

Informational Interviews

An informational interview can be a great way to learn about potential career options. Here are a few tips about the informational interview process. For more detailed information, please refer to the CEL website.



- The easiest way to make initial contact is via e-mail or phone – use the work number if it is listed.
- Whether calling or e-mailing to arrange an informational interview, introduce yourself, give an overview of your experiences, skills, interests and goals, and state how the interview will be helpful to you. Make the purpose of the interview very clear and stay true to that purpose during the interview.
- Informational interviews are best if conducted in person. If a face-to-face informational interview is not possible, then arrange a time to phone the alum to gather the information you need.
- Dress professionally for an informational interview.
- If you are contacting the alum as part of a job or internship search, request an informational interview. If you simply ask if the alum has a job or internship available, the answer is likely to be "no" and the conversation will be over. During an informational interview, you will have the opportunity to ask job and internship search strategies, allowing the alum to inform you of the application process for any opening that might exist in their organization/company.
- Prior to the informational interview, research your field/occupation of interest by reviewing resources available online, at the CEL, in the library and by requesting materials from the organization/company itself. Professional associations also have a wealth of information on the career fields they represent. You will make a better impression if you go into the interview with some knowledge about the career you are investigating.
- Prepare a list of questions to guide the informational interview. Think through several areas you want to probe and generate specific questions. Keep in mind that you are asking for a person's valuable time. Prioritize your questions so that you gather the most essential information in the time allotted.
- At the beginning of the informational interview, refresh the alum's memory by giving an overview of your experiences, career interests and goals, again stating how the interview will be helpful for you.
- Be genuinely interested in the person you are interviewing. Each individual wants to be valued and not seen as just another connection.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself that relate to your experiences, skills, interests, and career goals. Practice answers to these types of questions with counselors in the CEL.
- Never use the informational interview to ask for a job.
- Ask for referral to two other contacts, either in the same organization/company or in another, who may prove useful to you as you pursue your goals.
- Always send a thank-you letter or e-mail to those alumni you contact.

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing



As you prepare to conduct an informational interview, use these questions as a starting point for creating specific questions for your interviewee.

- What do you do in a typical day?
- How did you first enter this job/career?
- What are the career prospects of this field?
- How would you recommend someone break into this field?
- What kind of background is required for this type of position? What kind of background do you (the contact person) have, and did it help you in this field?
- What kind of experience (internships?) would be advantageous in this field?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this field?
- What motivated you to pursue this work, and what motivates you to stay in it?
- What values do you find in this job environment? Are there any general characteristics that are typical of someone in this field?
- What are the typical working conditions of this job? (Probe for specifics about workload, expectations, dress codes, degree of independence, amount of supervision, closeness of relationships, pressures, degree of cooperation or competition.)
- What kind of compensation can one expect when deciding to pursue this career (salary & benefits)?
- What is the philosophy of the company like in terms of time off, flex time, sick leave, personal days, daycare, etc.?
- What are the possibilities for mobility in this career? From one level to another? Between companies? Between states? Outside of the country?
- What technologies are integrated into this career?
- What is the management style of this organization?
- Is there something you would recommend I do to test whether this type of job is a fit for me? Is there any other information you can give me to help me understand what it might be like to work in this sort of job?
- Who else would you recommend I contact for more information about this career track/organization?
- Could you recommend a person or organization that might provide a shadowing experience for a day?