career?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- How did you enter this job/career?
- What would you have done differently in your career?
- What are the career prospects in this field?
- What are the emerging jobs in this career area?
- How would you recommend someone break into this field?
- What educational background or training is required?
- What kind of experience would help in this career?
- What are the emerging trends in this field?
- What are the disadvantages and advantages to this career?

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- Are there additional educational training or certifications required once you are in the field?
- How does one acquire training in this career?
- What technologies do you need a good command of to be successful in this career?
- What recommendations would you have for an entry-level person considering this career?
- What kind of work schedule does this career require? Overtime, flextime, part-time, job sharing, travel, on-call basis, 9-5, evening, or night shift work, etc.?
- What rewards do you get from your job/career?
- What style of supervision is used in your job?
- What type of environment is this to work in? Pressure, people contacts, office arrangements, etc.?
- What combination of skills and abilities would be valuable in this career?
- What kind of independence do you have in your career/job?
- How can I learn more about this career/job?
- What kind of cooperation or competition exists between co-workers in this career?
- How is the work/life balance for this career field?
- What professional organizations would you recommend joining for this career field?
- Who else would you recommend I contact for more information about this career?

Of all the questions listed above, it is essential to ask the last one. Often, a good contact in your field of interest will have a number of names to give you.

Informational interviewing is an effective tool in your approach to education and life planning. It can be one of your most important resources as you plan your career and lifestyle. It provides you with the opportunity to discover much of what you need to know in order to make a knowledgeable and satisfying decision. Make the interview a benefit for you. Add the contact that you just interviewed to be part of your network! For more helpful hints on networking, view the Partnership's Education Guide 7: Networking.

Finally, remember to send a thank you note after your interview. The person that you interviewed shared their valuable time with you. It is important, professional, and demonstrates good manners to formally say thank you for their time and expertise. A hand written note is always best if you have the correct address. However, an email thank you is acceptable.