

Information Interviewing

What is an Information Interview?

An information interview is a conversation with a professional who can give you information about an organization, a field of work or a particular job that interests you. An information interview may assist you in the career decision-making process by helping you to:

- Reality test whether a career field interests you
- Build a sense of confidence and poise in dealing with professionals in the industry
- Challenge personal biases or assumptions about specific jobs/careers
- Discover career paths you did not know existed
- Establish a professional network that can contribute to future success
- Find out what motivates you in terms of the world of work
- Identify organizations where you could seek job interviews or internships
- Prepare for job interviews by becoming better informed about a specific job

How Do I Begin?

Advanced preparation is key when beginning the process of information interviewing. For each of the following steps the **Career Exploration Center Library** will have resources to support your goals.

STEP ONE: SELF-ASSESSMENT

- Identify your values, interests, personality, and skills.
- Identify your career goals. These may become clarified after a few practice interviews.
- Make an appointment with a CEC counselor if you would like some assistance in identifying or discussing your career goals.

STEP TWO: MAKE A LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS/PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW

This list will include the individuals, companies and organizations that best match the values, interests personality, and skills you explored in step one. Make use of the **Texas Exes Career Network** (www.texasexes.org/careernet) and the **Faculty Contacts Program** at the Career Exploration Center to compose your list.

STEP THREE: RESEARCH THE COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

Become familiar with the company/organization on a cursory level. This knowledge will help you develop a list of questions and it will display your initiative. Ways in which you can gain information about a company include:

- Check for a website. Most companies have their corporate profiles and mission statements listed online. Be familiar with the services they provide.
- Some colleges' career services have company profiles specific to their industry (utexas.edu/employment/students.html).
- A reference librarian at the Perry Castañeda Library (PCL) can help you access company and organization profiles online and at the PCL.

STEP FOUR: COMPOSE A LIST OF QUESTIONS

- Gear your questions to fit your personal exploration needs
- Ask questions that will yield answers you can use
- Be FLEXIBLE -- answers you receive may spawn ideas for new questions

The following examples represent possible categories of questioning for the information interview:

Job Duties	“Please describe a typical workday.”
Future Potential	“How would you describe or estimate future growth for this field?”
Training/Education	“What is the best type of educational preparation or internship?”
Job Stress	“How much pressure is there in news reporting?”
Earnings	“What is the typical starting salary? After a few years?”
Location	“Does your company have branches in Colorado?”

Below are some additional categories and “idea generators” for developing your question list:

<u>FIELD OF WORK</u>	<u>PERSONAL RESPONSES</u>	<u>SPECIFIC JOB</u>
Credential requirements	Rewards of the job	Major responsibilities
Nature of the work	Challenges of the job	Advice for students
Where employed	Skills developed	Criteria for hiring
Benefits	Advancement potential	Academic requirements
Advancement potential	Uncertainties of the job	Resources available to do the job
Related fields of work	Greatest disappointments	Training opportunities

STEP FIVE: SET UP THE INTERVIEW

- Before making the initial contact, review the information gathered in the research section.
- Set up the information interview by calling, or writing a letter or e-mail to the interviewer. These methods for contacting the interviewer are equally acceptable, so you do what feels most comfortable to you. Find out who is the contact person by asking the receptionist or human resources representative, or from the data you have collected in Step Three (Researching the Company/Organization).
- If you choose to use the telephone, the following is an example of what you might say:

“Hello, my name is _____. I am a student at UT and I am considering pursuing a career in your field. I am not looking for a job at this time. However, it would be helpful if we could meet at your convenience so that I may ask you a few questions about how to get into your field and what it’s like.”
- If you opt for the letter or e-mail approach it is important that the correspondence be professional and to the point. The message of the letter or e-mail should be similar to the telephone example above.
- Be prepared with a schedule to arrange the meeting date, time, location and other data.
- After the interview, send a thank you note. See the example on the last page.

Key Tips:

- Make it clear that you are **not looking for a job** and do not use this as an opportunity to push your resume.
- Get as much information as you can about the field or the job from other resources, i.e. printed materials and online resources, **before** you seek an Information Interview. Ask only those questions that you could not have answered using other resources.
- **Know** the specific questions that you want to ask. Have questions written down and take notes!
- Have your first information interviews with people who are **easy** to contact, either because you know them or because they are easily available. This will help you get accustomed to the process.



- Do not assume that people will take a lot of time to talk with you. Be **respectful** of their time.
- If he or she resists a particular question you ask, **move** to another question without pursuing the first one.
- **Listen** attentively. **Do not** interrupt even when a question occurs to you while the interviewer is talking.
- At the close of the information interview ask for **references** to other people who can extend your exploration. You can wait to do this in your thank you note if they seem hesitant.

Thank-You Letters

Never underestimate the value of a thank you letter or phone call. It is well worth the effort. You may influence a future hiring decision by demonstrating that you already have a sense of professionalism. Even when future employment potential is low, a simple thank you note can build upon your network and gain contacts that will benefit you later.

If you met with more than one person, it is suggested that you write to each one. Make sure to use their business card or check for an online employee directory to ensure proper spelling of names. The thank you letter is usually typed (or legibly hand-written) on good quality stationery. These letters do not have to be long, but mention some information in particular that you learned from the interview. Send the thank you letter as soon as possible.

The following is an example of a professional thank you letter:

Your street address
 City, State, Zip
 DATE

Name of Person Interviewed
 Title
 Organization
 Street Address
 City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. Surname:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me yesterday. It was very helpful to hear your take on the prospects of a career in _____ .

I found it particularly interesting that you have seen jobs open up faster than they can be filled. This should be a good sign for finding a job upon graduation. I also appreciate the emphasis you placed on graduate-level education; I now have a clearer focus for my application to a master's program.

Again, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak with you. If you know of any other people who would be willing to discuss their experience with graduate programs in _____ , could you forward me their contact information? Any additional perspectives would be useful.

Sincerely,

(your signature)
 Your Name Typed

