

# Informational Interviewing

Simmons College  
Career Education  
Center

## WHY SHOULD I REQUEST AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

- 1) To get a realistic picture of the career field that interests you and to evaluate whether or not a certain job or organization measures up to your expectations.
- 2) To gather first-hand information about what types of job opportunities/career paths exist in a certain field or organization.
- 3) To obtain advice from people in your own area of interest on the best ways to market yourself to employers, as well as, suggestions on coursework and/or part-time employment that may be helpful for entry into a particular field.

Career decisions are often made without enough information. Job seekers may choose a career field because a friend recommended it, or because they read a job description that sounded interesting. Unfortunately, many uninformed job candidates take positions that seems intriguing, only to find out that they are a poor match for their skills and interests. Informational interviewing helps to answer such questions as: **What career should I choose?** In which company or organization would I be happiest? **Where would an entry level position lead me?** Are my work values and style compatible with people in my field of interest? **Do I have the right background and abilities for the career I am considering?** How do I get my foot in the door once I have made a decision?

Be professional! Write a brief letter to introduce yourself and state why you are writing. Explain that you are investigating the field as a preface to your job search and would appreciate 15 or 30 minutes of their time to answer a few questions regarding his/her educational background, employer, job responsibilities, and the field in general. Outline your background and the development of your interest in this field. Indicate when you will contact him/her to set up a mutually convenient meeting. Then, follow up with a phone call and refer to your letter to open the conversation. Introducing yourself by letter and making a formal appointment assures a business-like interaction with minimal interruptions.

## WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT?

Once you have identified career fields of interest, you will want to make a list of potential contacts. Good sources of information are people doing a job you would like to do, in a field you would like to investigate, or who are working for a company that interests you.

Contacts can be people you already know through an internship, job, or a community activity. Names of new contacts can be obtained through faculty, friends, relatives, past and present work associates, and supervisors.

There are also Simmons graduates who have volunteered to meet with students for informational interviewing. These alumnae/i can be contacted through the Alumnae/i Relations Office and online through

the Career Education Center's eRecruiting.com service. Resources (in print and on the Web) are available in the Career Resource Library to help you identify organizations which interest you. Contacts within these organizations can be professionals in positions that interest you or managers of departments you might enjoy working in. Avoid human resource offices (unless you are considering jobs in human resources!) because you are seeking information, not a job. Call the main switchboard, or check out the organization's Web site to secure the names/titles of appropriate individuals.

Even people you have never met are usually happy to assist you. Your request to talk with them about what they do is a flattering proposition. Most of us are quite good at talking about ourselves and would enjoy passing on the knowledge we have accumulated to those following in our footsteps!

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

### SELF-ASSESSMENT

Spend time taking inventory of your own values, skills, and interests prior to the interview. You will then be better equipped to state what you can do and to prepare questions that will help you determine if a job is a good match for you.

### RESEARCH

A preliminary investigation about the career field and the organization will insure the best use of time during informational interview. Better to use your expert contact as a resource for specific information, rather than the basics. The Career Resource Library (W-110), with its wide selection of career literature and company fields, is a great place to start.

### DEVELOP A WELL-THOUGHT-OUT LIST OF QUESTIONS TO USE AS A GUIDE

Ask whatever you need to know to assist you in your career decisions and upcoming job search. Keep your questions open-ended. "What" and "How" questions invite the interviewer to provide as much information as possible (as opposed to questions that can be answered "Yes" or "No"). Develop additional questions to fit your particular situation, but some suggestions to get started include:

What do you do in a typical work day?

What is your work environment like?

How would you describe the "corporate culture"?

How does this job fit into the department's/organization's structure?

What skills, education, and experience qualified you for your current position?

What preparation, coursework, or experience would you recommend for someone wanting to enter this field?

If you were hiring someone in this field, what skills and abilities would you look for?

What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you find the most frustrating?

What would a typical career path within this organization be?

What are your career goals? What other types of opportunities do you see this job preparing you for?

What is unique about your company as compared to others in the field?

What can I expect entry level salaries to be like? What might an average salary be with several years of experience?

What trends or changes are occurring in your field?

Would you look at my resume? How should I change it to make me more marketable to employers in this field?

## CAN I USE MY INTERVIEWEE AS A CONTACT?

Absolutely! Keep in mind that the purpose of an informational interview is to gather information and advice, **NOT** to ask about job vacancies. However, as you meet with professionals in your field of interest, you are building a network of contacts. So, prepare thoroughly, dress professionally, and arrive promptly. The contact you are making now could prove to be valuable when you undertake a job search. **DO NOT** abuse your contact's assistance by asking for a job during an informational interview. That is not why you are there. But, if you have had a successful visit and develop a comfortable rapport, **DO** open doors to additional contacts by asking, "Are there other individuals you suggest I speak with as I continue to investigate this field?" Consider creating an opportunity for further interaction by asking, "May I contact you when I begin my job search to see if you are aware of any openings?"

