

Informational Interviewing

Amica Center for Career Education

BRYANT UNIVERSITY

www.bryant.edu/career

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

An informational interview is a brief conversation with a professional who is working in your target career area of interest, the purpose of which is to gather career information and advice on the profession, career path, or company at which they are working. It generally takes place in person, over the telephone, or over E-mail. The E-mail option is becoming increasingly popular and is a good first step, after which you should try in-person or telephone contact.

HOW CAN IT BENEFIT ME?

Informational interviewing has a multitude of benefits, including:

- Gathering information about a particular job
- Confirming that the work suits your skills, interests, and values
- Learning more about a target company for future employment opportunities
- Meeting a professional employed in your target area for networking purposes
- Getting advice on recommended coursework or skill development for entry-level positions
- Getting a pulse on the current industry trends
- Increasing your confidence in networking

HOW OFTEN AND WHEN SHOULD I CONDUCT THESE INTERVIEWS?

Ideally, you should be setting career goals for each year of college. Make an effort to conduct at least two informational interviews per semester, perhaps one over winter break in your hometown area or two or three over the summer. If you stick to this plan, you will meet up to twenty-four professionals by the time you graduate. Planting these seeds will really pay off for you in the future!

HOW DO I FIND PEOPLE TO INFORMATIONALLY INTERVIEW?

We in the Career Center encourage you to start with people you already know. Begin with your friends, family, and distant relatives. Do you know what your friends' parents do? How about your older siblings' colleagues? Or your parents' friends? Ask everyone you know if they know anyone working in your target industry that may be able to give you career advice.

The next step would be to make use of your connections at Bryant. Become active in Bryant alumni associations, particularly your local chapter. People rarely turn down interested volunteers! Also, ask your professors, resident directors, and club advisors if they have any recommendations. Finally, tap into the "Bryant Alumni Career Link," a database available in the Career Center which consists of alumni who have volunteered to be contacted for a variety of purposes, including informational interviewing.

Finally, research professional associations that are connected to your target profession/career.

HOW DO I GO ABOUT CONTACTING PEOPLE?

If you are calling cold without having been referred by a mutual acquaintance, it's best to write first. State who you are and the purpose for writing. If possible, establish a link such as a mutual enthusiasm for the profession or the fact that you may have heard them speak (i.e. at a Careers in... program). Identify when you will be in touch with them regarding a meeting. If you have been referred by someone, always open the letter and/or conversation by saying so. This can help your chances of someone speaking to you in person.

WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS "NO"?

There is always a risk that someone will refuse your request. Generally, however, people are more than willing to help a new professional and are flattered when asked for advice. Sometimes people will say no because you have contacted them in a particularly busy time of year (i.e. tax season for accountants). Take seasonal workflows into account when making your requests, and don't take it personally if someone turns you down. Just move on to the next person on your list, or ask them if they can think of a colleague that may be willing to help.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY DURING THE INTERVIEW? ARE THERE THINGS I SHOULDN'T ASK?

Take time before your interview to prepare a list of questions about the subjects in which you are most interested. Review the last page of this handout for sample questions. Try your best to ask "open-ended" questions that encourage conversation as opposed to yes or no answers. Never ask for assistance in finding a job or any other kind of favors. This is unprofessional and is not in your best interest.

HOW SHOULD I CONDUCT MYSELF?

Arrive on time, dress neatly and professionally, shake hands firmly and maintain good eye contact. Respect the time allotted to you. Accept interruptions or delays gracefully. Relax, be yourself and enjoy observing the work environment. Pay attention to your surroundings, the staff, the noise levels, how people are dressed, what kind of moods staff are in, and the quality of their interactions with one another. You'll be surprised how much you learn in just a short amount of time!

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD KNOW?

Be savvy about finding others to interview. Ask during your interview if there is anyone s/he could recommend to you that may be able to give you additional information or a different perspective on the industry.

DO I NEED TO DO ANY FOLLOW-UP?

Always take the time to write a sincere thank-you note. Nurture contacts in the future. For instance, if you see an article pertinent to your discussion, send it off to the person with a brief note. If you decide to pursue something within the industry, follow up again with them, thanking them for being one of the first to reinforce your interest and enthusiasm in the profession.

Should you have additional questions, please feel free to see a member of the Career Center staff.

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How did you get into this field?

What do you like most about your work?

What do you find the most challenging?

What does a typical day consist of?

What are the primary responsibilities of your job? What percentage of time do you spend on each of the areas of responsibilities?

Are your duties typical of everyone with your type of position?

What kind of person (both skills and personality) would be best-suited to this line of work?

What are prospects for someone entering your profession today?

What advice would you give to someone applying for and finding a job in this field?

Is there travel required?

Are there other sources of information you can recommend?

Where else might I go to find other professionals doing similar work?

What kinds of activities does your department engage in?

What kinds of people do you usually deal with?

What are some recurring problems or challenges in your field or your company?

What kind of salary could I expect in an entry-level position in this industry?

Can you make any recommendations regarding coursework to supplement my major?

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/informationalinterview.html

http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html