

Professional Portfolio Development - Outdoor Adventure Skills Program

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS



INTRODUCTION

Information interviewing involves speaking to people who work in the field you want to learn more about. It is not interviewing for a job. Use it as a way to gather more information about the field you are interested in, so that you can make informed career choices, gather information necessary to write effective cover letters and resumes, and be better prepared for future job interviews. **Information interviews can also be a great way to make valuable industry contacts.** If you leave a good impression, your name may later be passed along to someone else who is in a position to interview you (but don't go in expecting this to happen). In order to leave the best impression possible, you must be prepared and act professionally.

Don't be afraid to set up these interviews. Most people genuinely want to help others, especially if your request comes across as professional, undemanding and polite. **To prepare for an information interview, do as much research as possible about the industry ahead of time, think of intelligent questions and rehearse what you want to discuss.** Before you head out for your interview, become familiar with the contact's organization: its products, services, competitors, etc. Also try to gather whatever information you can about your contact. Figure out what you want to discuss. A possible strategy might be:

Explain why you have set up the interview - what you hope to get out of it (don't ask them for a job).

Provide an overview of your career goals, experience, accomplishments and skills.

Ask questions – get information about trends in the industry, challenges the organization faces, etc.

Ask for referrals – names of others with whom you may be able to speak.

FINDING AN INTERVIEWEE

You will pleasantly be surprised to find that most people are willing to talk about the work that they do. It is part of the mentoring process to share information about a career with someone who is interested in entering the field.

To find an interviewee, you can:

call or email the Human Resources officer at a *company* you would like to work at and ask to speak to someone with whom you may be able to conduct an information interview,

interview a friend, a graduate, or relative if you know someone working in the field (your *personal network*),

look in *business directories, trade journals, or the Internet* for the companies and contact information,

contact *faculty and program advisors* at Fleming for names of employers and past graduates.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATION INTERVIEW

1. Call the interviewee and introduce yourself

Tell your contact that you would like to spend 20- 30 minutes with him or her either on the telephone or in person to discuss the educational requirements and experience needed to obtain a job of your choice in that company. This is an opportunity to learn about the company and the occupation. Also inquire about company's growth and hiring potentials, as well as about the career field.

2. Prepare sample questions

Here are a few sample questions you could use to show your sincere interest. Choose any of the following questions that would best suit your purposes. You may want to send your contact the questions ahead of time so that they are more prepared to use your and their time efficiently.

- **Occupation-specific questions:**

- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What kind of education/training is needed for this position?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- How did you get your job?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
- Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?

- **Career questions:**

- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- What are the basic education/training/experience prerequisites for jobs in this field?
- What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
- What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why?

3. Set a time to meet or talk on the telephone.

Be punctual and do not go over the agreed upon time limit unless directed by the interviewee. Respect the time limit that your contact has given you.

4. Treat an information interview seriously.

Arrive prepared to ask insightful questions and to answer questions about yourself. Dress appropriately, and bring your résumé. This is your opportunity to make a contact in the career field. At a later time, you may want to speak to the person again to inquire about hiring possibilities. So begin on a positive note.

5. Do not ask your contact for a job.

An information interview is conducted for the purpose of gathering information about a job and a company. It is not a job interview. If asked, however, be prepared to provide a résumé. The interviewee may keep it on file for future reference.

6. Always follow up with a thank you note

Following up with a thank you note demonstrates your appreciation for the time spent with you. It provides a courteous close to your interaction and signals your openness to future contact.

7. Before you leave the interview, ask your contact for the name of someone else that might be suitable for you to talk to. This is a way of building your network of employment contacts.

For more information about information interviews visit:

<http://www.canadiancareers.com/infointerview.html>

This site provides resources on information interviews, including interview tips and questions, links to tutorials, definitions, preparation, and benefits.