



Career Center
Lewis & Clark College
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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviews are used to obtain first-hand impressions of work in your organization or field of interest from professionals currently employed there. It is different from a job interview because...

- It is more informal.
- You are exploring opportunities rather than marketing yourself.
- You lead the conversation by asking questions.
- They are generally 20-30 minutes long.

By meeting directly with people, you can **gain deeper insight into the pros and cons of working in a particular organization or field**. Although contacting individuals may seem intimidating at first, most people love to talk about their work, and they will likely be impressed by your initiative and interest. They will also probably be interested in you and your college experience. Overall, informational interviews are a chance to **develop a contact that could be valuable in your future job searches and gain interviewing practice**.

IDENTIFYING CONTACTS

You should begin the process of making contacts and performing informational interviews months before you anticipate needing a job. This will help you be well informed and prepared by the time you are meeting with potential employers.

To begin this process...

1. Choose the position or field you want information about.
2. Write down anyone you know who holds this position or who could put you in contact with someone who does.
 - a. **Make use of your friends, relatives, professionals, peers, and co-workers.**
 - b. Lewis & Clark College Career Network, or L&C Net, on LinkedIn is a strong resource for this process. This group connects you to hundreds of alumni who signed up to talk to students. See the handout on L&C Net for more information about joining the group.
 - c. The Lewis & Clark College Career Center Insights page on LinkedIn can also help identify alumni in your areas of interest.
 - d. Social media, business directories, and professional organizations will also help you find people to contact.

OBTAINING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Depending on your relationship with the person, you can go about organizing an interview in different ways.

- If you obtained someone's name indirectly, you can...
 - Ask for a personal referral by the intermediate party.
 - Contact the individual directly with an introduction including "...so and so suggested I contact you..."
- Without an intermediary, you can...
 - Call for an appointment.
 - Send an email of introduction and follow up with a call. This is appropriate when arranging an out-of-town appointment. You must take the initiative to call after you write.

When contacting an individual to set up the interview...

- Give your name and affiliation with Lewis & Clark College.
- Explain the purpose of your visit: learning about the field or position they work in to help you explore career options.
- Specify the kind of information you are looking for.
- Ask to meet in person if possible, allowing you to see the work environment.
- **Be flexible** when working around busy schedules.
- Get complete directions to the organization and leave your contact information in case the meeting needs to be rescheduled.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Do some research about the organization or occupation in order to have background information. Sources to look into include publications on occupational fields, professional journals, newspapers, job descriptions, and websites.

Develop questions on topics that pertain to you. Use open-ended questions to elicit the most information. Keep your interests and values in mind.

Here are some questions to consider using in your informational interview. All of the following can be adapted to describe an occupational field or a specific job:

- How would you describe your typical workday (or week, month, as appropriate)?
- What are some of your daily tasks?
- What background is necessary or helpful in this position?
- What are entry-level jobs in this field?
- What are typical career paths?
- What do you like most about this job? What are the greatest challenges?
- What do you find most rewarding about your work?
- If you could change something about your job, what would it be?
- How would you describe an ideal applicant to your organization?

- Looking back, what would you have done differently regarding your career path?
- How would you characterize the working conditions (for example: closely supervised, supportive management, high pressure, independent, etc.)?
- What are current trends, changes, and controversies in the field?
- What do you see in the next five years for your field?
- If I work in this field, what are big mistakes to avoid?
- What is the typical salary range? How does this vary by setting?
- What are the rewards and demands of this work?
- Can you suggest some recent publications that discuss this field?
- Can you suggest other people I could talk to? May I use your name as a referral?
- Can you suggest the names of other organizations in this industry?
- Are there other insights you have that would give me a greater understanding of this career?

ATTENDING THE INTERVIEW

- Be sure to dress professionally.
- Be on time.
- Bring your resume to help the interviewee provide better information for you.
- Have a prepared and practiced 1-2 minute introduction.
- Obtain a business card with their accurate name, title, and contact information.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Send a thank you note following each visit within 1-2 days. All written correspondence should follow business form, in order to reflect your professional orientation. This person is now a part of your network, and **it's important to stay in touch**.

Keep records of your informational interviews, including notes on who you met with, what you discussed, and what resources they referred you to. Write down what you learned and keep these notes for future reference.

Informational interviews take time and energy, so you must be committed to carrying out the process. Long-term, you will gain information and skills that will be valuable throughout your life.