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The Information Interview

The information interview is a low-key situation in which you contact people who have the knowledge you seek or who make hiring decisions about a field of interest to you.. The interview can be used to research companies and positions, and to develop contact persons and job leads.

Preparation is the key to conducting a successful information interview. The steps listed below will help you arrange an appointment and plan an effective interview.

- Identify an appropriate organization and contact person within the organization.
- Prepare or review your resume.
- Determine whether you want to arrange the interview in person or over the phone.
- If you are arranging an interview by phone, refer to the **Telephone Prompter** below.
- When you are ready to place your call, make sure there are no distractions. Call from a quiet room, not a pay phone.
- If you are scheduling an interview in person, make certain you dress and act professionally.
- Arrange the interview at a time that is convenient to your contact person. Be flexible in scheduling the appointment.
- Read up on your field of interest.
- Prepare a list of relevant questions to use at the interview. (See back of page for suggestions.)
- Get a good night's sleep before the interview, and relax. Since you are seeking information and not a job, the interview is yours to control.

Where To Find Potential Information Interviewees

- Alumni
- Classroom guest speakers
- Company literature, annual reports, brochures, websites, etc.
- Employment directories
- Faculty contacts
- Friend working for a company in which you're interested
- Friends of the family
- Neighbors
- Newspaper, magazine articles
- NIU Career Services
- Speakers at conferences, student group meetings, graduation ceremonies
- Trade journals

Information Interview Questions

Below are some questions appropriate for use in an information interview. Alter the list according to your information needs. Your additional questions will form the basis for your interview so it is advisable to bring the list with you to the appointment. **Remember:** This is not a job interview, so you can bring up salary and other topics you normally would not ask about. Also, note taking in an information interview is encouraged.

- How did you get your start in this career?
- What is a typical work day like?
- Do the duties change at any time, i.e., each week, month or season?
- How long is your typical work week?

- Is overtime required? Allowed?
- How did you prepare for entry into this field? What specific training or degree did you obtain?
- Where is the best place to get appropriate education, training or experience?
- What is the entry-level salary range for your field? What is the salary range for higher levels?
- What are the opportunities for advancement within this field? This company?
- What skills are most important for your kind of work?
- My strongest skills are Do people in your field have skills similar to mine? What are their job titles?
- What rewards do you get from your work?
- What are the frustrations of your work?
- Are there good sources of information on this company, industry or field that you could recommend?
- What personal advice would you give a person entering this field?
- Can you give me the names of other people who might provide me with information or who might be helpful? May I use your name?

Telephone Prompter

Before you call someone to schedule an information interview, practice what you will say. This step in your preparation will allow you to be more relaxed when you place your call and increase the likelihood that you will get an appointment.

Use the format below or develop your own, but don't neglect this step. Even the most secure speaker needs practice.

Hello (Mr., Mrs., Ms.)_____. My name is _____. _____*_____ suggested I give you a call regarding information on _____. I'm not looking for a job. I'd just like some information about this field. I'm thinking of (a career change, entering this field, etc.) and would like to speak with you for a short time. I realize you are very busy, but perhaps we could have coffee or meet for lunch--whatever is convenient for you.

*If no one referred you to this person, explain how you got his or her name. For example, you might say, "I read an article about you in..." or "You were the speaker at a convention I attended."

Your request for an appointment to speak with a potential contact may be turned down.. Don't take the refusal personally and don't get discouraged. Use any refusal as a learning tool. Go back over the conversation to see if you can improve your preparation, strategy or presentation. Then try the next name on your list. In the long run you will have plenty of favorable replies – because, in general, people enjoy discussing their work with others.

The Follow-Up

The information interview doesn't end when you say good-bye. To make the most of what you learned you should follow-up on names, places, and resources mentioned during the interview.

- Review your notes
- Contact your new leads
- Read suggested material
- Send a thank-you note
- Send your resume, if appropriate
- Arrange another meeting in the future, if appropriate
- If you find an interesting and applicable item (announcement, newspaper article, website, etc.), send it to your contact.
- Report back to your contact regarding any leads given during the interview. Relate what happened and express your appreciation again.