



## What is Information Interviewing?

**Information interviewing is talking with people who have knowledge about a career field that interests you.** In a brief appointment, which usually lasts 20 to 30 minutes (10-15 if by telephone), you ask questions to learn about such things as pros and cons of the work, the demands, the sources of satisfaction, the training required, the future outlook, how to get started in the field, and more. Information Interviewing allows you to gain knowledge about the field from an “insider’s” perspective. It can help you decide if you really want to pursue the career field, and give you valuable information and contacts for your job search.

## Steps to Successful Information Interviewing

### 1) Identify contacts

Think of people who may be sources of career information or job leads. Expand this list of **networking contacts** as you talk about career ideas with your peers and anyone else you meet. Ask your family, friends, professors, doctor, minister, hair stylist – even the person next to you on the airplane – if they know of anyone doing the kind of work you want to explore. *(For more Networking tips, see CORC’s Job Search handout.)*

### 2) Request a meeting

Call or write to the person you want to meet. Explain how you got the person’s name; if someone referred you, be sure to mention that. When contacting a Hampshire alum, identify yourself as a Hampshire student or fellow alum. Take a minute to describe your background, and then ask if you might arrange a brief appointment at this person’s convenience to learn more about her/his career field. **Some examples of how you might state your meeting objective are:**

“I’ve read books and searched web sites for information on journalism, and I really feel like it’s time for me to talk with someone experienced in the field to get a real-world perspective.”

“I’m planning to move to San Francisco and want to find out everything I can about the Bay area before I start an all-out search for a job in the health care field.”

“I’ve often thought about pursuing a career in theater production, and I’d like to find out more about the field and how people generally get their start.”

“As part of my career research, I’m talking to people in a variety of fields to find out what their jobs are actually like.”

If contacting by letter (or email): Make the letter an example of your best writing: concise, logical and error-free. If the writing is careless, an alum might respond but might not feel comfortable referring you to others. Close your letter by saying that you’ll follow up with a phone call within a week – then be sure to do it. Don’t put your career questions in a letter and expect a written reply. That would be extra work for your contact. Besides, you’re likely to gain much more in a conversation.

If contacting by telephone: Begin by saying who you are and how you got the person’s name, then ask if this is a good time to talk. If it’s not, explain your reason for calling and ask when you might call back to possibly schedule an in-person or telephone appointment. If you sent an introductory letter/email and this is a follow-up call, ask if your letter/email was received and restate your reason for getting in touch.

If your contact can’t talk or meet with you, thank her anyway. If it feels comfortable, ask if she can refer you to anyone else in the field, and if you might use her name when introducing yourself. **Be prepared with your**

**questions before you call, in case your contact happens to be free and you have a spontaneous opportunity for a telephone interview.**

Phone Messages: Always give your phone number when leaving a message and remember to speak slowly and clearly. Make sure your own voicemail message is professional.

Confirmation: When you call to set up an in-person appointment, do not hesitate to clarify date, time, location, appropriate attire, and parking availability.

### **3) Prepare as if your future depends on it**

Plan to present yourself in a professional manner. Prepare a list of the questions most important to you (see the attached list of Potential Questions for some ideas). If you are meeting in person, be prompt, dress appropriately for that business and be well groomed. Remember to bring driving directions, your questions, pen, paper and resume. Start early – don't get caught in traffic. If this is a telephone interview, be sure to initiate the call on time. Making a good impression helps ensure that this person will remain a valuable networking contact in the future.

If you have a polished resume, bring it with you. Your contact may ask to see it, or you may have an opportunity to show it and get some feedback. Remember that if you do show your resume, it will be to obtain advice, not to ask directly for a job or internship.

### **4) Conduct the interview professionally**

1. Listen carefully and try to ask the questions most important to you. Be aware of the time constraints of your contact.
2. It is not appropriate to ask directly for an internship or job. You may ask for advice about how to get relevant experience, how to start your job search, or how to get appropriate training. If you positively impress your contacts, they may refer or recommend you if/when they hear of job openings.
3. At the close of the interview, thank your contact for his or her time. Don't forget to ask if s/he knows of other people who might help you with further information or different perspectives. Provided you make it clear that you're not trying to get a job through this particular interview, it is acceptable to ask in a general way if your contact knows of any job openings, or if s/he would keep you in mind upon learning of openings.

### **5. Follow up if you want to be remembered**

1. Always send a thank-you letter within two to three days of your visit. Although everyone knows they are supposed to do this, you'd be surprised to know how many don't bother, making those who do really stand out. Mention the parts of your visit you enjoyed and identify advice you found particularly helpful. If possible, include what you plan to do with the information you received. For instance, you might be able to say that you have already set up another information interview with someone recommended by this contact. Be sure your letter is well written: no typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar, etc. Your letter will make an impression, and you want that impression to be positive.
2. Keep a record of all your contacts. You may need to speak with them again at another point in your job search. You can keep networking information on index cards, in a binder or even on your computer – whatever works best for you. Include such data as your contact's address, phone, email, dates of contact, advice offered, names and phone numbers of people they suggested you call, and the date you mailed your thank-you note.
3. Finally, write again in a month or two restating how their advice helped you, and letting them know how your information gathering/job search is going.

## **Potential Questions For Your Information Interview**

Begin the interview by explaining that you'd like your contact's advice about his or her particular field of work. Below are some questions to target certain types of information. Select several that are relevant to where you are in your process. Remember to stay within the agreed upon time frame for your meeting.

### **Job and Career:**

- What are the duties/responsibilities of your job? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What knowledge and skills are desirable for this job? What do employers look for on a resume?
- What do you think are the rewards of working in this job, and the field in general? What are some of the frustrations and drawbacks?
- What is a typical salary range for this type of work? How high might one's earnings go in this field?
- What does it take to be successful in this field?
- What kind of advice would you give to someone considering this field?

### **Career Future:**

- What is a typical pattern of career development in this field?
- What is the future outlook in this field? Is there an over-supply of qualified job applicants for this type of work? An under-supply? Is this an industry/field that is particularly vulnerable to recessions?

### **Lifestyle Issues:**

- What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary workweek?
- What are your working hours and travel schedule like?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work schedule, vacation, etc.?

### **Career Preparation:**

- What kind of background is necessary to enter this field? Is a graduate degree recommended? If so, are there specific programs that are particularly valued in this field?
- How can I acquire the necessary skills? Are there courses or experiences, paid or otherwise, which are recommended?
- What books and magazines could I read to better understand the field? Do you have regular reading that you find useful?

### **Job/Internship Search Advice:**

- Do you have any advice about how I can find a job (or internship) related to this field?
- How can I identify both advertised and unadvertised openings?
- What is the best way to approach prospective employers? Best timing?
- What other types of employers hire people in this line of work?
- Any advice on developing new job leads?

### **Resume Review:**

- Would you be willing to look at my resume and tell me if you think it's appropriate for the jobs I will be seeking? What about the length, paper quality, layout, print-type?
- If an employer received this resume, how do you think she or he would react to it?
- Any suggestions about how I might improve the form and content of the resume?

### **Referrals:**

- Are there other people you would suggest I talk to about careers in this field?
- Can you give me contact information and may I use your name?