**Informational Interviewing Guide**



**Introduction**

There are many benefits to informational interviewing. For example, networking is a key skill to uncover unadvertised opportunities that exist in the world. It also enables you to learn more about a field or organization and receive expert advice that many outside parties are not privy to. As you build relationships through networking you will be more likely to gain new contacts through referrals. Networking and informational interviewing can sound difficult and potentially overwhelming to do but it is just socializing and building new relationships.

Adapted from York University Career Centre’s [Tapping into the Hidden Job Market: Informational Interviewing document](https://careers.yorku.ca/files/2014/08/informational-interviewing.pdf?x24009)

**Suggested Process**

The following outlines the steps to informational interviewing:

1. Select an occupation or field that you want to learn more about/work in.
2. Identify someone to interview
3. Plan the specific questions you want to ask
4. Arrange for the interview
5. Conduct the interview
6. Follow up on the interview, show your appreciation, and stay connected
7. Reflect on what you have learned.

Graphical user interface, application, chat or text message

Description automatically generated

**Select - Identify – Plan**

1. **Select** an occupation or field that you want to learn more about/work in.

2. **Identify** someone to interview

* Ask if people you know could connect you with people they know in the field.
* Attend events that are focused on your interests and identify people there to follow up with for an informational interview.
* Research a company website, LinkedIn, and Twitter to identify people you would want to interview.
* When conducting an information interview ask if they would suggest anyone that you should talk to so that you continue to speak and connect with new people.

3. **Plan** the specific questions you want to ask

* Always research the company before going into an informational interview.
* Do not ask for a job; instead, focus on questions that uncover office culture, what skills are valued, what a typical day looks like, and potential challenges/problems they deal with.

**Arrange – Conduct**

4.  **Arrange** for the interview

* Contact the person that you are interested in interviewing. Ideally, ask someone you have met to introduce you to the person you would like to chat with or choose a person you have previously met at an event.
* If you are cold emailing a person to ask for an informational interview, mention why you want to chat with them in particular – for example, because of their recent accomplishment, their career trajectory, or their connection to you as an alumnus from your university in your field of interest, etc.

5.  **Conduct** the interview

* Build rapport by thanking them for taking time out of their day to meet with you, engage in some small-talk, and offer to buy them a coffee/tea if you are meeting them in person at a coffee shop.
* Discuss your background, why you are interested in the field/organization, and why you decided to contact them.
* Take notes during the interview but make sure to keep the conversation flowing.
* Respect the period that you agreed to meet. If you do have more questions for them or want to continue to chat after the 15-20 minutes that was agreed upon, give them an opportunity to get out of the conversation.
  + *e.g., “We’re coming up to 1:30pm and I want to respect your time. I’ve enjoyed speaking with you, and you have provided valuable insights. I would be happy to continue chatting, but I want to respect your schedule.”*
* Ask if they would recommend anyone that you should talk to so that you continue to speak and connect with new people.

**Follow up – Reflect**

6.  **Follow up** on the interview, show your appreciation, and stay connected

* Follow up with them over email, thanking them for their time, within 24 hours of the interview.
* Highlight one key insight that you gained from talking with them and ask if there is anything that you can do for them to return the favour.
* Make an excel file to track the informational interviews that you have had: note contact information, when you last contacted them, and key points that they raised in the discussion. Follow up periodically (i.e., every couple of months) with relevant information about your progress or interesting articles that you have found.

7.  **Reflect**on what you have learned

* How can you use this information when applying to new opportunities?
* Is there anything that you would change next time?
* Is there anything new that you learned about the field or organization?

**Tips for Success**

1. Be respectful and engaged with whoever you are speaking to.
2. Do not ask for a job – build relationships and gain information instead.
3. Ask for 15-20 minutes of their time and give them an opportunity to leave the conversation when it gets close to the end meeting time. If they want to continue talking, that is fantastic, but show that you respect the time that they have provided you.
4. Ideally, meet face-to-face because it is easier to build rapport, but online options like Zoom offer flexible alternatives.
5. Prepare questions in advance.
6. Ask if there is anyone that they would suggest you talk to.