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

\* Remember, you are not asking the person for a job, but are gathering information and advice to assist you in your decision making. Be sure your contact is aware of this.

\* Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation. After all, you are the interviewer in this case! Asking the well-thought-out questions you have prepared and being appreciative of your host's assistance will make your contact feel time was well spent. Bringing notes with you for reference is a perfectly acceptable way to keep the ball rolling.

\* Respect your host's time. Don't overstay your welcome. Stick to the time frame stated in your letter unless invited to stay longer.

\* Keep detailed records of your interviews and copies of all correspondence. Your notes on what transpired will refresh your memory as you evaluate what you have learned and have repeat contacts with your interviewees.

\* Make your first contact the one in which you are least interested. You will perform better when the stakes are higher if you have had some practice beforehand.

\* Follow up each meeting with a prompt thank you letter expressing your gratitude for their assistance. If the interview went extremely well and your contact agreed to further assist you when your job search gets underway, remind him/her that you appreciate the offer of continued assistance.

\* Keep your contact network informed of your interviews/job offers, especially if they seem to have taken an interest in your career. Maintaining professional contacts is an ongoing process which will benefit you throughout your career.

## OUTLINE FOR A LETTER REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

For use as a general format and idea generator!!

Your address

Date

Name

Title

Address Of Contact

Salutation:

**IDENTIFICATION** In the opening paragraph, identify yourself and explain why you are writing: Are you a student doing research in a certain industry area? Are you exploring opportunities in a selected organization or career field? Why are you writing to this particular individual? Did you find her/his name through a contact or by researching corporate directories? Did someone refer you?

**EXPLANATION** The middle paragraph(s) should expand on your background and how your interest has developed: Have you developed strengths or skills that you think could be useful in the area you are investigating? Has your long-time goal been to do what this person is doing? Did your work experience or internship confirm an interest in this area? Have you learned about this career field through your course-work and/or research and now want a professional's perspective on what you have read?

**ACTION** Your final paragraph should request a brief informational meeting and suggest how that will be arranged: Would you like to visit the contact in her/his office? Do you have a certain time in mind? Indicate to the contact that you will be calling them to arrange this appointment.

Sincerely,

*(leave four spaces for your signature)*

Your Name

### THE SIMMONS COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION CENTER

is available to students and alumnae/i throughout their careers. Our services include, but are not limited to, workshops on resume writing, interviewing skills, and networking, self-assessment tools, job search strategies, on-campus recruiting, career fairs, and private consultations.

## OUTLINE FOR A PHONE CONTACT TO REQUEST AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

If you are already well acquainted with the interviewee, you might choose to make a telephone call initially instead of writing a letter. If so, the same issues that are covered in the letter previously outlined should be addressed.

### FIRST

Identify yourself and why you are calling.

### SECOND

Expand on your background and how your interest has developed.

### THIRD

Request a brief informational meeting and arrange a mutually convenient time.

### SUGGESTIONS

To keep the conversation going smoothly and insure that you don't forget key issues, prior to your conversation make some notes about topics you wish to cover.

### Note:

*For a more detailed telephone script please refer to the Networking handout.*

*For sample letters, please visit our Web site, or visit our office.*

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## SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

For use as a sample only! Not a model!  
Yours will be tailored to your own individual needs.

15 Pleasant Street  
Brighton, MA 02143  
July 1, 2000

Fontaine O. Information  
Manager  
USA Bank  
One Post Office Square  
Boston, MA 02101

Dear Ms. Information:

As a junior in Management at Simmons College, I am currently investigating career options in preparation for my job search next year. I have developed a growing interest in commercial banking, based on industry analysis performed for my Behavioral Implications in Management course. I obtained your name from the Simmons Alumnae/i Resource database as someone who might provide me with first-hand information about what it is like to work in this field.

Both my academic and practical experience have contributed to my interest in banking. For example, my curriculum at Simmons has included a strong core of classes in finance, economics, and management. I especially enjoyed the coursework in Money and Banking and Managerial Finance. In both courses I received high grades and gained a background in monetary policy and operations of financial institutions. My practical experience working as a bank teller for two summers has allowed me to see these concepts in action.

I would appreciate the opportunity to have a brief informational meeting with you. It would help me to hear your perspective of the banking industry and ask how your educational background has contributed to your success. Also, I would appreciate your suggestions for my continued pursuit of a career in this field. I am available during the week of April 21-25 and will be calling you within 10 days to discuss the possibility of an appointment.

Sincerely,

(leave four spaces for your signature)

I.M. Curious

Note: For a sample Thank-you letter visit the Career Education Center or  
[www.simmons.edu/resources/career](http://www.simmons.edu/resources/career)