

Informational Interviews

What are Informational Interviews?

Informational interviewing is a strategy you can use to research certain career fields or opportunities within a particular organization. They provide an opportunity for you to inquire about skill and educational requirements, daily responsibilities, related occupations, typical career paths, and what is most and least satisfying about the work. In addition, informational interviews allow you to observe the work environment, obtain information about the general working conditions, and inquire about information not readily available in books or online.

Informational interviewing is not an interview for a job. It can, however, help you focus your job search and assist you in developing important networking relationships within the world of work. Effective use of informational interviewing can help you make important decisions about your career.

Arranging Informational Interviews

Resources for informational interviews can be obtained in many different ways. You will want to tell everyone you know that you are interested in investigating certain careers and ask if they can provide you with the name of one resource person. Check with your friends, relatives, and Augsburg faculty and staff for contacts. You can also make informational interview contacts by attending our campus career programs including employer panels and job fairs.

Once you have identified a contact person, your next step is to actually schedule an informational interview. Whether you do this by phone or by email, be sure to explain how you obtained their name, why you are requesting the interview, and an estimation of the time you will need. Thirty minutes is usually adequate. Most people are eager to talk about themselves and their companies and will likely be open to your request.

Preparing for the Interview

Preparation is essential to get what you need from the interview and create a favorable impression. Since the purpose of the interview is to determine whether there could be a match between you and a particular job or career, advance self assessment is necessary to ascertain if the job matches your skills, interests, and values. You will also want to prepare a list of questions for the interview. Some commonly asked questions are included in this handout to help you get started. In addition, you will want to dress for an informational interview as you would for an actual job interview.

During the Interview

Relax and enjoy this meeting. Be sure to ask your prepared questions and to monitor your time as it communicates respect for your contact. If time allows, you may want to ask for a brief tour of the work area. Ask if they know someone else in their professional network that you could speak with as this will help you expand your networking contacts.

Following Up after the Interview

Sending a professional thank you note is an important courtesy. In your thank you note, show your appreciation for the interview and mention what you learned from the interview. You should also state if you followed any particular advice that was given to you by your interviewer.

Finally, keep a record of who you spoke with and some brief notes summarizing your discussion because you may need this information in the future. Discussing your observations with a career specialist may help you sort through the information you obtained.

Sample Questions

- Tell me about your work. What are the activities and responsibilities connected with your job? Please describe a routine day or week. Does this vary by employer?
- When and in what position did you start?
- What do you like about your job? What are the pressures, challenges, and frustrations of your work? Is this typical of the field/company?
- What recommendations do you have for someone who would like to enter this field? Academic preparation? Needed experience?
- Tell me about your work schedule. How many hours do you routinely work? Are you on a set schedule? Does this position require irregular hours, weekends, evenings, holidays? How much control do you have over your schedule?
- What entry-level jobs are typical in this career field?
- How competitive is entry into this field? What is the outlook for future openings?
- What salary range can one expect at entry-level? What is the salary for an advanced position?
- What are the advancement possibilities? Is additional education necessary?
- What professional publications are read by people in this field?
- What professional organization do people in this field belong to?
- Who else might you suggest I talk to for additional information? May I use your name to introduce myself?
- May I contact you if I have further questions? If so, how do you wish to be contacted?