

Explore your career options - informational interviewing

Informational interviewing is talking to people already employed in your field of interest about their job, industry or organisation. It's a great way to gather information and develop your networking skills.

Why would I do it?

Through informational interviewing you can:

- get a realistic understanding of daily tasks, career path and salary
- hear personal insights into the industry and understand industry trends
- gather information to help you decide if you are on the right career path
- develop contacts or a network of people in your preferred industry
- learn about work experience or job opportunities

Step one: Who do I interview?

Start with your current networks and identify 3 to 5 people who work in a job or industry that interests you. Ask your family, friends, current employer, co-workers, lecturers and student society peers if they know people in that occupation or industry.

Remember that you are not asking for a job, just asking questions to gather information and explore your options.

Extending your network

- Attend Career Fairs, student society events, faculty seminars or networking events.
- Become a member of a relevant professional association. Research their links and attend industry events where you can approach people.
- Research through the internet, newspapers and professional journals to create a list of organisations to call to find a person working in that area.

When meeting new people at social and networking events, they will usually appreciate you asking interesting questions about their work. When you seem to have built a rapport, let them know you'd like the opportunity to talk with them further. Ask politely if they have a business card, or if there is a telephone number or an email address through which you could contact them.

Read more on networking at: www.deakin.edu.au/careers

Step two: Make an appointment

You have some options for making contact to request an interview. Choose the option that suits your personal style so you feel comfortable. Regardless of which approach you use, you will need to be well prepared and communicate clearly.

- Clearly explain why you are contacting them
- Mention who referred you, or when you met them previously
- Make sure it is clear how long you expect the interview will take (keep it less than 20 minutes)

Letter or email contact

Clearly state your reasons for writing, mention your referral source and that you would like the opportunity to meet with them. Tell them that you will follow up in a couple of days (give a date) to confirm a meeting time. Follow up on the date you specified.

Telephone contact

Follow the same process as for letter or email contact. In addition pay particular attention to speaking clearly and explaining your request in a well thought out and concise manner.

Tips for telephone contact

- Practise before you call.
- Don't call at lunch time or near the close of business.
- Have a pen and your schedule handy to note the appointment time or other information.
- Be prepared to answer any questions they may have about you and your studies!

Example of what you could say or write:

"Hello Mr Brown (or Dear Mr Brown if you are writing)

My name is Michelle Drewer and I am studying towards a Bachelor of Environmental Science at Deakin University. My uncle, Brad Jolley, suggested that I would find it very helpful to talk you about my options once I graduate and to learn about where I could gain some industry experience while I am studying. I am also keen to get some tips from you about your career path and what you did with your degree.

Do you have about 20 minutes to meet me and answer some of my questions?"

Step three: Prepare for your informational interview

Choose 7 or 8 questions that will gather helpful information for you. Example questions are on the back page.

- Research the organisation where the person works so your questions are relevant and show your interest and enthusiasm.
- Keep the person's position in mind when you choose questions. Also think about previous positions they may have had.
- Practise before you go!

Consider taking an up-to-date copy of your resume along. You could ask for suggestions on improvements based on their knowledge of the role or industry.

Step four: During your informational interview

Use the same diplomacy as you would in formal work situations. For example, don't ask how much they get paid - instead, ask what salary an entry graduate should expect, or after two years of experience.

- Dress professionally and arrive about ten minutes early.
- Plan how you will start the interview. Introduce yourself and thank them for making the time to answer your questions.
- You will ask the questions and lead the discussion. Listen carefully, take notes as you talk and show interest.
- Prioritise questions in your list in case you run out of time
- Don't stay longer than you asked to - show you value their time.
- Ask if there are other people they think you should talk to
- Make a good impression with your presentation, preparation and professionalism.

Never ask for a job or try to turn an informational interview into a job interview - your contact will feel misled.

Sometimes informational interviews have turned into actual employment interviews. If it seems you are being interviewed for a specific job, clarify it with the employer so that you can emphasise your transferable skills and how they relate to the job.

Step five: After the informational interview:

There are three things you should do immediately following an informational interview.

1. Reflect on your new learning
2. Follow up
3. Update your records

Reflect on your new learning

Each interview will provide new information. Reflect on insights about:

- information you gathered on that position or industry
- issues to consider
- plans or topics for your next interview.

Ask yourself:

Does it seem like a good fit for me?

Is there other training I should consider?

How do I feel about the hours and type of schedule (set/flexible) described?

What do I need to do to become a competitive candidate?

Would I be satisfied with the work situation described?

Would I be dissatisfied with the same thing(s) they find dissatisfying?

How do I feel about the conditions (stress/anxieties) of this occupation? Do I want to deal with them?

Has my opinion of the occupation changed as a result of the interview?

What are the most important new facts and understandings that I acquired?

Did I have any misconceptions changed by what they said?

Follow up

Within a day of the interview:

- Write an email to thank your contact for their time. Tell them what you gained from the conversation.
- Get in touch with any people they suggested may be helpful.
- Research any training or work experience leads they mentioned.

Update your records

Keep up-to-date records of all the contacts you make as you may want to contact them in the future regarding work opportunities.

Example:

Organisation and date of contact	Person I will interview	Place, date and time of interview	My questions	Follow up letter sent	Notes
<i>Envirosolutions Called: 14 July</i>	<i>Tim Brown (referred by Uncle Brad)</i>	<i>211 Queen St, Melbourne 21 July, 2:20pm</i>	<i>What has been your career path? What do you like best about this job?</i>	<i>22 July</i>	<i>Check envirofax website for training dates</i>

Example questions for informational interviews

In a 15 or 20 minute meeting, you will only have time for a few questions. Prioritise!

Questions about the job

- What has been your career path?
- What do you like best about this job?
- What are your main responsibilities/ kind of tasks do you do on a typical day or week?
- What are some of the more difficult or frustrating parts of this job?
- I really like doing..... Do you have the opportunity to do that in this job?
- What qualities does a person in this job need to have?
- What sort of person progresses in this job/field?

Questions about working conditions

- What kind of hours do you work? Are these hours typical for this job?
- What kind of pay range could a graduate expect in this occupation?
- Does this career require travel?
- Are you able to achieve an effective work/life balance in this role?

Questions about training

- What training did you do to prepare for this job? What qualifications or courses are well regarded in this industry?
- What do you recommend that I do to prepare for an entry level job?
- What types of job would help me learn the most at the start of my career?
- What type of work experience or internship would an employer look for in a job applicant like me? How could I get some industry work experience?
- What are the key skills that I should include in a job application for this field?
- Where are the growth areas and skill shortages in this industry?
- How can I increase my chances of getting a job in this field?
- What professional association would you recommend that I join?
- What sort of professional development is offered by this organisation?

Questions about careers and contacts

- How did you go about job hunting after you graduated?
- What contacts or resources were most useful when you were looking for a job in this field?
- Did you get some knockbacks and how did you deal with those?
- What advice would you give me about where to look for jobs?
- What advice would you give me about preparing for applications or interviews in this field?
- Where are vacancies advertised for this industry sector?
- Are there any issues or developments that may influence job prospects in this field?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could talk to for information? Can I say that you gave me their name?
- What is the one piece of advice you wish you had been given before you went into this career?