

# Stuart Graduate School of Business

## Office of Career Services

# GUIDE TO INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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### What Is an Informational Interview?

Informational interviews are fact-finding meetings that will help you gain insight into an industry, occupation or a specific employer, learn what types of skills are needed in the job, and establish contacts that may help you find employment in the future. Informational interviews can help you:

- Gain information about a career field in which you have an interest and find out what it takes to succeed in that field
- Receive feedback on your potential to succeed in a career
- Gain knowledge about the skills and qualifications needed for a job in that field, so that you can relate this information to your own skills, interests, and values
- Obtain “market based” information on what job opportunities exist in a given field, industry, or market.
- Get an understanding of how people feel about their work and what they do in a typical day
- Obtain knowledge of the industry, recent trends and developments, and jargon used
- Make networking contacts for the future

### How to Get an Informational Interview

Ask friends, parents, family members, professors, and acquaintances if they know anyone employed in the career you are researching.

Tell them that you are seeking their advice and information, **not a job!** Employers will grant informational interviews when they firmly trust that you are not using the request as a ruse to ask for a job.

#### **Making Contact:**

- Write a letter to the contact person to introduce yourself and ask for a few moments of their time for an informational interview. Follow up the letter with a phone call approximately one week later.
- Below is a sample letter requesting an informational interview. If someone has referred you to another person for an informational interview, mention this contact name in your letter (for example, “John Smith suggested that I contact you.”)

Sample letter requesting an informational interview: (Proofread all correspondence and save copies!)

April 1, 2006

Isaac Brock  
1234 Madison Avenue  
Suite 4444  
Chicago, IL 60661

Dear Mr. Brock,

I am student at the Stuart Graduate School of Business at Illinois Institute of Technology beginning my second year pursuing a MS in Financial Markets . Hedge funds have been of interest to me since I took a class in that subject. Your company has an outstanding reputation in its investment expertise.

My area of concentration in my program is investments. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you briefly and discuss your own career path and area of specialty. Any further advice and insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

I will contact your office the week of April 10 to set up a mutually convenient time for this informational meeting. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephen Malkmus

- Approximately a week after you send the letter, call to arrange an appointment. Usually before 9:00 and after 4:30 are the best times to reach an individual.
- When you call, be sure to tell them your name, who referred you (if applicable), why you are contacting them and how you would like to meet (remember to mention that you will only take 20-30 minutes of their time-and then stick to that!).
- Please remember to be flexible in your scheduling, as the interviewee may have prior commitments. If your prospective interviewee seems too busy to talk to you, ask a convenient time when you could call back to discuss scheduling an appointment. If an individual is not willing to meet, graciously accept his/her declination of your request and leave it at that. Should an individual not return your phone calls or get in touch with you, cease trying to get in touch with the individual after your second follow-up call or email.

## Preparing for the informational interview

- It is a process that **you** initiate. You select the people with whom you wish to talk, schedule the meetings, begin the questions and guide the flow of conversation. Therefore, you must prepare and think about the topics you would like to discuss with the interviewee.
- Learn something about the industry, organization, and individual prior to the interview. Make sure that you are ready to ask informed questions.
- Create a list of questions that you'd like to ask the interviewee. See the list of sample questions at the end of this document.
- Prepare a resume (printed on high-quality resume paper) to take along with you in case the individual you are interviewing would like to see it. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may ask the person you are interviewing to critique your resume.
- Make sure that you dress professionally. Dress as you would for a job interview (see the Interviewing Guide section on attire).
- **DO NOT BE LATE!** Keep in mind that this individual is taking time out of his/her busy day to do a favor for you, so be sure that you are on time and convey that you greatly appreciate his/her time.

## During the interview

- **Arrive 10-15 minutes before your appointment.**
- Be prepared to **initiate the conversation**. Do not make the interviewee guess what it is you are there for.
- **Adhere to the originally agreed-upon time constraint of the interview.** If the interviewee wants you to stay and continue talking, that's fine. Otherwise, wrap up your conversation after the originally-stated amount of time (usually 20-30 minutes) and leave.
- It is okay to **ask for referrals to other appropriate individuals** in the field or related organizations for additional informational interviews. For example, you could ask, "Do you have any recommendations for other individuals I should consult for advice about this industry?"
- **DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB!** Informational interviews are for gathering information. Do not ask for an informational interview and then try to turn the meeting into a job interview. Your interviewee may feel that you intentionally tried to deceive him/her and this will eliminate any chance of this person serving as a future networking contact. You may ask the interviewee's opinion about obtaining a job in the field, or ask them how they went about obtaining their own job. See the list of sample questions below for some ideas.
- **Take notes.** Make sure that you appear to be interested in what the individual is saying.
- **Ask for a business card.** Keep a record of all the contacts with whom you have conducted informational interviews.

*Remember that it is important to make a favorable impression; you never know how this person may help you.*

## After the interview

**ALWAYS** follow up after the interview by writing a thank you note!

## **Some Sample Questions**

- How did you decide on this career? What was your career path? Your education?
- What skills, education, and experience are needed to enter this field?
- What are the typical entry-level jobs in this field? Or what kinds of jobs should I be looking for in order to enter this field?
- What skills are needed most for this type of job?
- What type of individual usually succeeds in this field/company?
- What are some of the problems/decisions you are likely to face in a day?
- Describe your typical work day.
- What are the rewards/challenges/frustrations of your work?
- What do you wish you would have known prior to entering this field?
- What is it like to work in this organization?
- How does your job affect your general lifestyle?
- What would you change about your job if you could?
- Where do you see yourself going from here?
- What are the new developments in the field?
- What steps would you recommend that I take to prepare to enter this field?
- Can you suggest anyone else whom I could contact for additional information?
- What are the professional journals in this field that I should read?
- In which professional associations would you recommend that I participate?
- What courses would you recommend that I take to prepare for jobs in this field?
- What kinds of changes are occurring in your field?
- What industry trends do you foresee over 5 or 10 years?
- Is there a basic philosophy or culture of companies in this field?
- These are my strongest assets (skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits and values): \_\_\_\_\_  
Where would they fit in this field? Where would they be helpful in this organization? Where might they fit in other fields? Where might they be helpful in other organizations?
- [If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate:] Would you mind taking a look at my resume?
- Do you have any other advice for me?

## **Additional resources**

Quint Careers Informational Interviewing Tutorial: [http://www.quintcareers.com/informational\\_interviewing.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html)

DePaul Informational Interviewing Tips for MBA students: <http://mbacmc.depaul.edu/tools/interviewing.asp>

The Chronicle of Higher Education, Informational Interviewing 101: <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2001/04/2001041301c.htm>

Harvard University Office of Career Services, Information Interviewing Guide: <http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/careertools/infointerviewing.htm>

Occupational Outlook Quarterly, Guide to Informational Interviewing: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf>