

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing involves meeting with someone with a job or career that interests you and asking them questions about how they got their current position and what it entails.

Informational interviewing is the more sophisticated version of job shadowing. It gives you access to first-hand information that you can't find on the internet or in books and helps to build a network that you can nurture for future opportunities.

There are many potential benefits:

- Provides insight into the career you are planning – ensuring it matches your expectations and skills
- Makes you visible in the job market and gives you access to unadvertised opportunities
- Expands your professional network
- Exposes you to additional skills that you need to build on
- Reveals other career paths that may interest you
- Demonstrates that you are pro-active

Step 1: How is it done?

• **Make contact/ Take the initiative**

Be assured, most people are happy to assist! Remember that the objective is to get information and advice, not to get a job. This is in addition to online research, creating a solid CV, improving your interview skills, and applying for jobs.

• **Who should I contact?**

Identify possible contacts who work in a position or a field that interests you and/or who work for a company that you would like to join. Start by researching appropriate careers and companies based on your interests, studies or experience. Make a list of people who you could contact (family, friends, lecturers, alumni of your place of study, professional associations, etc.). Also use professional organisational directories, company websites, LinkedIn, and employers who visit campus at career expos, showcases and presentations.

• **What should I say?**

Ask if it is a good time to talk (if calling). Explain how you got their name, why you want to contact them, ask for either a short meeting at a time and place that suits them or their time via a phone call or email. Be clear that you aren't looking for a job. Email and phone calls each have pros and cons, so choose what you are most comfortable with, and be ready to do what best suits your contact.

Example phone call or email (*replace italics with your info*)

Hello <Mrs Smith> or Dear <Mrs Smith>

My name is <Joe Fortune> and I'm a <Microbiology undergrad at UCT>. Is this a good time for you to talk briefly?

I got your number from <my lecturer, Jane Mkhize>, who suggested I speak with you. I am interested in the <food technology> field, and I could use advice from someone who is in this field.

Would it be possible to schedule a 20 minute meeting or phone call, whenever it is convenient for you, to ask a few questions about your work and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field?



Step 2: How should I prepare?

- Research the person you are interviewing, their company and the industry. The better prepared you are, the more you will get out of the interview and the better the impression you will make.
- Prepare a summary about yourself. Make sure you can articulate your goals
- Prepare your CV to take along to the interview, not to give to them, but to have available.
- Prepare plenty of questions to take with you and draw on in the meeting.

Use the following question categories and examples to help you plan:

<p>The industry</p> <p>Is the industry undergoing any changes that would affect the jobs in it?</p> <p>What do you think about the <...relevant current industry-related event...>?</p> <p>The company or organisation</p> <p>How long do people typically stay at the organisation?</p> <p>What is the company culture like?</p> <p>What are the working hours and conditions?</p> <p>The person</p> <p>What did you do before getting this job?</p> <p>What qualifications did you have before or while in the job?</p> <p>How did you get into the field? Is it different now to when you started?</p> <p>Did the job differ from your expectations?</p> <p>What are you currently working on?</p>	<p>The job</p> <p>What does a typical day involve?</p> <p>What skills or education do I need to get the job?</p> <p>What positions do people move on to?</p> <p>What is the salary expectation at entry level?</p> <p>You</p> <p>Are there any voluntary or work experience opportunities that you recommend I apply for?</p> <p>Can you recommend anyone else for me to talk to, specifically, for example, about a related career path of interest?</p> <p>Are there any professional organisations / books / online resources that may help me enter the field?</p> <p>Would you mind if I contact you again in future (be specific), for example, to submit my CV after completing my studies.</p>
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Step 3: How should I conduct the interview?

You should aim to make the best possible impression and conduct yourself professionally, as you would if you were in a job interview, including doing the following:

- Dress professionally
- Arrive on time or a few minutes early
- Turn off your phone and other devices
- Introduce yourself, and offer a firm handshake on meeting and leaving
- Keep the meeting to an agreed time
- Take a paper and pen and your questions
- Restate the objective of the meeting
- Give a brief overview of yourself and your education and/or work background

Step 4: What do I do after the interview?

Write down what you learned from the interview. Evaluate how the information from the interview aligns with your expectations – be prepared to change your job search strategy or career goals. Strategize for your next informational interview based on your experience.

If you had a good rapport, consider keeping in contact. This person may be able to help you find work in the future. Always email to thank your interviewee for their time and information within a day or two of meeting.