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Informational Interviews

An informational interview is an opportunity to spend time (usually 30 minutes) with someone who is a professional in a career field of interest to you. By talking with an “expert”, you will be able to acquire information and establish connections for networking purposes. Contrary to popular belief, most professionals are honored to talk with students about their experiences. However, you must be prepared to make sure that you respect the time and energy put forth by the professional!

An informational interview is a method of career exploration. It also enhances your interviewing skills through the meeting and interviewing of a “stranger”. In addition, an informational interview can provide you with possibilities for future internship, part-time, or volunteer experience.

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 career field of interest, check out our “What to Do with a Major in...” handouts, or visit LinkedIn to search Mississippi State University using the alumni tab.
- 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 at home (and other relatives) about people in their network.
 - Ask your neighbors at home and former supervisors/co-workers.

2. Do background homework before contacting the employer.

- Identify specifically why you are contacting this person.
- Identify specific things of interest that this person can provide to you.
- Compile a list of 15 questions to ask during the interview.

3. Contact the professional via email or phone to schedule time to meet.

- Email the person directly. If contacting by phone, speak directly to the person or explain to an administrative assistant why you would like to speak with this person and ask for best steps to contact them.
- Have a written telephone “script” ready (see attached 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 their 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.
- Select an outfit to wear to the interview. Be sure to wear business professional attire (suit and tie, blazer and shirt with skirt/pants, or a dress) and good shoes. Remember, you are visiting a place of employment and need to look businesslike.
- Put together a nice notebook with paper, pens, and copies of an updated résumé to take with you. Be sure to write down your 15 questions in the notebook!

5. During the actual interview...

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early, and announce your presence to the administrative assistant. Be courteous to everyone that you meet.
- Shake hands and introduce yourself.
- 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 their 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.
- Within 2 days, send an email to thank them for their time.





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TELEPHONE SCRIPT IDEAS

- A. 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.
- B. State how you found out about this person (through your roommate, through a neighbor, through LinkedIn, etc.).
- C. 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?).
- D. Once the interview date has been established, verify the specific address, location, date, and time before you hang up.

sample:

- Hello, my name is _____. I was given your name (or found your name) by _____.
- I am a (class year) at MSU and am interested in arranging an informational interview.
- I am interested in learning more about the field of _____ (or your position as _____).
- Is this a good time for me to try to set up a meeting with you or someone on your staff?
- (If not), when would be a good time for me to try to call you back?
- I would like to meet with you for about a half hour at your convenience. Would you be available to speak to me (during the week of _____)?

POSSIBLE INFORMATION QUESTIONS

1. How did you get started in this field?
2. What was your educational background?
3. What are your major responsibilities?
4. What do you like most about your job (what is the most rewarding aspect of it)?
5. What do you like least about your job?
6. What is a "typical" day like for you?
7. What obligations does your work put on you outside of the actual job? What are some lifestyle considerations for this career field?
8. What are some common entry level positions in the field of _____?
9. What kind of salary range and benefits could an entry level position expect to receive?
10. 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?
11. What do you think is the best educational preparation for a career in this field?
12. Which classes would you recommend that I take to gain more skills?
13. What types of experiences do you think would be helpful to obtain while still in college for this field?
14. What have you found to be a major weakness of new hires in this field?
15. How do people usually find out about full-time openings in this field?
16. Is it effective to simply send in a résumé when seeking employment? Why/why not?
17. What are other careers related to yours that I might investigate?
18. What is the future outlook for this career field?
19. What are the areas of potential growth and decline in this field in the future?
20. Can you recommend other types of organizations in this field that I might contact should I consider pursuing this career?
Can you recommend any specific person for me to talk with?

Adapted from the University of Georgia's Career Center.



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