

# Career Development: Informational Interviewing



Career Services Center  
(602) 243-8154

<http://students.southmountaincc.edu/StudentDevelopment/CareerServices/>



An informational interview is a brief meeting between a person who wants to investigate a career and a person working in that career. It provides you with a first-hand look at an occupation. Who would know better about a particular job than the person who is actually working in it? The purpose of an informational interview is not to get a job. Instead the goal is to find out if that job would be a good fit for you.

## Research You

Preparation is the key to a successful informational interview. First, research you! Utilize self-assessment inventories to investigate career choices. The Career Services Center at South Mountain Community College offers the Discover program to help you learn more about yourself, your interests, abilities and how they fit with your values. Stop by the office to pick up an access code to use Discover. Once you have an access code, you can complete the interests, abilities and values inventories. Upon completing the inventories, make an appointment with a Career Services Center staff member to go over your results. A variety of other occupational information that can assist you in your research can be found on the Career Services website at: <http://students.southmountaincc.edu/StudentDevelopment/CareerServices/>

## Prepare

Second, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask during the interview. Think about what you want in a job and think about what you hope to gain from the interview. Tailor your questions accordingly. Try to make your questions open-ended rather than “yes” or “no” and the interview will be more conversational. Some sample questions include:

- How did you get started in this field?
- How do you spend your time during a typical day at work?
- What skills and training are required?
- I really like doing \_\_\_\_\_. Do you have the opportunity to do that?
- What excites you most about the job?
- What are some challenges you face doing this job?
- What characteristics does a person in this job need to have?
- What types of advancement opportunities are available in this field?
- Do you usually work independently or as part of a team?
- What kinds of hours do you work?
- Is there flexibility in the scheduling at this organization?
- Does this career require travel?
- How did you prepare for this career?
- How does this career affect your lifestyle?
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this career?
- Can you recommend any books or trade publications related to this field?
- What professional organizations are a part of this field?
- Do you belong to any of these organizations? If so, which ones and why?
- Can you suggest anyone else I may talk to in this field?
- May I tell them that you referred me?

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## Make the Call

Third, call to set up the interview. This can be stressful to do. Gather courage and make the call! When you call, identify yourself. Ask if it is a convenient time to talk. Explain that you would like to meet to learn more about that person's career. Let the person know that you will only take 15 (or 30) minutes of their time. When you get there, stick to the time frame! Arrange a date and time to meet. It is best to meet them in their office at the job location. That way you can see the actual environment of the job. Thank them and hang up!

You may not need as much research for an informational interview as you would for a real interview. Knowing something about the organization will demonstrate your enthusiasm to the person being interviewed. Company literature and Web sites are a good source of information as are a company's annual reports and trade publications.

## Conduct the Interview

Fourth, interview day is important! An informational interview is more casual than a job interview, but it still should be professional. Make a positive first impression. Dress and act professionally. Arrive on time (or a few minutes early). Be friendly to everyone you meet (receptionists, other employees). Smile and shake hands. Don't use first names unless invited to do so. Don't sit before your host does. Avoid using slang, chewing gum or smoking. Be comfortable without being sloppy.

This is your informational interview so it is important that you lead the conversation. You can begin by thanking the person you are interviewing. Briefly recap why you requested the interview and begin asking the questions. It is okay to bring a notepad to write down information. Listen carefully to the responses to your questions. This is the time for the person being interviewed to do the talking. It is time for you to listen.

It is important that you monitor the time and stick to the amount you requested for the interview (15 or 30 minutes). If you have reached the time and the person being interviewed seems to have more to share, you may indicate that you don't want to exceed the arranged time frame. You can ask if it is okay if the conversation continues or would it be all right to schedule another meeting? If you would really like to continue, it is okay to request another time. If you would like to finish and not revisit, that is perfectly all right also. You may have gathered all the information that you need to make a decision.

## Say Thank You

At the end of the interview say thank you. Show your gratitude by sending a thank-you note. The note can be brief. The thank-you note should be written and sent that day or the following day. You can send a thank-you note via e-mail or regular mail. The choice is yours.

After the interview, spend some time reviewing and reflecting about what it is that you learned. Is this area still of interest to you? To make a well informed decision, it is beneficial to conduct at least three informational interviews in the chosen area. Three interviews will give you a clearer picture of the occupation. Also, you add more people to your networking group by conducting more interviews. If you decide you like the occupation, you can continue with more hands on exploration by volunteering, job shadowing, doing an internship, taking classes related to the field, or applying for a position.

### Informational Interviewing Resources:

Occupational Outlook Quarterly – [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)  
Middlesex Community College, Career Services Office  
[www.middlesex.mass.edu/CareerServices/](http://www.middlesex.mass.edu/CareerServices/)