



Careers Centre

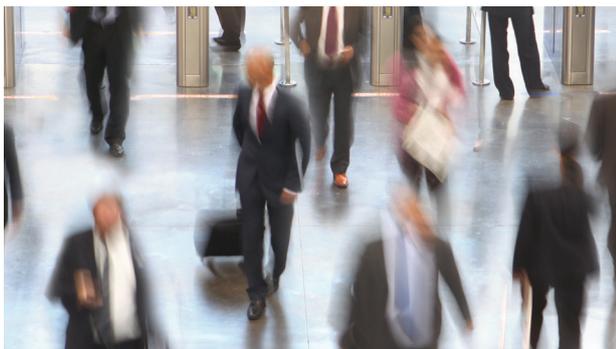
# Informational Interview Tips

Informational interviewing is a key part of your job search strategy. It involves talking to people to gain focussed information about a position, career field or an organisation.

## Why ask for an informational interview?

Informational interviewing can help you to make career decisions with research showing some of the most successful job seekers spend time talking to people in various organisations before they began seeking employment. In order to make an informed career decision, it makes sense to ask the experts who are actually in the occupation or field that you are interested in. The information interview, because of its exploratory nature can be particularly enlightening for university graduates and career changers.

In an informational interview, you are seeking leads and information regarding an industry, a career path or an employer by talking to people you know or who have now been referred to you. It is important to realise it is not an job interview.



## What are the benefits?

Informational interviewing allows you to build a targeted network of contacts in your field of interest. This network allows you to obtain information about how to “break in” and “succeed” in a chosen field as well as learn about the trends, growth potential and the important issues.

Informational interviewing also allows you to tap into the hidden job market and gain information about unadvertised positions and career paths you had not previously considered. On a personal level, you will be able to highlight any skill gaps or room for personal improvement, identify your professional strengths and mentally sample an occupation or company.

Having complete an informational interview you may have developed greater confidence, have a recommendation from an individual within the organisation and be a more impressive candidate.

## Preparing for the interview

### Identify the Information You Want

You should have a sense of what is important to you and what you want.

Deciding which position, company or industry you want to learn about would depend on what you want to do with your life and career.

## Become self aware (emotional intelligence)

- Take the time to assess your interests, work related values, beliefs, skills, motivators, de-motivators, and job preferences before you embark on an information interview. This may help you to narrow down the companies or positions you wish to target.
- While gathering information, stop and think: Does what I'm finding out about this type of work show me that it really suit my aims and interests?
- Visit the UWA Careers Centre or check out these useful websites listed below.

## Discover the industry

Use a variety of resources to discover the industry:

- Industry websites and brochures
- Past employment advertisements containing job profiles and selection criteria
- UWA Careers Centre; Careers Fairs, CareerHub, Career Mentor Link, Workshops, One-to one appointments, Employer presentations
- Professional Organisations
- Online job boards
- Newspapers and business publications or directories (eg. BRW Top 500 Companies)

## Useful websites

### Self awareness

*My Future - career and occupations*

[www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au) – career and occupation site

*Your Career and You*

[www.graduatecareers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/YourCareerYou-2012\\_web.pdf](http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/YourCareerYou-2012_web.pdf)

*Department of Training and Workforce Development*

[www.careercentre.dtwd.wa.gov.au/careerplanning/Pages/CareerPlanning.aspx](http://www.careercentre.dtwd.wa.gov.au/careerplanning/Pages/CareerPlanning.aspx)

### Research the labour market and industry

- [www.joboutlook.gov.au](http://www.joboutlook.gov.au) – skill shortages/occupations
- [www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au) – career and occupation site
- [www.jobguide.deewr.gov.au](http://www.jobguide.deewr.gov.au) - occupation research
- [www.graduatecareers.com.au](http://www.graduatecareers.com.au)
- [www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/ResearchStatistics/Pages/AustralianJobs.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/ResearchStatistics/Pages/AustralianJobs.aspx)
- Fact sheets on Career Hub - [uwa.careerhub.com.au](http://uwa.careerhub.com.au)
- [www.graduateopportunities.com](http://www.graduateopportunities.com)
- Employer Websites- Advertised positions – what do employers want?
- Professional associations
- Gradaustralia – [www.gradaustralia.com](http://www.gradaustralia.com)
- Gradconnection- [au.gradconnection.com](http://au.gradconnection.com)

