



UNC Asheville Career Center
259 Highsmith University Union
(828) 251-6515 career@unca.edu www.unca.edu/career

The Basics of Informational Interviewing

What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing is a well-planned, scheduled interview with a person who is doing the kind of work in which you are interested. It is an excellent technique to use when you want to: explore your career options; learn more about certain occupations; and/or network with people who can help you in your job search. Although it is an effective job search tool, you need to remember that *the primary purpose of an informational interview is to obtain information, not to obtain a job.*

Benefits of Informational Interviews

- One of the most valued strategies in gathering information and establishing contacts as you begin or continue to build plans for the future.
- Gain a firsthand impression of a specific work environment.
- Get practical ideas and insider advice about how to enter that field.
- Get the names of other people in your field of interest who can give you more information.
- Develop and maintain friendly relationships with your contacts over time and they may let you know about future job opportunities.

How to Schedule an Informational Interview

Utilize your contact base to identify people who are doing the kind of work you want to research. Your contact base includes family, friends, fellow students, faculty, university staff and former work colleagues from your part-time jobs and/or internships. The UNC Asheville Career Center also has a searchable database of alumni mentors who have offered to assist students. Go to the Career Center website and click on "online postings." At the top of the page, click on Mentors. You can search the database according to location and occupational interests.

Call or write the person you want to interview requesting a 20-30 minute meeting. Introduce yourself as a student or alumni who is exploring career options. Explain that you are interested in learning more about specific job fields as part of your career planning process. Most people are very flattered and love to talk about their job.

Preparing for the Informational Interview

It is very important to be well prepared for the informational interview. The positive impression you make during the interview could potentially lead to employment opportunities later. Learn something about the company so that you can show a genuine interest in the work environment. Most importantly, prepare a set of questions that will give you the breadth of information you need to assist you in your career planning process. A suggested list of questions is included with this handout. Establish a system for organizing the contact information and results of each interview. This is important for both follow-up activities as well as for making a decision on your career choice.

The Interview

You should treat the informational interview the same as an employment interview. Dress appropriately, arrive a few minutes early, and be polite to everyone you meet. Be sure to have your prepared questions with you and something on which to take notes. You may have your resume with you and offer it at the end of the interview, if you think it is appropriate and if you are interested in the company. Keep the focus on your stated purpose, *to learn more about the job field*, and be sure to end the interview within the time you requested. Ask for the names of other people (at least two) who would be good contacts for interviews. Send a thank you letter within 24 hours of your interview. Organize your notes and contact information.

Good Informational Interview Questions

- What do you like the most about your job?
- Please tell me about your background and how you prepared for this career.
- Describe a “typical” day for you.
- What are the most important skills required for this type of work?
- If you were starting over, what changes, if any, would you make in your career?
- What are the most difficult or challenging aspects of your job?
- What advice can you give me about breaking into this field?
- Tell me about the work environment: hours, travel, health issues, etc.
- What is the short-term and long-term outlook for this field?
- Do you mainly work independently or with a team?
- What are your primary responsibilities?
- What are the professional growth opportunities in this career field?
- Do you have any suggestions for other people I should meet?
- May I use your name when I set up additional interviews?
- Where do you suggest I go to obtain additional information on this career?

Good Websites

- http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html
- <http://danenet.wicip.org/jets/jet-9407-p.html>
- <http://content.monstertrak.monster.com/resources/archive/jobhunt/infowhy/>
- http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/occupations/a/info_interviews.htm