The Art of the Informational Interview

Powerpoint and presentation by Debra Behrens, PhD
The Art of the Informational Interview

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Topics

• What is an informational interview?
• The purpose
• How to prepare
• Examples
• Questions to Ask your interviewee
• Q&A
What is an informational interview?

An interview conducted by a prospective job seeker, who interviews a professional to learn about:

- a specific job
- a profession or career field
- industry
- organization/company
Purpose and Benefits

Purpose
1. Exploring a career, job or organization
2. Building your network

Benefits
Learn more about a field and how you might enter
Career decision-making, help clarify your goals
Uncover opportunities- related occupations
Confirm your current focus
Identify strategies for closing gaps in experience, skills
Humanities PhD Transferable skills

**Communication:**
Writing
Public speaking
Stakeholder management
Web, social media

**Instruction and Knowledge management**
Research/Analytical
Teaching and training
Curriculum development

**Project skills:**
Project management
Managing budgets
Problem solving
Organizing scholarly meetings and events
Skills Transfer

GSI → Trainer/HR

Lauren  PhD  French Literature
Goal-apply teaching skills in a new career

Used the Informational interview to identify gaps-experience, and industry knowledge

Contract job via ASTD network ---FT position
ASTD.org
Getting inside the Organization

Alan PhD on job market completed initial company interview

Used LinkedIn, found a contact within company, asked for referral

Informational Interview- focused on company initiatives, organizational culture

Two weeks later - Callback-finalist
Where to find contacts

Former graduate students
Friends, faculty from undergrad institution
Company literature or brochures
LinkedIn or Facebook
Newspaper or magazine articles
Faculty contacts
Former employers
Relatives
Friends of parents/parents of friends
Happenstance-6 degrees…
Mapping the Terrain

Locating the professional community, the habitat of people who do the kind of work you want to do

Through your colleagues, fellow grad students, alums, you have access to a wealth of contacts and resources

There is a wide world of opportunity and people willing to help   Platform 9.75
Introducing yourself

How you learned of this person (i.e. “my neighbor” or “my cousin Leo”)

Mention any shared connections or interests

A brief summary of your current work, your interests, and the kind of information you seek/what you want to do

Why you think this person could be helpful

A simple request to connect:

“If you would be willing to have a conversation (in person or via email/phone/Skype), I would be very grateful.”
Request a meeting

• Identify the person you wish to interview.
• Send an introductory email explaining who you are and your purpose.
• If following up on a referral, be sure to name drop
• Request a brief meeting/ 20-30 minutes
• Write up your interview questions
Prepare

Conduct initial research on the career or employer for a grasp of the basics.

Learn about the career field in general. Why?

Decide on a focus, organize your list of questions.

You are the interviewer, and this is not a job interview.

Keep your purpose in mind.
Questions

Please describe your current job and career path.

What educational background is required in this career?

What aspects of your job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?

What professional associations do you belong to?
More Questions

If you wanted to break into your industry, what would you do?

How has the field changed within the past ___ years?

What are the current issues and trends in this field?

What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?

Who else would you recommend I speak with?
After the interview

Send a thank you email or note.

Follow up with the referrals the interviewee provided.

Keep track of contact information from informational interviews and follow up.
The steps- review

Make courteous initial contact
Ask for information....NOT a job
Face-to-face meetings are preferred
ask for only 20-30 minutes
Try to obtain several referrals from each person you contact
Follow up and keep them informed of your progress
Thank them
Why bother?

70% of all jobs are filled via Networking. (BLS)

An estimated 35% of jobs people get hired for didn’t exist before they were hired
Next Steps
Questions?

Thank you!