## Make a List of People You Know

Choose those who can help you connect to other people within a company or industry. Since this is part of networking, you will want to include anyone and everyone you know including:

- Your fellow students
- Co-workers
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Friend's parents who may work in business or industry
- Lecturers
- Professional organisations
- Your alumni association
- Attend Professional meetings
- Follow up on casual business invitations that you may have received

## Learn about the Contact

You will need to research who within an organisation you want to contact including their position and the company structure. Company reports and websites are a good place to obtain this information or alternatively you can write to the company or phone them for information.

## Make the Appointment

You will need to contact the person you wish to interview by phone or letter to schedule an interview. Remember that they are generally busy; therefore you will need to be flexible with your time. If they are too busy to speak to you initially, enquire about the most convenient time for you to call back (don't expect them to call you).

When requesting an Informational Interview by phone, ask to speak directly with the person of interest (from your research, you should know the name of the person you wish to see and the title of his/her position).

When you get through to your contact person, introduce yourself, state where you are from (e.g. a student at UWA), explain that you are conducting personal research in their career field and would like to meet with them for 20-30 minutes to find out first-hand information to assist in your career exploration and decision making.

Sometimes your contact person will ask you to conduct the interview then and there. It is important that you have your questions ready in this event, because this may be the only chance you will have to obtain the information that you are seeking. (See "Examples of Informational Interview Questions")

It may turn out that your contact is unable to grant you the time you are seeking. If so, ask whether they would suggest another contact for you. Take the names and numbers down

and always be polite and professional. Remember to ask your contact if you can use their name. When contacting the referral, explain that the first contact gave you his/her name and suggested that you call them to request information.

Be **strategic** in your choice of prospective interviewees. You may wish to include some people who have the power to **hire** you should a position become available.

Requesting an Informational Interview by **letter or e-mail** is less immediate than a phone request and possibly less effective as it does not require a response. You may need to **follow-up** with a polite phone call. Your letter should:

- Be treated like a cover letter- professional and impressive.
- Be short, succinct and relevant (1 page maximum).
- Explain who you are, what your qualifications are and why you are writing to this person.
- Request a 20-30 minute appointment to enable you to interview the person and gather information.
- State your flexibility and ability to fit in with their schedule.
- Close with a thank you, and a pro-active statement that you will contact them the week beginning date (----) to set up a mutually convenient time.
- Follow-up on your commitment to set the time in the nominated week.

Do not get discouraged if you find that some people are just too busy to give you an appointment.

## Planning your interview

---

### Plan an Agenda for the Session

This is your meeting. Do not assume that person will give you the information you seek unless you ask the right questions. Select questions that will give you the most information. Be efficient and do not overstay your welcome. (See "Examples of Informational Interview Questions")

### Conduct Yourself as a Professional

Dress and act the role of the position that you are seeking. Know as much as possible about the company before the interview so you can ask informed questions.

### Show Interest

A little flattery goes a long way. Say something like, "Mary gave me your name and told me you're considered to be an expert in your field. How did you get started?"

### Be Prepared to Answer Questions About What You're Looking For

Have a short personal statement prepared that you can present if you're enquired about your job search. Bring a resume, but do not offer it unless it is requested. Remember, the purpose of this interview is to obtain information.

## Get Names

Ask for other contacts in the same field. If no names are suggested, be grateful for information or suggestions obtained.

## Send Thank-You and Follow-Up Letters

Thank the person at the conclusion of the interview, but also send a letter stating your gratitude for the time given. Stay in touch with your contacts by writing notes or emails, informing the person about how helpful their suggestions have been to you.

## Take Advantage of Any Referrals You Receive

In this process, you will have to take risks and stretch beyond your comfort zones. Each step will take you closer to that job offer. The informational interview is a source of power you can use to your advantage. With preparation, listening and follow-through, you will find the power of people helping each other.

