

# Informational Interviewing and Networking

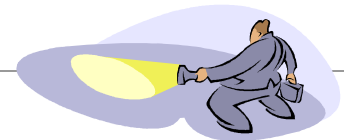
*The most effective way to learn about careers, internships, and jobs*

## What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing and networking is **an approach to career exploration and job hunting** where you build relationships with people in targeted career/job areas. These relationships can result in new knowledge about career fields

as well as discovering opportunities for internships and full-time positions. You may speak with some people only once and with others you may develop long-term relationships.

Research shows that 85% of job opportunities are never advertised. Informational interviewing and networking can be your key to this "hidden job market".



## Why do Informational Interviewing?

- Learn about the day-to-day aspects of careers, occupational fields, and work environments.
- Learn about internships, jobs, and volunteer opportunities. Remember, informational interviews are not job interviews. Handled appropriately, you can ask about how to locate and pursue employment opportunities or increase your marketability.
- Learn how to make career decisions and get feedback from others about your skills and careers they see as a fit for you. Learn to describe what you seek from a career. This level of informational interviewing is less formal and more easily done with friends/family.
- Identify additional contacts by asking, "Who else would you recommend I speak with?" or "Do you know anyone in \_\_\_ career that might be willing to talk to me?"
- Maintain career knowledge and stay competitive in professional circles. Informational interviewing and networking is a professional skill that should be used throughout your career both formally and informally. Successful professionals learn about new opportunities using these skills.

## How to do Informational Interviewing

### STEP 1 – Identifying People

Use these ideas to identify people to informational interview or to uncover people who can provide you with great leads.



- **Academic** - Professors, advisors, alumni, classmates, your career counselor, mentors, student organization members, and activities you are associated with because of school. Check the UWM Experts List for a listing of professors and their specialty areas [www.uwm.edu/News/experts/](http://www.uwm.edu/News/experts/) A listing of UWM student organizations can be found at [www.uwm.edu/UWM/Student/Org/](http://www.uwm.edu/UWM/Student/Org/)
- **Family and Friends** - People you are related to, study with, are on your holiday list, neighbors, co-workers, etc.
- **PantherNet** - An online database of professionals willing to talk with UWM students/alumni to share first hand career information and advice, discuss skills for career success, and offer strategies for locating internships and full-time jobs. Find a link to PantherNet on the CDC homepage.
- **Professional** - Professional organization members and people you meet at work, conferences, career/job fairs, job clubs, volunteer experiences, etc.
- **Written Material** - Newspapers, magazines, books, and professional journals/directories that have the names of people in careers of interest and organizations you would like to be affiliated with.
- **Mentoring Programs** - UWM, community, and professional association mentoring programs connect you to professionals. To locate UWM programs, contact schools and/or department majors.
- **Others** - Church and community organization members, acquaintances, people you strike conversation with in a store, your hairstylist, and anyone who knows a lot of other people.
- **Internet** - Websites with names of people in careers of interest and professional listservs. Refer to page 13 for identifying and contacting listservs and the rules of netiquette.

## STEP 2 – Preparing For It

- **First** - Develop a clear sense of your interests, values, and skills. Use the CDC website and/or meet with a CDC staff member for help.

Use this information about yourself to develop questions that will assess your compatibility with the career/work environment.

Such as, “Having variety in my job is something that I value. On a scale of 1-10, how much variety is in your career?”

These types of questions will help you to differentiate between your interests and values and the interests and values of the person you’re interviewing.

*Develop questions that help you assess your compatibility with the career/work environment and that test the accuracy of your knowledge and assumptions about the career.*

- **Second** - Research the career field. Use links on the CDC website to help you with this.

Develop questions based on your research findings. Such as, “My research of this field showed that people work 50-60 hours per week, would you agree with this?”

- **Third** - Think carefully and creatively about what information they can best help you with. For example: Aunt Betty may not be in the field you're interested in, but she may have good friends who are.

*See pages 4 and 5 for a list of suggested informational interviewing questions.*

## STEP 3 – Arranging It

When arranging the informational interview, contact may be made through a phone call, email, or having someone who knows the person arrange the meeting for you. If you were referred to your contact, you may want to mention the name of your referral.



Be sure to explain your mission of gathering information.

You might say, "I'm a UWM student and I'm considering a career in \_\_\_\_\_. I'm trying to learn more about the career by talking with professionals. Would you be willing to meet with me for 20 minutes, to talk with me about your career?"

If they say this is too much or a bad time, ask what would work better or when you should "try back". You may also ask if there is someone else in the department that they could refer you.

Most people are flattered by requests for career information and advice and are usually quite helpful.

Be aware that the receptionist or other "screening" personnel may try to discourage you by telling you that no jobs are available or that you should contact human resources. It is important for you to clarify that you are seeking advice and information, not a job.

