INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information, not to get a job or to ask someone if there are opportunities at their company. You want to talk to people out there in the field who are already doing something you might be considering, someone who could serve as a resource for information and guidance to you in your career planning and your job search. You want to make informed decisions about your career plans, your career path, and to do that, you need to gather as much information as you can about career options, companies/industries, job markets, etc. You also want to obtain leads and contacts of additional people who might be able to help you.

Have a notepad and pen handy and try to get the person’s business card for your follow-up thank-you letter.

Informational Interviewing Etiquette

- Arrive on time for the interview. NEVER arrive late.
- Never waste the interviewer’s time. Be prepared, organized, and focused on the information you are trying to gather.
- Assure the person that you aren’t asking for a job, but are hoping to gather information about your intended career path.
- Prepare a list of relevant, well thought out questions to ask.
- After any interview, whether informational, traditional, or over the phone, ALWAYS write a thank-you letter. Good business etiquette keeps doors open to future opportunities.

Some Sample Questions to Ask

1. What type of work do you do – special projects, your daily routine, etc.?
2. What career path is typical for someone in your position?
3. What credentials, background, special skills, training, etc. are required for your position?
4. How did you prepare for, and obtain, this position?
5. What is the most rewarding, and least rewarding, aspect of your job?
6. Are you required to travel, work late hours or weekends?
7. Do salaries, compensation, opportunities for this position vary in different regions of the country? Global opportunities?
8. Any “inside advice”, tips you could offer me in pursuing a similar career?
9. Do you feel your present career/company/industry has potential for growth, or do you feel your skills/job could become obsolete in the future?
10. If your present job was eliminated, what could you take from this job to be competitive for a new job? Would you need additional training?
11. If you were in a position to hire someone for your position, what would you look for in the ideal candidate?
12. Does your company usually hire internally, or do they search for outside candidates? How do they advertise their job opportunities?
13. How do you feel your position/your company would be attractive to job candidates?
14. In addition to your company, what other companies hire people with my skills and background? What other industries? Best geographic locations?
15. Do you feel from my background/skills so far, I am on the right track for pursuing this career path? Any weak areas I need to address?
16. Could you suggest some additional people I could contact who might be helpful to me with my plans? Is it ok with you if I mention that you referred me?
As employers increasingly rely on telephone interviews to screen job candidates, students need to be prepared for that possibility. During phone interviews, employers can:

- Judge tenacity in a candidate by not returning the candidate’s phone call. Tenacious candidates, they say, don’t give up. Instead, they persist in calling every 10 days, expressing their interest in the position and the company – even when their messages go unanswered.
- Identify candidates with positive attitude by asking about “worst boss” horror stories. They claim that true positive thinkers avoid divulging such stories and instead will focus on “best boss” anecdotes.
- Get a sense of how quickly candidates think on their feet by role-playing during the phone interview. They view quick thinkers, such as those who can appease a persistent, irate customer, as an asset to any organization.
- Find out whether candidates accept criticism and have a desire to improve, or get defensive.
- Test candidates’ adaptability by suggesting alternate ways of getting work done or solving problems. For example, they ask what candidates would think of performance evaluations that were done by peers or clients, or how they would feel working in a specific geographical location.
- Ascertain which candidates have a thirst for knowledge and a desire for expanding their horizons by asking what books they have recently read, what electives they studied in college, and what their hobbies are.
- Determine which candidates have superior communication skills by asking them to leave voice-mail messages stating why they are right for the position. Such messages indicate how effectively they can articulate their position and how well they will function when hired.

How You are Evaluated During a Phone Interview:

- Did you have an enthusiastic voice?
- Did you answer questions vaguely or directly?
- Did you research the company well, or did you ask simple questions?
- Did you express interest in a second interview?
- Did you follow up with a thank-you letter?
- Did you pursue this opportunity with a phone call or e-mail?
- Did you send supporting material (résumé, portfolio, etc.)
How Can You Prepare for a Telephone Interview?

1. Other than having to wear your business suit, treat the phone interview the same as a traditional face-to-face interview. Be just as prepared and professional.
2. By including your phone number of your résumé, you are telling an employer to contact you at that number. Anticipate that any call could be from a potential employer. Answer your phone with a simple “hello”.
3. Have a copy of your résumé, your files of job-hunting information, and notepaper and pen within easy reach.
4. Also have a calendar or appointment book nearby in case you need to schedule a date for an interview.
5. **During the Interview:**
   1. Be in a private place where you feel comfortable.
   2. During the conversation, answer questions just as you would in a face-to-face interview. Take time to organize your thoughts, be sure you understand the question, focus on your interest in the job and your qualifications for the job.
   3. At the conclusion of the conversation, be sure you understand the follow-up. If in doubt, ask. Thank the caller and express interest. Be sure you have the person’s name, correct spelling, title, company, address and phone number.

After the Call:

1. Write down a few notes – who called, what was discussed, next steps, etc. Keep all this information in your job-hunting file.
2. Write a follow-up letter thanking the interviewer, restating one or two key points, and reaffirming your interest.

