

Informational Interviewing

What it is:

- “A conversation...in which facts or statements are elicited from another... to obtain knowledge derived from study, experience or instruction.” -The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
- A chance to get an insider’s view into a particular career field or company
- NOT an interview for a specific job

What it’s for:

- Gathering information and reaching tentative decisions about yourself and your options
- Self-assessment (Would I like this line of work? What would I need to do to be competitive in this field?)
- Researching companies (Would I like working in this culture? Are there opportunities for advancement?)

When to use it:

- Throughout your career, not just when you’re thinking about a new job or a new line of work
- To gain new networking contacts in a different field or company

How to set it up:

- Identify people to interview. Ask friends, family, faculty or employers for names of people who work in the profession you hope to enter. Use the Career Management Center’s CareerSearch or eRecruiting resources to identify contacts.
- When setting up the interview, introduce yourself and why you’re calling. Indicate where you got the person’s name. Ask if the person would be available for a short meeting to discuss his or her occupation. Explain a little about your own background and why their occupation appeals to you... but never give the impression that you’re asking for a job.

What types of questions should be asked:

- Can you tell me how you got to this position?
- What do you like most about what you do, and what would you change if you could?
- How do people break into this field? Do you have any suggestions for me?
- What are the types of jobs that exist where you work and in the industry in general?
- What does a typical career path look like in your industry?
- What are some of the biggest challenges facing your company and your industry today?
- Are there any professional or trade associations with whom I should connect?
- What’s unique or differentiating about your company?

Important tips:

- Treat it as a business appointment and conduct yourself in a professional manner.
- Write a thank-you note afterwards. Stay in touch if you’ve followed up on their suggestions. Build a strong mentoring rapport; you may have developed a great networking contact!

Sources: ODU Career Management Center, The New York Times Online, iSeek.org