



Informational interviews

Informational interviewing is the process of researching your career and job ideas through identifying and talking to people already employed in roles that interest you. In this way, you are the interviewer, aiming to acquire useful information that helps you understand the knowledge, skills and experience that is needed for certain career paths. It also allows you to explore the nature of certain organisations and industries.

The majority of people will be happy to talk with you in this manner, provided that you are professional in all your contact with them. Whether arranging a meeting with a specific person, or spontaneously starting a conversation at an event or elsewhere, informational interviewing is a helpful means of preparation for your future careers. Even conversations that only last a few minutes may be beneficial.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?

- Think about what you want to find out, and prepare some questions accordingly
- Where possible, try to arrange a specific time to talk with someone. If a casual conversation starts up in a public place, you can explore with them the option of making an appointment to meet or talk in more depth later
- Target organisations of interest and research what they do. Refer to Massey Career and Employment Service's separate handout on researching the organisation for more information on this topic
- Make contact with the organization to request its help. Make it clear that you want information about future possible careers and that you need to talk to the departments that use the types of skills, qualifications and experience you are hoping to make use of. Ensure that when doing so that the person understands that you are seeking information only, e.g. "I'm interested in learning more about...". They should be able to identify staff in roles that interest you.
- If possible, make an explicit appointment for a short period of time (say 20 minutes).
- Ask them for details of additional contacts that you can approach for more detailed informational interviews later - contacts that are doing the types of work that appeal to you

IF YOU CAN MEET IN PERSON

- On the day, ensure that you arrive and leave on time.
- Dress appropriately, as if this were a job interview
- Arrive thoroughly prepared with questions that you want answered
- At this stage, stick to the agenda of eliciting career information, not seeking a job opening
- Try to leave with at least two referrals to other people in the field that you can talk to in the same way. Ask your contact if you can use their name when approaching these new people for help, and if you can say that they suggested the contact



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- Take a copy of your CV with you, but in this situation only offer it if requested
- Take down notes immediately after the interview, recording everything that you have learnt
- Send a thank you email right away
- Keep organized records of your informational interviewing process

HOW DO YOU FIND PEOPLE TO TALK TO?

- Refer to our specific handout on networking
- Ask your family, friends, lecturers & acquaintances: “Who do you know who works in a job something like the one that I am looking for?”
- Contact the human resources department of organisations in your field of interest. Explain to them that you want information about future possible careers and that you would like to talk to people who work in your area of interest. Websites such as Universal Business Directories: www.ubd.co.nz and Finda: www.finda.co.nz are good sources of organizational information
- Investigate professional associations that operate in the fields that interest you - some will have directories of members that you can access
- Use contacts and groups on professional on-line networking sites such as LinkedIn – see <http://www.linkedin.com>

WHAT IF I CAN'T ARRANGE TO SEE SOMEONE IN PERSON?

You may not be able to arrange a face-to-face interview. When making contact with an organisation, you should therefore be prepared to interview by telephone or Skype if the opportunity presents itself i.e. have your questions ready when you make the initial contact. As an alternative, you could ask whether or not it would be possible for you to email your questions to them for passing on to appropriate colleagues. Possible questions to ask

- What are the activities & responsibilities that make up your job?
- Why did you decide to enter this field?
- Which part(s) of your job is most rewarding? Why?
- What would you change about the job if you could?
- Is there likely to be enough growth in this industry or sector that you would advise someone like me to get into it?
- What personal attributes do you think are essential for success in this field?



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- What are the essential and desirable qualifications required?
- Where do you expect to go from here in your career?
- What else do you think I need to know in order to make an informed decision about a career in this field?
- Can you suggest names of other people I might be able to talk to next in this field? When I call her/him, may I use your name?

INFORMATION IS THE GOAL

- Don't confuse the Informational Interview with a job interview. Think of it as a 'career search'
- Be clear, honest & unambiguous about your motive or agenda throughout the process
- If appropriate, ask the person to look at your CV. Ask them 'Is there anything else I could be doing now to enhance my chances of obtaining work in this field?'

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR POSITION

Before you talk to anyone consider the perspective of the person providing the information:

- What would make you want to help?
- How much time could you spare to answer questions?
- What would you expect the person to know already?
- How would you want the initial contact to happen - by email, 'phone or letter?
- Would you be prepared to meet the person face-to-face?

Without doubt, informational interviewing can be one of the most valuable career development tools. For further information on informational interviewing, please refer to the Career and Employment Service: <http://careers.massey.ac.nz>