## Informational Interview Questions

---

The questions you ask need to be:

- Position related
- Education and training
- Organisation related
- Occupational outlook
- Suggestions / referrals

## Examples of Informational Interview Questions

### Position related

- What is your background?
- What are the various jobs in this field / organisation?
- How did you become interested in this position?
- How did your background help you get started in this position / field?
- What are the duties and responsibilities of your job?
- How would you describe your job responsibilities on a typical day?
- What kinds of problems do you typically face?
- What is the pace of your workflow?
- What type of hours do you typically keep?
- Are you ever required to work additional hours, nights, weekends etc.?
- What type of personal characteristics, skills and talents are essential for this position?
- How did you learn these skills?
- Are there any additional skills that would enhance my chances of breaking into this field?
- What else does it take to be successful in this career?
- What is the typical work progression in your field?
- How does the economy effect job availability in this field?
- If you were made redundant, what type of other work do you feel competent to pursue?
- What are typical entry-level opportunities in this field?

- What type of entry-level position would you recommend for someone at my stage of life and with my background?
- What type of work experience / volunteer work would you recommend for someone wishing to gain entry into this field?
- What is the entry-level salary range in this field/ organisation?
- What salary range could be expected at senior levels of this occupation?
- What are the major highlights of this job?
- What advice would you give to someone wishing to enter this field/ occupation?
- What cautionary notes would you give to someone in my position?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- What are the biggest issues facing this field / organisation?
- Given my educational and work background, how would you rate my chances of obtaining an entry-level position in this field?

### Education and training

- What are the educational requirements for this position? (What qualifications are seen as appropriate?)
- Are there any industry based training programs that you would recommend?
- Is ongoing training a pre-requisite for advancement in your field?
- What specific training / advancement programs are typically required by your company?
- How does your organisation provide for employee's professional development?
- Does your company provide study leave for courses other than those they run?

### Organisation related questions

- What is the organisational structure of this company?
- Who do you supervise and to whom do you report?
- What is the management style of this company?
- Are employees included in any decision processes?
- What types of clients do you service?
- Who is your major competitor?
- How does this organisation differentiate itself from its competitors?
- How is this organisation similar to its competitors?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture of this organisation?
- How flexible is the organisation in terms of dress, work hours, vacation schedule, family commitments, etc.?
- How does your organisation utilise communication technology (e.g. internet, intranet, etc.)?
- Is tele-working a feasible possibility in this organisation?
- In your opinion what is the best way to get started in this organisation?
- If you were in my position, how would you approach an

organisation like this for employment?

- Do you offer a formal graduate program and if so, how does that operate?
- Are there work opportunities for graduates other than those offered in the formal graduate programs?

### Occupational outlook

- Are there any professional organisations you could contact?
- Is there a demand for people in this field?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing over time?
- What opportunities for advancement are there for people in this field?
- How do you keep yourself marketable?
- Do your colleagues usually move organisations to secure advancement?
- What do you wish you had known about this field before you entered it?
- Given the opportunity again, would you choose the same career path?
- If not, what would you do differently and why?
- What is the outlook for women in this occupation/ organisation?
- How does this career affect your work/life balance?
- How can I learn more about this field and keep up with current issues?

### Suggestions / referrals

- Given the information that you have about my background, what other occupations would you suggest I investigate before making my final decision?
- Can you suggest other people that I might contact for further information about this or related occupations?
- May I use your name?



### References:

<http://career-advice.monster.com/job-search/professional-networking/informational-Interviewing/article.aspx>

<https://student.unsw.edu.au/information-interview>

<http://www.careers.qut.edu.au/student/resource/2012%20Networking%20&%20Info%20Interviewing.pdf>

---

The University of Western Australia Careers Centre  
 Ground Floor Student Central North  
 Tel: +61 8 6488 2258  
 Email: [careerscentre@uwa.edu.au](mailto:careerscentre@uwa.edu.au)  
[careers.uwa.edu.au](http://careers.uwa.edu.au)