

Learning About Careers

How Can I Learn About Careers?

There are **various methods** for learning about careers of interest — **online resources, books, publications, videos, etc.** But the best method for finding out **the most current and accurate information is through informational interviewing.** Career informational interviewing is the process of interviewing an individual who has a career that you may be interested in. It provides you with key information you need to choose a career, select a major, or learn how to break in and find out if you have what it takes to succeed in a particular career.

How can it benefit you? Consider that one out of every 200 resumes (some say as high as 1,500 resumes) results in a job offer. Even though getting a job is not the purpose of informational interviewing, **one out of every 12 informational interviews, results in a job offer.** Job offers just happen to be a great side benefit of this valuable practice.

Informational Interviewing

- ◆ The term informational interviewing was coined by **Richard Bolles**, author of the best-selling career guide, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Bolles refers to the process as **“trying on jobs to see if they fit you.”** You conduct the job screening process in advance of pursuing a career.
- ◆ **Informational interviews can be used by many types of career seekers:** college students embarking on their career path, or **career changers** who want to know which of their skills might transfer to a new field, or **job seekers** within the same career field.
- ◆ **An informational interview is not the same as a job interview** by any means, but it is probably the **most effective form of networking there is.**
- ◆ CSM students in CRER 120 are required to conduct informational interviews and report their results to the class. **It’s not uncommon that someone in the course will receive a job offer or internship as a result.**
- ◆ **Most people make career decisions based upon romantic notions as seen on TV or in the movies.** Most do not talk with people in their career field of interest before jumping in. Yet you miss out on an incredible opportunity if you fail to research your career field by talking to people in it.



Adapted from: <http://www.quintcareers.com/>

PREPARING FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is a great way for you to research a career or field of work. It gives you an opportunity to “interview” potential employers to learn more about the requirements and duties of this work, to develop relationships leading to possible future employment, and to practice your interviewing skills. The purpose is to gather information, not to find an immediate job, although this sometimes happens. Below are some tips to help you prepare for informational interviewing.

- ◆ **Schedule several informational interviews for the same career (5-8)** -This gives you a more rounded picture of the field, as well as more employers to network with. Talking with many employers builds your skill and confidence in asking and answering questions.
- ◆ **Consider preparing a resume** – Even though this is not a job interview, having a resume helps the employer better understand your skills and background. Ask the employer to critique your resume – identifying areas for further development.
- ◆ **Prepare a list of questions to ask during the interview** - Take along a list of about 10 questions you’d like to ask (job duties, entry requirements, starting pay, job openings, internship opportunities, etc.). Identify those of greatest priority so that if time runs short, you’ll get the most important questions answered first.
- ◆ **Put your resume, list of questions, paper and pen in a portfolio or folder to take with you.** Write down the information you gather during the interview.
- ◆ **Dress professionally** – Wear clothing that you would wear to a job interview and appropriate for this work/career field. When in doubt, dress more conservatively.
- ◆ **Make a good impression.** Even though your meeting is for informational purposes, the employer is still evaluating you for possible present or future job openings. So make a good impression.
- ◆ **Ask the employer to evaluate your experiences** and qualifications in comparison to the career you’re interested in. Ask specific questions about how you could better prepare for this type of work, including educational training.
- ◆ **Remember, besides gathering career information, you are also evaluating the employer and field.** Notice whether workers appear happy, how attractive the facilities are, and whether this is the type of environment and field you’d like to work in.
- ◆ **Send a thank you note shortly after your meeting** to thank the employer for their assistance and to keep the door open for future contact. Then periodically, contact the employer with an update of your activities and if ready, to inquire about employment/internship opportunities.



BEGINNING YOUR LIST OF CONTACTS



To get started with your informational interviews, you'll need to contact people who work in a career of interest. To find these people, it's easiest to call people you know to ask for their help in giving you referrals to individuals who work in this career field. Your family and friends may be able to give you the names and contact information for these people. Next you'll move onto your acquaintances. Once you've exhausted these lists, contact people you don't know, but who may work in a job of interest.

To get started, write down the contact name and information below:

Name

Phone Number

Contact Date & Results

Close Contacts (family, relatives, friends, etc.)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Acquaintances (co-workers, neighbors, and school, church, social, sports clubs, etc.)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Cold Contacts (those you don't know directly — companies for directories, staffing agencies, etc.)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

The best way to arrange an informational interview, besides networking with people you know, is by directly contacting employers. Below is a sample guide for calling.

Introduction

- ◆ “Hello, I would like to speak with the _____ department.”
- ◆ “Hello, I’d like to speak with the _____ supervisor (or person who’s in charge of your _____ staff).”
- ◆ “Hello, this is _____. I wonder if you might be able to help me with some information?
That’s great.”

