What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is an interview designed to help you gain information about various industries and/or career options. Perhaps the best way to expand your knowledge about a particular field of interest is to talk to someone actively doing the work you’re interested in. Informational interviewing allows you to gather data about an occupation and/or industry prior to deciding your career goals. Your requests for informational interviews should be based on your genuine need to know more about a career field before determining what you want to do and where you want to work. The informational interview is not a scheme or a trick to get you in the door to talk to a potential employer about a job.

The Process

1. Target a department/organization or individual of interest.
2. Research the department/organization as much as you can prior to the interview.
3. Be aware of your qualifications, career goals and interests.
4. Contact the person by phone or email to arrange an appointment.
5. Use an intermediary contact name, if you have one, to introduce yourself.
6. Request approximately 30 minutes of their time, at their convenience
7. Take writing material, but limit your note taking so you can pay attention to the person.
8. Be prompt.
9. Pay attention to the first impression that you make. Even though this is not a job interview, treat it as such.
10. At the end of the meeting, ask if there is anyone else they would recommend you contact regarding your interest. If they give you a name, ask if you might use their name as an introduction.

Follow up

1. Write a thank you note.
2. Follow up on any contacts or referrals you have been given.
3. Maintain a list of the contacts you make and keep notes of the information you receive.
Why Do Information Interviews?

1. Build your confidence for job interviews.
2. Expand your knowledge of the job market.
3. Become a more impressive job candidate by have done some “professional homework.”
4. Find out about jobs/career paths you did not know existed.
5. Discover what the best fit (both skills and personality) is for the jobs you are considering.
7. Deepen your understanding of the world of work in a variety of settings.
8. Have insider information, not just data from printed (possibly outdated) material.
9. Good practice for an actual job interview.
10. Potential employers have a chance to meet you at your best.
11. Find out what you should be reading and which professional associations you should join to keep interests and abilities current.
12. Clarify and redefine your career goals.
13. Practice your assertiveness communication skills.
14. Make your professional development a #1 priority. Focus on your career.

Suggested Questions for the Information Interview

- Please describe a typical day (time spent at desk, with people, in meetings, etc.).
- What do you like most about this job?
- What do you find the most challenging?
- What sort of experiences does this department look for when recruiting for positions?
- What type of training or education is necessary to be competitive for these positions?
- What particular skills are necessary to perform this job successfully?
- What career paths are generally available in this field?
- What are the classifications for someone entering this field?
- What are the working conditions in this field? Flex time? Overtime? Degree of independence? Dress code? Travel?
- What is the management style in this organization?
- How are decisions made? Do people feel included in the process?
- Where do you see growth or change occurring in the organization?
- Are there internships/volunteer opportunities I could do to see if this is the right fit?
- What do you suggest I do to maximize my career potential?
- What other departments at UCLA are similar to this one?
- Tell me how you came to your position. If you could start all over again, would you choose the same career path? Is your career path typical? If not, what might a beginner in this field expect today?
- What other organizations offer the same types of positions or programs in this field?
- Have you been active in any professional organizations?
- Who else might I speak with who might help me learn more about this job or occupation?