

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing involves meeting with people who are currently working in your career field of interest in order to gain a better understanding of the occupation and to build a network of contacts.

Informational Interviewing Objectives

- To explore careers.
- To gain information that will help you clarify your career goals.
- To obtain suggestions about the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a particular career field.
- To increase your network by meeting individuals who may be able to provide encouragement, advice and job leads in the future.

Informational Interviewing Process

Before the Interview:

- Identify the occupation(s) you would like to explore.
- Identify potential individuals to interview.
 - Start with people you already know: friends, family, professors, co-workers, supervisors, or neighbors. Ask if they know anyone who works in the career field(s) and/or organizations that interest you.
 - The career development office can also help connect you with Calvin College alumni working in your field of interest.
- Contact the individuals who have been recommended to you and arrange a meeting. The outline below is an effective approach to requesting an informational interview:
 - “Hello, my name is _____. I am currently a student at Calvin College, and _____ suggested I contact you. I am interested in learning more about working in the _____ field. Do you have any time over the next few weeks when I could come to your office and talk with you? I’m sure my questions could be answered in 30 to 45 minutes.”

Before the Interview (cont):

- Research the occupation and organization.
- Prepare a list of questions to cover during the interview. Refer to the back of this handout for suggested questions.
- Select what you will wear to the interview. Dress professionally and conservatively.
- Bring copies of your resume.

During the Interview:

- Be prepared to initiate the conversation, since you requested the meeting.
- Keep in mind that this is an information-gathering and advice-seeking interview. Be clear that you are not asking for a job!
- Refer to your list of prepared questions, but be flexible and allow the conversation to follow its natural course.
 - Some of the best advice may come as a result of tangents.
 - Listen carefully and ask new questions based on the interviewee’s responses.
- Take notes.
- Adhere to the original time request of 30-45 minutes, unless the professional invites you to stay longer.
- Distribute your resume *only* if the person you are interviewing requests a copy.
- Before you leave, ask for a business card.

After the Interview:

- Send a thank you note.
- Write down additional notes/thoughts for future reference.
- Evaluate the information you received. How does it relate to your plans?
- Follow through on any advice the professional gives you.

Sample Informational Interviewing Questions

- Where were you when you were my age, and how did you get from there to where you are today?
- Why did this type of work interest you? When did you realize this is what you wanted to do?
- What positions and experiences have led you to this position, and which were the most helpful?
- What obstacles have you overcome to reach your current position?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- Describe how you spend your typical day.
- What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- If you could change some aspect of your job, what would it be and why?
- Looking back on your career path, what would you do differently?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills?
- What advice do you have for a person considering a career in this field?
- Do you have any recommendations for training or education to best prepare for this kind of work?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain experience in this field?
- What is the job outlook for entry-level professionals in this field?
- Do you have suggestions of other people I should contact for more information about careers in this field?

Other Informational Interviewing Resources

- Connect with Calvin alumni working in your field of interest by using uKnight, an online networking directory for Calvin alumni (www.calvin.edu/alumni). You can register for a uKnight account once you complete one year as a Calvin student.
- Visit www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html for a helpful tutorial on informational interviewing.