

Informational interviews – making it a good one

Why do an informational interview:

- Career readiness – do I really want to enter this kind of career?
- Career getting – help you get a job
- Career flexibility – helps you have contacts in other places
- Hearing good ideas – helps you bring ideas from other fields / places to your work

Assume

- People want to be helpful and support your journey even if they don't know you
- They have done lots of these types of interviews and it quickly becomes clear whether this is going to be an interesting / productive interview or a painful one
- They are busy – they might not want to have a really interesting intellectual discussion for a long time

Getting ready

- Be formal in your ask for their time – show that you really respect it by watching the time and offering to end the conversation if it goes beyond the set amount
- What is the organization the person works for? What is its mission? How is it funded (can look up their taxes on guidestar if it is a nonprofit) Who in the organization has your dream job?
- What does the person do? What have they done in the past? Who are they connected to on linked-in?
- What other organizations are in the space they work in that you are interested in?
- Prep specific questions for them – write them out in a notebook with their name printed in big letters at the top

The interview

- Bring something to take notes on and a pen
- Present yourself thoughtfully and authentically

What to say / How much to talk about yourself

- Practice
- Be concise and interesting – give them a sense of where you have been and where you could imagine going
- Talk about your values if you do not have a clear sense of direction
- I am told that XXX, XXX and XXX are my strongest assets (fill in the blanks with skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits, and values). Where would these traits and skills be helpful in this organization?

Personal questions

- If you were just entering your profession now what would you do differently?
- What would you be doing if this wasn't your work?
- Are you happy with your work life balance?
- How does your work nurture you as a person and professional?
- How well did college prepare you for your career?
- What personal qualities or soft skills do you think have helped you the most? What personal qualities are most important for someone to be successful?

Work questions

- Why did this type of work interest you, and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What would you say has been the biggest change to your job or field since you started?
- What part of your jobs is the source of most of your work related frustration or stress?
- What has surprised you most about your profession?
- What information, skills, or experiences allowed you to move successfully from A to B?
- What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- Which past jobs have been most helpful in getting you to this point in your career?
- What other jobs can you get with the same background?
- Why did you decide to work for this company? What do you like most about it? What are the big differences in companies in this field? How would you describe the culture of this company?
- What would the next step be in your career?

Advice questions

- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain the necessary experience to be ready for _____?
- What's the best advice you'd give to someone interested in this field? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which trade or professional journals and organizations would be helpful to me as I learn more about this field?
- Do you have any special words of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- Would you mind taking a look at my resume?
- I'm waiting to hear back about interviews for positions—what advice would you give me about how to best prepare?
- What experiences, skills, or personality traits does your company look for in new hires?
- What do you wish you had done differently when you first started at your company?
- What job search advice would you give to someone in my situation?
- Given my interest in XXXX and XXX is there anyone else you think I should speak to in order to learn more about XXXXX?
 - a. The key here is to make your request as specific as possible. This might be counterintuitive, but it actually makes it easier for your contact to think of someone when you say, "Could you recommend a couple more people for me to speak with to learn more about XXXXXX?" than to come up with an answer to, "Is there anyone else you would recommend that I speak with?"

Follow up

- A substantial thank you note will guarantee to help them remember you longer and more positively – reference something you learned about them personally, something you learned about the field professionally, and a personal take away that you left with
- Remind them of any action steps they agreed to – a resource or connection they said they would make