**Useful Resources:**

**Example of a Draft Email**

**Draft email: Contacting someone for the first time (adjust to your situation):**

Hello \_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I attend York University and am in a course focusing on XX. I am particularly interested in XX because XX. I am now trying to gather as much information as I can about XX to better understand how this field might align with my future goals.

I learned about the work you are doing in this area from XX.  I would be grateful to speak with you for 15 – 20 minutes about your perspectives on this field/organization, how you came to it and whether you might have any advice to offer me. This information is not readily available from any other source. If this is agreeable to you, please let me know your availability for our conversation.

Thank you,

If you are uncertain about how to conduct informational interviews, there are many helpful resources to the topic on LinkedIn Learning [accessible through your York account](https://lil.info.yorku.ca/). For example, “[The Informational Interview](https://www.linkedin.com/learning-login/share?account=2174970&forceAccount=false&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.linkedin.com%2Flearning%2Fweb-career-clinic%3Ftrk%3Dshare_ent_url%26shareId%3DtSXg7e7LRUGJ6IqVUyEwWQ%253D%253D),” “[Request and conduct informational interviews](https://www.linkedin.com/learning-login/share?account=2174970&forceAccount=false&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.linkedin.com%2Flearning%2Ffind-a-job-in-the-hidden-job-market%3Ftrk%3Dshare_ent_url%26shareId%3DGao3OCRvSKKyhM2fUcX3Dg%253D%253D),” and “[Use Informational Interviews to your advantage](https://www.linkedin.com/learning-login/share?account=2174970&forceAccount=false&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.linkedin.com%2Flearning%2Fa-career-strategist-s-guide-to-getting-a-job%3Ftrk%3Dshare_ent_url%26shareId%3DTx5OccJAQk%252BoqtvSl2pSwQ%253D%253D)”

## Sample Questions on a Sector, Organization, Issue or Occupation (SOI)

## Sample Interview Questions - Career Path or Skill Set

*Sample Interview Questions Focused on a Sector, Organization, Issue or Occupation*

**Human Resources:**

* Are most positions in this field/organization full-time or contract?
* What are the primary functions/roles that people perform in your field/organization?
* What are the most highly valued skills, experience, attitudes, and training of people in this field/organization?

**Knowledge Dissemination:**

* By what means is knowledge shared in this field, e.g. conferences, online communities, newsletters/journals etc.?
* How do you find and connect with people in other organizations or locations who share your interests and concerns?
* Which professional associations or special interest groups are active in this field? Do you belong to any of these and if so, what do you value about these communities? If not, why not?

**Key People/ Organizations:**

* Who are the leaders or innovators in this field/organization? What are their most significant contributions?
* What do you think this field/organization does well? What has led to this success?
* Where do you think this field/organization needs to improve? Why?

**Prospects:**

* What do you think will be the most significant changes in this field/organization in the coming years?
* What new challenges or opportunities do you think these changes will create?

**Course Connections:**

* In what way does [specify relevant course concept or topic] inform your sector, organization, or occupation?
* How has your sector, organization or occupation addressed [specify relevant course concept or topic]?

**Sample Interview Questions - Career Path or Skill Set**

*Sample Interview Questions Focused on a Career Path or Skill Set*

* Why did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
* How did you get to this position? (What experiences, contacts, strategies, decisions were involved?)
* What is a typical day on the job like for you?
* What skills are most essential to be effective in your job?
* How did you learn these skills?
* What opportunities are there for advancement in your position or occupation?
* What makes this occupation, position or organization exciting/satisfying?
* How would you describe the work culture of your organization?
* What advice do you have for someone interested in this field/job?
* Is there a particular resource you would recommend to learn more about your field or occupation?
* Is there someone you would be willing to introduce me to who could answer some of my questions about this occupation?