Informational Interviewing

WHAT IS IT?

Informational interviewing is one of the best methods for gathering information on a one-on-one basis about an occupation or an industry that interests you. You are researching a career field and an employment market as an investigator, gathering information to help you choose (or confirm) your academic major and career goal. An informational interview is one you initiate—you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- Gain up-to-date information in your field of interest.
- Evaluate how you see yourself fitting into this field and whether or not you’ll like it.
- Expand your professional network to discover future employment opportunities.
- Increase awareness of your professional strengths to motivate you to achieve your career goal.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

1. **Narrow down** the occupations you have already researched to those that best match your personality, values, and skills. Decide what information is needed to either clarify or expand on what you have read. A personal perspective can provide you with a wealth of information to consider. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered. (Refer to the attached list of questions.)

2. **Identify people to interview.** Contact EWU Career Planning for a list of Alumni Career Consultants who have offered to share career related information with you. Select someone whose major, current job or employer matches your interests. Also consider interviewing people you already know - friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. Directories from professional organizations, the yellow pages, or public speakers are also good resources. Write down the name, job title, and phone number of each person doing the jobs you wish to investigate.

3. **Arrange the interview.** Contact the person by telephone, e-mail, or letter followed by a phone call. Introduce yourself as an EWU student, and, perhaps, mention how you found the person’s name. Explain that you might be interested in pursuing the same major and/or career and want to gather more information to help you decide. Tell them you’re not looking for a job, you’re just wanting to get a personal perspective. If meeting in person, make a definite appointment for a specific period of time—usually for 20 to 30 minutes. Be sure to write down the time and location of your appointment. Have your questions ready in case the person has the time to talk during this call. If e-mailing, include your questions. Thank the person for speaking with you and confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. If the person is unable to meet with you, ask for a referral and state your appreciation for any names given to you.

4. **Conduct the interview.** Dress appropriately as if you were attending a job interview and arrive on time. Be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. During the interview observe the work surroundings—physical characteristics and office atmosphere reveal a lot about a work environment. Take brief notes if appropriate. Wrap up the meeting on time, and request the person’s business card.

5. **Follow up.** Within a few days send a thank-you note to your contact mentioning how the information helped you in your decision-making.
NOW WHAT?
Always analyze the information you’ve gathered. Adjust your career objective if necessary. Contact any new referrals for interviews, and follow the same plan as above. Continue this process until you find yourself EXCITED and ENTHUSIASTIC about a particular line of work and know that this is the direction you can happily pursue with all your energy. Keep in mind that this process works. Admittedly, it seems a bit scary, but the fact is that people ARE willing to share their information when you show respect for their time, interest in their line of work, and appreciation for their help.

Tips for Informational Interviewing

Prepare a list of your own questions for your informational interview. The objective is to make sure this occupation matches with your interests, personality preferences, non-negotiable values, and the skills you will most enjoy using in your future work. Here are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What major/degree is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
5. What is your level of freedom to solve problems and take action on the job?
6. How did you decide on the major/career/employer you chose?
7. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
8. What entry-level skills are needed for this job?
9. What entry-level jobs provide the best training for this field?
10. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
11. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
12. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
13. How much and what type of responsibility is required in your position?
14. What kind of people do you meet in this type of work?
15. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
16. Do you work mostly with people, data, things, or ideas?
17. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
18. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
19. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
20. Do you think that my personality and values (describe them) are a good fit for this field?
21. How did you find your job?
22. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?