**Tips for a Successful Phone Interview**

- Practice Practice Practice
- Have a self-confident and enthusiastic voice. Smiling while you talk helps.
- Speak succinctly. Don’t be long-winded, but avoid “yes” or “no” answers.
- Enunciate your words carefully and speak directly into the phone.
- Don’t allow dead air: Have a list of questions to fill time.
- Don’t eat, or chew gum while interviewing.
- Do not take other calls during the interview, (ignore or disable call-waiting)
- Do not use a cordless phone unless necessary.
- Your posture can be determined by the sound of your voice. Sit in an upright position or remain standing.
- Avoid nervous habits that will create noise, such as clicking a pen or scratching your head.
- Treat the phone interview with as much preparation as you would an on-site interview.
Creating a Video-Friendly Environment:
It is important to have everything in place before you begin. You want to limit distractions so that the focus is on you, not what’s in the background.

- Position your webcam at eye-level
- Proper lighting is essential for high-quality video
  - A simple desk lamp can be used as your main light source
  - Turn on any available lights in the room, close all windows, and check to make sure there is no glare in the monitor
- Be mindful of your background
  - Position yourself in front of a wall with neutral colors; avoid patterns, wallpaper and mirrors
  - Be sure recording area is clean—a tidy workspace conveys professionalism and organization to your potential employer
  - Turn off appliances or devices that may create noise
- Your recording space should be quiet and comfortable
  - Allot yourself ample time to answer each question in your chosen space
  - Eliminate all possible distractions and interruptions

Preparing for your interview:
Mental preparation for your interview is just as important as the physical setup. You should prepare for your recorded interview with the same tenacity and focus as if you were walking into your employer’s office.

- Practice, Practice, Practice!
  - In a traditional interview, eye contact is of the utmost importance, so make sure you look directly into the camera to answer the questions posed to you.
  - Do not look at the computer screen when answering questions—this places your line of sight below the webcam and you will appear to be looking down from the interviewer’s point of view.
- Research the organization and ready yourself to answer company-specific questions
  - Familiarize yourself with the company’s mission statement, history, product and service offerings, management, and information about the company culture.
- Be prepared to answer any questions about your resume and rehearse your responses
  - Review your resume and develop multiple talking points around all of your past
  - Polish your answers—nothing destroys your credibility faster than a constant stream of filler words like “um”, “like”, and “you know”.

Taking the Interview:

- Speak clearly and enunciate
  - You don’t want brilliant answers to be mumbled
  - Listen to each question, contemplate your response, and answer concisely.

- Answer with a headline
  - The first sentence of your answer should set the tone by restating the question and providing your initial instinctual opinion.

- Take a deep breath, relax and let your personality shine through.
  - At the end of the day, employers hire human beings, not just the name at the top of the resume
  - Smile and have fun- remember, if you are adequately prepares, you will be successful.

UmmLikeYouKnow Filter Help:
People seem to use “umm”, “like”, “I mean”, and “you know” as crutches when they’re not prepared. Be prepared, be passionate and enlist the help of others.

- When you have something to say and you’re passionate about it, you will use filter words less frequently.
- Employers like to see composed, thoughtful responses so don’t be afraid to take a second to formulate your response.
- Enlist the help of others. Give your friends a nickel every time they catch you using a filter word! If you learn to stop using them in everyday life, you’ll have no problem in an interview.
- Record yourself. This will help you reflect upon your communication patterns and it will help you catch your filter words. I mean sometimes we like use them umm without even realizing it you know?

Information for the video interview handout was taken directly from the interview stream website. PDF’s with more information can be found under the interview stream resources section.
Behavioral Interviewing, an increasingly common format used by recruiters, is based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. You will be asked to describe past experiences and provide specific details about what you did, accomplished, and learned, etc.

Tips and Suggestions

- Know your own strengths and accomplishments. Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments, successes, projects, activities, etc.
- Listen carefully to each question and take time to organize your response.
- Ask for clarification if needed (“Am I answering your question? Do you mean…?”)
- Tell the interviewer about a specific situation, not a vague general one.
- Focus on your role in the situation, unless specifically asked otherwise. Focus on “I…” not “we…”.
- Avoid vague or hypothetical responses, such as “I usually…” “I always…” “I never…”.
- Very personal examples or experiences are not appropriate for an interview.
- Answer the question that is asked, not one you may have already rehearsed.
- There may be little time for you to ask questions, but have questions just in case.

Sample Questions

1. Tell me about a major project you had to plan for school or work. 
   (Organizational skills)
2. Describe a situation when you had several things to do in a limited time. 
   (Ability to set priorities, time management)
3. Tell me about a time when you helped to resolve a group problem. 
   (Teamwork skills, interpersonal skills)
4. Tell me about a time when you had to turn to someone else for assistance. 
   (Knowing limitations)
5. Talk about a situation when you had to take charge to get something done. 
   (Taking initiative, responsibility)
6. Tell me about a time when you had to learn and apply something new in a short time. 
   (Ability to learn and apply knowledge)
7. Describe something you did that you are particularly proud of or consider an accomplishment. 
   (Leads to follow-up questions on HOW … planning, leadership, delegation, etc.)