Asking for a Meeting

- ◆ “I’m attending College of San Mateo and am considering/working toward a (degree/certificate) in _____ to later work in the _____ field. I’m very interested in learning more about this field so that I can clarify my career goals. I’m only calling a few businesses to learn first-hand about this field and would really like to meet with you. I’d like to know how **you** got into this field, what **you** like and dislike about it, and what a typical day may look like for **you**. This information would be very helpful to me in making a good career decision. Would you be able to meet with me for about 15 – 20 minutes sometime this week or next?”

If yes, then say...

- ◆ “That’s great! When would be a good time for you to meet?” (Set date and time and get address/directions.)

If No, then say...

- ◆ “Thanks so much for your time. Would there be someone else at your company whom I might be able to speak with about this information? (If not, then...) Would there be someone else at another company who might be able to help me with this information?”
- ◆ “Great!” (Get the name and phone number of the person(s) and ask if you may give their name as a referral when calling.)



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REPORT SHEET

Prior to your informational interview, make a list of the questions you'll ask your interviewee about their career. Below is a **sample list of questions** you might want to consider asking. Add any others that you would like information about. Use this form to record your interview results.

Career Researching _____

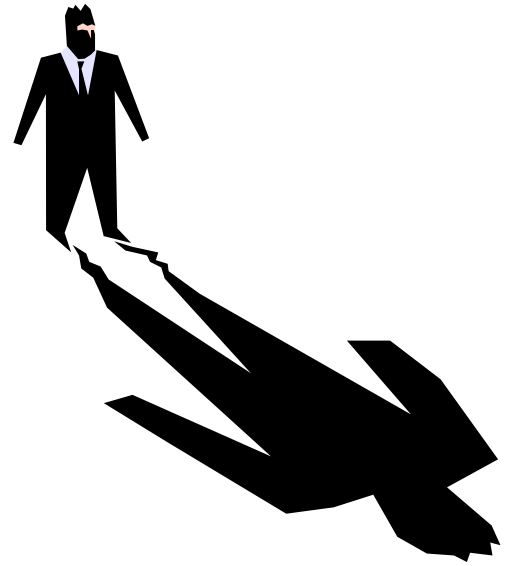
Date of Interview _____ **Company Name** _____

Contact Person _____ **Title** _____

Phone _____ **Email** _____

1. What are typical entry-level positions in this field?
2. What are the typical job duties someone in this position performs?
3. How does a person enter this field? Any appropriate majors for this work?
4. What skills are required to work in this occupation?
5. What personality traits/qualities are useful for people in this profession?
6. What training/qualifications would you recommend for someone to enter this field?
7. What are some of the enjoyable aspects of this work?
8. What are some of the less enjoyable aspects of this work?
9. What are some pros and cons of this work?
10. What is a typical starting salary for this work?
11. How frequently do you hire for this position?
12. What is the current forecast for employment in this field? (How many people were hired during the past six months?, Are there current job openings?, Openings anticipated in the next six months?)
13. Describe possible paths of advancement with this occupation.
14. Who else might I speak to about this career?

JOB SHADOWING



What is Job Shadowing?

Job shadowing is an opportunity to visit a company and observe an employee who is working in the occupation you hope to enter often for a half to full day.

Why Job Shadow?

Job shadowing allows you to learn as much as possible about the responsibilities, skills, and future outlook of occupations you are considering for future employment. With the changing world of work and new technological advances, it takes a great deal of insight, knowledge and know-how to make a decision that could affect the rest of your life.

Benefits of a Job Shadow

- Explore interesting careers
- More in-depth exploration of a career
- Observe professionals at their workplace
- Obtain knowledge that comes only from being in the job setting
- Determine if this career path is the right one
- Link textbook knowledge acquired in class and apply it directly to the real world of work

How to Get Started

Use the same strategy you would to find a person for an informational interview. Instead of asking for an interview, you would ask to observe the person for a few hours or an entire day. Another approach to use at the end of an informational interview would be to ask about a future job shadowing opportunity.

What Happens During Job Shadowing?

During your time with the employer, you can ask questions about the career, observe the person performing their duties, take good notes about the components of the job, the work environment, interactions with other people, and tally up what you like and dislike about the position. You might also inquire about internship opportunities. Whether the job fit appears to be a good fit or not, ask your contact for referrals to other contacts where you might be able to shadow to give you another example to consider.

After the Job Shadow

Within one to two days of your visit, send a thank you note to your contact describing the value of the experience and what you found to be helpful. Then stay in touch which may result in future job offers.

