



SKIDMORE COLLEGE

CAREER SERVICES

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Interviewing for Information

SOME TIPS

Skillfully used, informational interviewing is one of the most valuable of all sources of occupational information. While it may cover some of the same ground as printed material, it presents opportunities for an intimate and flexible inspection of the job field unmatched by written sources. The informational interview communicates the first-hand experiences and impressions of someone close to the occupation and is directed by your questions.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

An informational interview is less stressful for both you and the employer than a typical job interview. You are the one in control. Questions can be asked that may not be strategic during a first interview (i.e., questions regarding salary, benefits, vacation). You can discuss what is done on a day-to-day basis and relate it to your own interests and feelings. Beyond the advantages of gaining valuable career information, the informational interview provides the opportunity to build self-confidence and to improve your ability to handle a job interview.

You should regard each interview as a business appointment and conduct yourself in a professional manner. Consider that you are appearing not only on your behalf, but as a representative of Skidmore as well. The majority of business people are very willing to cooperate with college students. Of course, Career Advisors eagerly anticipate requests for informational interviews. If you have made clear, in advance, the explicit purpose of your interview you will, in all probability, find your contact an interested and helpful person. Remember the appointment time and appear promptly for your interview. You should neither be too casually dressed nor overdressed. Regular business attire is appropriate. Be sure you know the name of the person you are to see, the correct pronunciation of his/her name, and the title of his/her position.

Because so much ground may be covered in the informational interview, individuals sometimes take notes during the meeting. A limited amount of note-taking is justified provided that your contact is agreeable and that you do not permit this activity to interrupt communication between the two of you.

Sketch out a brief outline of the topics covered and the information gained as soon as possible after the interview. This will require only a few minutes, and will insure that you remember the important points discussed. Later, working from your outline, you can construct a more detailed report of the interview.

Write a thank you note to the people you have interviewed. Report back to them if you have followed up on any suggestions. By building strong rapport with career contacts you enhance the likelihood that they will offer assistance with your job search when you are ready for that phase of your career planning process.

QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended to help you build a detailed picture of the occupation. Use these questions only as a guideline. Your interview will be most effective if you formulate questions that reflect your *genuine curiosity* about careers.

OCCUPATIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. What is the title of the person you are interviewing?
2. What are other commonly-used titles for the position?
3. What are the duties performed during a typical day? Week? Month? Year? Does s/he have a set routine? (As the person describes the duties, ask what skills are needed). How much variety is there on a day-to-day basis?

4. What educational program is recommended as preparation? (Distinguish between courses which are desirable and those which are indispensable.)
5. What kinds of courses are most valuable in order to gain skills necessary for success in this occupation? (Distinguish between courses which are desirable and those which are indispensable.)
6. What degree or certificate do employers look for?
7. What kind of work/internship experience would employers look for in a job applicant?
8. How can a student obtain this work experience?
9. Are any co-curricular activities recommended?
10. What steps besides meeting educational and experiential requirements are necessary to “break into” this occupation? (i.e. - exam? interview? union membership?)
11. What are the important “key words” or “buzz words” to include in a resume or cover letter when job hunting in the field?
12. What are opportunities for advancement? To what position? Is an advanced degree needed? (If so, in what discipline?)
13. Which skills are most important to acquire? (i.e. - which skills do employers look for?)
14. What are the main or most important personal characteristics for success in the field?
15. What are the different settings in which people in this occupation may work (i.e. - educational institutions, businesses, etc.)?
16. What other kinds of workers frequently interact with this position?
17. Is there evidence of differential treatment between men and women workers with respect to job duties, pay, and opportunities for advancement?
18. What are the employment prospects in the advisor’s geographic area? Where are the best employment prospects? What are the employment prospects at the advisor’s company? Is mobility a necessary factor for success?
19. What are some related occupations?
20. What are the different salary ranges?
21. Does the typical worker have a set schedule (i.e. - 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) or are the hours flexible?
22. What are the demands and frustrations that typically accompany this type of work?
23. Is there a typical chain of command in this field?
24. How can you determine that you have the ability or potential to be successful in this specific occupation?
25. Is this a rapidly growing field? Is it possible to predict future needs for workers in this field?
26. What types of technology are used and how are they used?

27. Where might job listings be found?
28. What entry level positions are there in this field that a liberal arts graduate might consider?
29. What does the advisor know now which would have been helpful to know when s/he was in your shoes?

FUNCTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. How many hours does the advisor work?
 - A. Where is the work primarily conducted (office, home, at client's, on-the-road)?
 - B. Is work typically conducted on weekends, evenings, holidays?
 - C. Is this typical for people in this occupation?
2. What sort of education does the advisor have?
 - A. Is the education relevant to what the advisor is doing?
 - B. Does the advisor's college major play a significant role in his/her work?
3. What has been the advisor's career path from college to present?
4. What are the satisfying aspects of the advisor's work?
5. What are the greatest pressures, strains or anxieties in the work? What are the major job responsibilities? What are the toughest problems and decisions with which the advisor must cope? What are the dissatisfying aspects of the work? Is this typical of the field?
6. How would the advisor describe the atmosphere/culture of the work place?
7. Do you think the advisor left out any important questions that would be helpful in learning about the job or occupation?
8. Can the advisor suggest others who may be valuable sources of information?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Reflect on the information you gathered and consider issues such as...

1. What is your reaction to the number of hours and type of schedule (set/flexible) described?
2. What do you need to do to make yourself a competitive candidate?
3. Do you think you would be satisfied with the situation your contact described?
4. Do you think you would be dissatisfied with the same thing(s) your contact described?
5. What is your reaction to the conditions (stress/anxieties) of this occupation? Do you want to deal with them?
6. Have any changes taken place in your opinion of the occupation as a result of your interview? What are the most important new facts and understandings that you have acquired? What misconceptions did you correct?