

Informational Interviewing

Talking with people about their work history or place of employment, called informational interviewing, is a key step in exploring career options and expanding your network of contacts. The interviews usually last 20-30 minutes and allow you to:

- find out about jobs you might like (i.e., how they fit your interests, values, skills, and personality)
- learn more about the realities of working for a particular company/organization
- discover career fields you never knew existed
- gain information about the local labor market (i.e., how the outlook for a job you are seeking differs between Ohio and other states)
- tap into “insider information” that will increase your strategic awareness (i.e., learning how applicants can stand out when submitting their resumes and interviewing for positions within the organization, etc.)
- find out about different ways to prepare for a particular career
- sometimes obtain leads on volunteer or internship opportunities as well as current or anticipated job openings

Whom Should I Interview?

Look for individuals who:

- work in settings you like (e.g., hospitals, politics, big business, theater)
- work in career areas in which you are interested (e.g., broadcaster, stockbroker, criminal lawyer, market researcher)
- work at specific organizations (e.g., Peace Corps, Microsoft) that appeal to you

Where Do I Find These People?

Start contacting those you know already, and be sure to ask if they know anyone in their network who may also be willing to speak with you. Consider the following categories of contacts - might someone that you know in one of these categories be a good person in which to start your search?

Family/Relatives	Hometown Contacts (e.g., neighbors)
Friends/Roommates	Current/Past Supervisors
Service Providers (e.g., hair stylist)	Professors/Academic Advisors
Classmates	Co-workers
Coaches/Teammates	Social Media Contacts/ Followers

The Arts and Sciences Career Services Office organizes events that allow students to meet with alumni, employment recruiters, and internship site supervisors – all of whom are great sources of information!

If you are unable to find a person to interview via your network of contacts or the Career Services Office, one of the resources described in the *Networking Resources* tip sheet will surely yield someone for you to interview. The tip sheet is accessed at <http://ascareerservices.osu.edu/guides/networking>.

If you are hesitant to initiate contact to request an interview, keep in mind that people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. Also, many “careerists” value informational interviewing (it’s a practice that has been around for quite awhile!) and will likely think that you may have some ideas that will be of interest to them.

How Should I Prepare?

As your time with the interviewee will be limited, you should follow the steps below to maximize the actual interview experience.

- Clarify your learning goals. Are you seeking information about a career field? Are you seeking professional contacts with whom to network? Do you want to learn about what it’s like to work for a particular company?
- Prepare a list of questions (sample questions appear on the following page).
- Avoid asking questions that pertain to information you can easily find online. The following questions are provided as samples for you to consider. You will likely need to develop a couple of questions that speak to the “big questions” you have about a particular career field, employment setting, or specific organization.

Career Preparation

- How did you prepare for this line of work?
- Is volunteer work an accepted way to gain experience in this field?
- If you were starting out again, what would you do differently?

Job Description and Occupational Outlook

- Describe your typical work week. What do you enjoy most?
- What are the toughest demands/problems you have to deal with?
- What are some of the reasons people leave this field?

Company Details

- Is this organization highly structured (hierarchical)?
- Does this company have a strong history of promoting from within?
- Are salary and benefits more-or-less competitive for the field? If not, are there compensating factors?

Lifestyle

- Does your work allow you personal time? Is there a balance between work and personal time?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours, vacation, etc.?

Job Hunting

- How did you get your job?
- What kind of position could a college graduate anticipate when entering this field?
- What are the future prospects of this organization? For this industry?

Advice

- Are there any professional groups that an undergraduate could join which would be beneficial?
- Can you give me feedback on my resume, either in terms of how to better present my qualifications or additional experiences I should pursue to build a stronger resume?

Although informational interviews are best conducted in a relaxed manner, to yield opportunities for spontaneous discussion, they also need to be focused so that you can obtain the key information you are seeking. Starting the interview with a list of questions will demonstrate good organizational skills on your part.

Initiating Contact

Contact the person you hope to interview and ask to speak to him/her about his/her career. Identify yourself and share that you are a student at Ohio State who is in the process of exploring career options. If you were referred by someone in your network, mention that person's name to establish the connection.

A common way to request an informational interview is to send an email like the one found below:

From: Brutus Buckeye [buckeye.1@osu.edu]
To: Carmen Oval [coval@xyz.org]
Subject: Ohio State student seeking career advice (referred by Scarlet Gray)

Dear Ms. Oval,

I understand from a mutual acquaintance, Bucky Badger, that your work history includes experience as a Market Research Analyst. As this is an area that interests me, I am hoping that you are available for an informational interview.

I am studying Communications at Ohio State and am in the process of obtaining as much information as I can about occupations that seem to be a good fit given my interests, values, personality, and skills. It would be great if I could speak to you about your work in this field. Please know that I am not looking for your assistance in finding employment.

Are you available to talk at some point before (insert a date 10 days out)? Ideally, I'd like to speak with you for about 20 minutes.

Thank you for considering my request!

Brutus Buckeye
(614) 123-4567

Make it clear that you are seeking information rather than looking for his/her assistance with obtaining an internship or employment. Remember, this strategy is called an "informational interview" not a "find me a job interview". It may turn out that the contact will know of an opportunity that is a good fit for you, but you shouldn't approach them with that expectation.

If the person is unavailable or not interested in assisting you, ask if he/she knows of anyone else who may be able to help you.

Gather Background Information

1. Research the organization where the interviewee works so you have a basic understanding about their products/services, key competitors, and recent press releases or news items.
2. Research the career field in which the person works so that you are familiar with the general education requirements, type of work performed (on a basic level), and average earnings.

Helpful resources for collecting information about career fields and industries include:

- a. Career Finder - accessible to Arts and Sciences students via FutureLink, this tool includes a career interest survey and suggests careers based on your assessment results and desired level of education.
- b. Occupational Outlook Handbook - versatile tool that allows you to quickly access information on hundreds of specific occupational titles or explore job titles within 25 career clusters. <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>
- c. Hoover's Online - profiles private sector companies and non-profit organizations; access from databases found at: <http://library.ohio-state.edu/screens/databases.html>

Although you don't need to do as much research for an informational interview as you would for a bachelor's level job interview, knowing this type of background information will likely result in a more useful interview - and will demonstrate enthusiasm on your part.

Conducting the Interview

- Start and end the interview on time. Keep your agenda honest. If your stated purpose is to interview someone about his/her career field, do not change the agenda into a job interview for yourself. If the contact wants to turn the informational interview into a job interview, go with the flow!
- Be prepared to take notes, but ask permission first.
- Ask for at least one referral to someone else who can provide you with more information or a different perspective. Ask if you can use the interviewee's name when contacting the referral.
- Thank the interviewee for his/her time and comment positively on the helpfulness of the information shared.

After the Interview

Send a follow-up thank you note, with a few lines expressing your appreciation. Aside from being a thoughtful gesture, it will help the person to remember you should he/she learn about a resource that could assist you (e.g., an internship opportunity).

Evaluate the information you've received:

1. What positive impressions do you have about the occupation? What negative impressions do you have?
2. How does the information gained help you clarify your own career objective?
3. What are your "next steps"? Who else do you need to interview? Beware of relying too much on the views and advice of only one or two people.

Keep a record of your interviews. A record of names, titles, addresses, dates, and major points of discussion will make it easier should you need to get back in touch with your contacts. Meeting with someone for an informational interview is often the first step in building an ongoing networking relationship. Tips for creating strong networking relationships can be found in our *Getting Started with Networking* tip sheet by visiting our website: <http://ascareerservices.osu.edu/guides/networking>