



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Informational Interview Guide

Informational Interviewing: Student Preparation

Students can learn about industries, professions, and the skills needed in the workplace through informational interviewing. Most people enjoy talking about their careers, so well-developed informational interviews can provide a comfortable exchange of advice and information, as well as helping students plan for achieving their personal goals.

Before you begin:

1. Decide on three areas of career interest and develop a list of possible contacts. As you choose the areas, develop a written list of your objectives:
 - What do you expect to learn?
 - How will that knowledge help you navigate your education and career path?
2. Talk with family and friends to develop a list of industries and possible interviewees. Use the Internet to search careers and broaden your search.
3. Select three employers who are either in different industries, if you want to explore different careers, or in different companies, but in the same industry, if you want to compare how various employers in the same industry are different.
4. Vary the roles of those you chose. You will hear very different answers from a company owner, supervisor, or mid-level manager.
5. Write either a telephone script or letter to introduce yourself and ask for a 30-minute informational interview. A sample letter is included in this packet. If you will introduce yourself by phone, practice your script before calling.
6. Be prepared to explain the purpose of the interview and your objectives and both how and why you selected that person or company for the interview. Share two sample questions. Be sure the person you are to interview has your contact information.
7. Schedule a time for a personal interview. Write down the agreed-upon time and place and then reconfirm it. Make sure it's at a time when you have transportation and can get there comfortably. The day before your appointment, reconfirm the date, time, and place.
8. If you are using technology for a virtual interview, be certain you have the required equipment and access to the appropriate website. Check to be certain your computer and connection are working well and you are able to use this technology effectively.
9. Prepare your questions ahead of time (see attachment for suggestions). If you have not already done research on the industry and company, do so before the interview, and incorporate some of your knowledge into the questions you ask.
10. The questions offered here are only examples. Use them as suggestions as you develop your own based on your objectives for the interview.
11. Prioritize your questions and practice asking them. You will probably not have time to ask all your questions so be clear about which ones are most important. Be prepared to elaborate on your questions. For example, if you ask about the culture of the company, your interviewee may ask you to explain what you mean by "culture."

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12. Make two copies of your questions: one for note-taking and one for your portfolio.
13. Before attending the interview, make sure you have completed the appropriate paperwork required by your instructor or school.

On the day of the interview:

1. Preparation:

- dress professionally
- gather your notes, a notepad and two pens
- arrive 10 minutes early
- carry identification

2. During the interview:

- take a few minutes to develop rapport at the beginning of the interview
- ask the questions you have prepared, but also be open to new questions that come to mind
- be prepared to explain exactly what you mean for each question
- if time is short, make a note of these other questions, but stick to the most important questions first
- leave at the agreed-upon time unless you are invited to stay longer, but, either way, acknowledge when your time is up
- at the end of the conversation, thank the person for his or her time

After the interview – the follow up:

3. Immediately after your meeting, reflect on the interview:

- What went well?
- What could have been improved?
- What question(s) will you delete?
- What other questions do you wish you had asked?
- Which questions need to be revised?
- Could your use of time be improved? How?

4. Write and send a thank you note (a sample is included in this packet)

- Express your appreciation for the time and information
- Mention one specific question and answer — something you learned from the interview
- Describe how you will use the information you learned
- Make two copies: one to mail and one for your portfolio

5. Review your notes and develop a written report for your journal based on questions and responses.

(Sample questions for your consideration are included in this packet.) If requested by your teacher, develop a short presentation sharing what you learned from the interview.

6. Review and revise your questions, decide on your next interview, and begin the process using these same guidelines.

Informational Interviewing: Sample Interview Questions

Student Name:
Individual Interviewed:
Organization:

Date of Interview:
Position:

Sample Questions:

Nature of the work

- What is done on a typical day? The purpose of this question is to understand the variety of tasks and gain a realistic perspective of day-to-day work in this profession.
- What are examples of the functions (tasks) that are performed? Be prepared to share an example to explain what you mean.
- Are these tasks performed more with people, data, or things?
- What technical skills are used?
- How much time is spent in direct client or customer interaction?
- How much of the time do people work on their own, versus in teams or groups?
- What kinds of data do you work with and/or analyze?
- What tools and equipment are used?
- What types of organizations employ people in this occupation? (for example: non-profit organizations, businesses in various industries, etc.)
- What are the typical hours in this profession and how would you describe the working environment?
- Is the work done inside or outside?

Education and skills required for this occupation

- What kinds of academic skills are required to be successful in this profession?
- What kinds of education and degrees are required to work in this field?
- Are skills such as “problem solving”, communication, and teamwork required in this profession? If so, how are they used in this profession?
- Is any kind of specialized training required?
- What are the specific skills you would look for in an entry-level employee or intern (e.g. knowledge of specific computer software, etc)?

Long-term employment outlook

- Are the opportunities in this career path increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable?
- In what parts of the state, country, or world are opportunities increasing?
- Can you describe a typical “career path” in your organization?
- Does this career offer the opportunity to acquire skills and responsibilities that would allow for advancement?
- In what kinds of other organizations or positions could an individual apply these skills?

Informational Interviewing: Sample Interview Questions

Salary and earning potential

- What pay range and benefits (e.g. insurance, vacations, health benefits) can an employee expect?
- How rapidly do pay and benefits increase?
- Is there a maximum possible income?

Sources of frustration and satisfaction

- What are some of the main problems or challenges in your work?
- What gives you the most satisfaction or enjoyment in this work?

Final comments

- What advice would you give a person considering a career in this field?
- Can you refer me to anyone else in this or other fields that I could speak with for more information?
(Ask for exact name, organization, title, telephone, and email address, if possible)
- Are there other sources of information that you think might be helpful to me?

Informational Interviewing: Sample Student Reflection Sheet

Student Name:

Names of organizations where interviews were conducted:

Name	Position/Company	Date

Student Reflection

1. What interests of mine would be satisfied in this career path?
2. What personality traits do I have that would help me to be successful?
3. Which of my needs and values can be met in this career field?
4. What skills and special knowledge do I already have that will help me be successful?
5. What skills and special knowledge will I need to develop?
6. Where can I develop these new skills and/or knowledge?
7. Overall, how has the information obtained helped me clarify or redefine my educational and career goals?

Informational Interviewing: Sample Introductory Letter

Employer Name

Title

Address

Date

Dear _____,

INTRODUCTION: I am a junior at _____ High School in _____. I am interested in learning as much as possible about the opportunities for me after graduation and the skills and education I will need to be successful in a career.

PURPOSE: In an important part of my research about careers, I am interviewing people from various industries and professions. People who are actually in the field can help me immensely as I prepare for my future.

WHY HE/SHE SHOULD MEET YOU: I would like to learn more about your career and the industry. I am especially interested in talking with you about _____. Would it be possible to personally interview you for 30 minutes at a time and place that is convenient for you?

ASK FOR FOLLOW UP: I will contact you on _____ to learn if we can arrange a meeting.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Signature

Student Name

Contact information

Informational Interviewing: Sample Thank You Note

Employer Name

Title

Address

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me on _____ about _____. I was particularly interested in _____ because _____. Most importantly, the information you shared will help me clarify my personal career goals and focus on the academic knowledge and skills needed to achieve those goals.

Thank you once again.

Signature

Student Name