

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is a form of networking that serves three purposes:

- Gathering information from experts in the fields you are considering for your next career move.
- Placing yourself in front of decision-makers, including people who have the authority to decide whether you are a potential fit for their organization.
- Developing advocates for your job search; people you interview may be able to put you in touch with others who can help you achieve your career goals.

Conduct an Informational Interview with a former Cal Poly Pomona Alumni

Contact the Alumni Affairs for more information

<https://www.cpp.edu/~alumni/student-alumni-association/network-dinner.shtml>

Career Center Calendar

Check www.cpp.edu/~career for current dates, times and locations for Drop-In Advising, workshops and career events.

“Drop-In Advising”

Brief, 10-15 minute sessions with a Peer Advisor who can provide you the tools and resources to be successful. No appointment necessary!

Mon-Fri: 11am-3pm

Getting Started

The three steps in scheduling an informational interview are:

1 *Research:* Identify people in organizations in your chosen professional field. A good way to start is with referrals from friends, family members, faculty, or alumni who you meet. It is possible to cold call, but referrals are more likely to agree to meet with you.

2 *Contact:* The telephone, email and written correspondence are all acceptable ways to contact people you wish to interview. A meeting with a career counselor at the Career Center can help you decide which method is right for you, under which circumstances.

Whenever contacting a potential interviewee, it's important to cover the following:

- How you learned of your contact, or who referred you
- The reason for requesting the meeting (usually to obtain information about the industry in which your contact is working)
- Your status (e.g., student, fellow professional, member of a professional organization)
- Why the meeting will be helpful (e.g., because the expertise of your contact will help you make a more informed career decision)
- How long the meeting will be (don't ask for more than 30 minutes)
- How and when you plan to follow-up to schedule the meeting.

When “cold calling” or contacting someone with whom your connection is remote, you can promise that the reason for the meeting is not to seek immediate employment with their organization. Therefore, it is usually not necessary to send your resume in advance.

3 *Follow-up:* When using email or correspondence, follow-up with a phone call to schedule the meeting a day or two after your communication reaches your prospective interviewee. During that call, you may need to re-iterate some of the points you made in your initial communication.

Conducting the Interview

Dress as you would for a job interview, and come prepared with at least 5-7 questions to ask. Bring a portfolio or small brief case with copies of your resume, the questions you plan to ask your interviewee, and paper to write on.

You will be expected to lead the meeting you have requested. Examples of questions you can ask include:

- How did you get started in this field?
- What do you like most about your job?
- What are the most challenging aspects of your position?
- What skills help you the most in doing your work?
- What is important for me to know about entering this field successfully?
- What personal qualities are most needed to do well in this career?

- Do you have any advice for people getting started in your line of work, or in your industry?

A good informational interview is like a conversation, with each person participating. Asking questions that follow-up on things your interviewee discusses is a good way to improve rapport and move the interview into a conversational mode.

Closing the Interview

After 30 – 40 minutes it is probably time to initiate the close of the meeting. Now that you have established rapport with your interviewee, it may be a good time for you to ask them to take a look at your resume. For example, you could say:

“Thank you for the time you’ve taken...your insight has been very helpful. I’m not here to ask you for employment, but because I am considering a career in your field, I was hoping you might give some advice on my resume. Is this the kind of resume that might be successful in obtaining interviews with an organization like yours?”

Many interviewees will offer to keep your resume, or you can offer them the chance to keep it. You never know if it will be passed along to someone else in the organization. After you have received some feedback on your resume, it can be helpful to ask for a referral to someone else with whom you can have a similar meeting. This will keep your network of contacts growing. For example, you could say:

“This meeting has really gone a long way toward helping me assess my career goals. Is there someone else in your organization, or someone else in your field, whom you could suggest I contact for a similar meeting?”

After gathering information, having your resume reviewed (and perhaps kept) and gaining a referral for a similar networking opportunity, you have accomplished your major goals for the meeting.

The Power of Building a Network

Informational interviewing is a powerful tool in building a network of supporters who can open the door to future employment. Your efforts may pay off quickly, or may take some time. You eventually may find a job by more traditional means. But you never know when a meeting will pay off in an important lead for your job search. And by keeping in touch with your new contacts and letting them know where you eventually find employment, you will cement your relationship with them.

Example of Informational Interview Request

Your street address
City, State Zip Code
Email address
(Area Code) Phone Number

October 5, 2006

Ms. Jane Smith
Vice President, Information Technology
Excellent Enterprises, Inc.
1500 Techno Road
Pasadena, California 91000

Dear Ms. Smith:

While reviewing technology developments on the internet, I read your press release about Excellent Enterprises’ entry into the artificial intelligence field. I am contacting you because I am considering a professional position in information technology, and artificial intelligence solutions are of particular interest to me.

I am currently a student majoring in Computer Science at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and I was hopeful that you could provide me with some insight that would be helpful in deciding how to approach the field of artificial intelligence as an aspiring professional.

I would like to schedule a 20 – 25 minute meeting with you at your convenience so that I can ask some questions that will help me better understand what a career in your field is like. The purpose of the meeting is to learn from your expertise, not to seek immediate employment with your organization.

I will contact you by telephone on October 11 to see if we can schedule a meeting. Thank you for considering my request, and I hope we can spend some productive time together in the near future.

Sincerely,

Sam Student