You may find it helpful to say that you've been advised by a career counselor to speak to someone who works in your career of interest.

## STEP 4 – Conducting It

- Ideally you want to conduct your informational interviews **in person**, however, if this is not available to you the second option would be by phone and the third option through email. Email is the least preferred method because it's harder to personally connect with the interviewee as well as very difficult to clarify your questions or the interviewee's responses, when needed.

- Dress neatly, arrive on time, be professional, and establish a good rapport. Though you are not interviewing for a job right then, you may contact this person later to identify internships/jobs that are available.
- Refer to your list of prepared questions. It is okay to take notes, but be sure maintain eye contact. Consider asking if it is okay to tape record the meeting so you aren't distracted by taking notes.



- Acknowledge when your agreed upon amount of time is approaching. Such as, “I know we had agreed on 20 minutes, so I'll just ask this last question.” They will appreciate you being respectful of their time. However, if they have more time available they may say that they can meet for longer.

- Ask for a business card and if they could refer you to others that may be helpful to you.

## **STEP 5 – Following Up and Evaluating What You Learned**

- Within a week of the interview, be sure to send a thank you letter. Email is acceptable. An example can be found on page 5.



- When evaluating a career or potential employer, remember to differentiate between your interests and the interests of the person you interviewed. For example, if the person said they liked that their job was fast paced, you need to relate this to what you know about yourself to determine if you would also enjoy that aspect of the job.

Also differentiate between your feelings about the person and your interest in the career. For example, if you really liked the person you interviewed, be careful not to allow those feelings to overshadow whether the career is a good fit for you

- Maintain a file with information on each informational interview. Include name and contact info for each person, how you located them, interview date, information gathered, and names of additional referrals. You may want to use the informational interview worksheet on page 6 as a template.



- If, you decide to pursue a career or seek employment as a result of an informational interview, it is recommended that you email that individual to update them. You may want to send a cover letter and resume to this person when you implement your job search.

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## **CDC Informational Interviewing and Networking Resources**

*These print and video resources are available for viewing in the  
Career Development Center in Mellencamp 128.*

### **BOOKS**

- Information Interviewing
- Dynamite Networking for Dynamite Jobs
- High Impact Telephone Networking for Job Hunters

### **VIDEOS**

- Career Informational Interviews
- Making Contacts: The Power of Networking
- Networking: Turning Contacts into Success
- How to Get the Job You Want

**Have more questions about how to do informational interviewing?  
Need help identifying people to informational interview?**

A CDC counselor can help you! Make an appointment or drop in during Express Lane hours.

**To make an appointment call 414-229-4486**

### **Express Lane Hours**

(10-15 minute meetings on a first-come, first-serve basis)

Monday 4:00 p.m.– 5:45 p.m.

Tuesday & Thursday 9:30 a.m.– 11:30 a.m.

Wednesday 2:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.

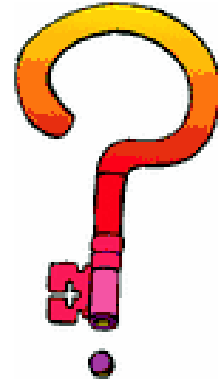
Friday 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

# Suggested Informational Interviewing Questions

## Questions for People in Your Career Field of Interest

### **Nature of the Work**

1. What are the specific duties and responsibilities?
2. Describe a typical day/week?
3. What are the toughest problems you deal with?
4. What part of this work do you find most rewarding?



### **Work Qualifications**

1. What kind of training, education, or course work is required?
2. What skills or talents are most essential in this career?
3. What personal qualities are important?
4. What kinds of prior experiences are absolutely essential?
5. How did you prepare yourself for this work?

### **Working Conditions**

1. What type of setting, hours, atmosphere, etc. can be expected?
2. What obligations does this type of work place upon you outside of the ordinary workweek?
3. How much flexibility do you have in terms of hours of work, dress, vacation, etc.?

### **Internships / Work Entry**

1. What types of internships/part-time jobs would you suggest before entering this field?
2. Where would I look for related experiences in this career, such as internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer positions?" (try to get specific names of places and people)
3. What types of employers hire people in this field? Where are they located?

### **Work Advancement**

1. What additional training or qualifications are necessary for advancement?
2. What are some of the job possibilities for experienced workers in this field?
3. Is turnover high in this field?
4. Do people normally move to another organization or do they move up in this organization?

### **Employment Outlook**

1. How rapidly is the present career field growing?
2. If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what other kinds of work do you feel you could do?
3. How would you describe or estimate future prospects?

### **Salary Questions – Do not Ask for Their Salary**

1. What is the average starting salary?
2. What are the salaries for experienced workers?
3. How much do salaries vary in this career according to the employer, region, or industry?

### **Referral – Always Ask These**

1. Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
2. Can you name a few people who might be willing to see me? May I have permission to use your name when I call or contact them?
3. What are the professional associations in this field?

# Suggested Informational Interviewing Questions

## Questions for People Outside of Your Career Field of Interest

### Self-Exploration

1. What skills do you think I have? Can you give examples of when you've seen me use them?
2. What are some interests I seem to have. How might these be important to my career?
3. Based on what you know about me, what values do you think I should consider seriously when I seek a job?
4. What is your perception of me as an employee? What fields do you perceive me in? Why?

### Personal Advice

1. Are there regrets you have about how you made any of your career decisions? Can you give me suggestions as to how I might avoid having those same regrets?
2. What are some of the best things about the decisions you've made in your career? How did you do it?
3. If you were a college graduate again and had to do it all over again, what would you do different? What would you do the same?
4. What educational preparation do you feel would be the best?
5. What kinds of experiences, paid employment, internships, or volunteer, do you most strongly recommend?
6. Is there anything I should be asking that I've forgotten?

### Referral – Always Ask These

1. Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
2. Do you know specific people you could refer me to? May I use your name when I contact them?
3. Can I check back with you in a few weeks to let you know what happens as I follow up on the information you've shared with me today?

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## Informational Interviewing Thank You Letter Example

222 Grant Avenue  
Anytown, Wisconsin 53200  
August 30, 2007

Ms. Jamie Exxon  
President  
Excel Corporation  
2999 Hearsay Avenue  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53200

- Send a thank you letter within a week of your meeting.
- Email is acceptable

Dear Ms. Exxon:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me yesterday to discuss the field of accounting. You provided me with a wealth of information and advice that will help me to determine the best approach to take in planning for a career in corporate accounting. As you suggested, I plan to locate a part-time job or internship next semester to help me further investigate the career and gain related skills.

Thank you for referring me to Mr. Dorian Graybar and Ms. Kelly Jackson-Hunt. I look forward to speaking with them soon. I will keep you posted on the status of my career exploration.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Brett Smith

# Informational Interviewing Worksheet

Make photocopies and keep one as an original

Interviewee's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization employed with: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Job responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Workplace conditions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Training/skills/qualifications required: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Job titles or career fields related to this profession: \_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions, advice, or feedback from the interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How has the interview impacted my career decision? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Overall impressions of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Based on this experience, what do I want to do differently in additional interviews: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date thank you letter mailed/mailed: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional follow-up actions: \_\_\_\_\_

Other people to contact:

1) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

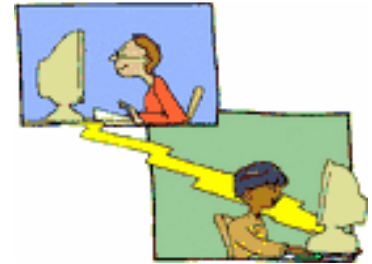
Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# Informational Interviewing and Networking on the Internet

## *Using email discussion groups to learn about careers and locate internships and jobs*

Listservs and mailing lists are discussion groups organized around certain interests, topics or occupations. They are great ways to network with others who have the same career interests as you. These discussion groups allow you to gain up-to-date information about current trends and developments in occupations or career fields you may be considering as well as information about possible internships and job openings.



### **STEP 1 – Identify Email Discussion Groups**

These email discussion search engines will identify groups based on your areas of interest. They also provide descriptions of groups that match your search criteria and instructions on how to join.

- **TileNet** <http://tile.net/>
- **CataList** <http://www.lsoft.com/lists/listref.html>
- **Yahoo Groups** <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

### **STEP 2 – Learn the Rules of Netiquette**

Email discussion groups have their own rules of etiquette regarding the types of information and questions that can be posted to the group. It is important to understand the rules of email discussion groups. For information about netiquette and internet networking check out these links:

- **Top Ten Rules for Effective Netiquette**  
<http://ulmercenter.wordpress.com/2006/11/03/top-ten-rules-for-effective-netiquette/>
- **Top Seven Recommendations for Professional Email Netiquette**  
<http://top7business.com/?Top-7-Recommendations-For-Professional-Email-Netiquette&id=492>

### **STEP 3 – Monitor Email Discussions & Identify Contacts**

**Before participating** in a listserv or mailing list, monitor the group and the discussions to become comfortable with the environment and aware of proper netiquette. Look for postings by members who seem most knowledgeable about the topic being discussed or your area of interest. Note their email addresses, organizational affiliation, and position in the organization.

### **STEP 4 – Contact Members**

Use the following guidelines when contacting listserv and mailing list members.

- **Contact people personally** - not through the group. **Do not** post a general message to the group asking for someone to speak with you.
- When contacting people; identify yourself, concisely state why you are contacting them, and the correlation you identified between your interests or questions and their postings. Be polite and express appreciation for taking their time.
- Request a follow-up to your email message, via phone or email.

**For more information on how to conduct informational interviews and network through email discussion groups, speak with a Career Development Center counselor.**