

When writing a research paper, you consult the experts. Career research is no different! Information interviews add to your knowledge about careers by connecting you with professionals working in roles that are of interest to you. Information interviews can be of assistance in confirming your interest and understanding of certain careers, forming accurate perceptions of the occupations and their fit with your interests, skills, and values, as well as helping you establish a professional network.

When thinking about who to conduct informational interviews with, consider seeking the assistance of professors, career counselors, the Career Assistance Network, family members, friends, neighbors - essentially anyone who is knowledgeable about your professional goals. You can also solicit names from news/magazine/newsletter articles, membership directors, company websites, etc.

Once you've created a list of individuals to interview, contact them and arrange a time to meet. Additionally, prior to your interview, you will want to prepare questions to ask. The back of this handout contains a list of questions to get you started. Consider researching the person you are interviewing using LinkedIn, their company website, etc. Being knowledgeable about their professional and educational background will help you ask informed, purposeful questions and appear confident and prepared.

When conducting the interview, dress neatly and appropriately based on the environment and the expected dress code of your interviewee. Be sure to arrive (or connect) on time. Additionally, be sure to ask for the individual's business card and send a thank you after the interview.

CONNECT

Below are examples of first-contact scripts; use variations for phone/video interviews.

Referral from a professor / family member / friend/ other individual:

Dear Mr. Scott,

My name is Kate Johnson, and I am a student at Nebraska Wesleyan University majoring in English. My professor, Dr. Jones, suggested that I contact you regarding your graduate school experience at the University of Colorado. I am interested in a career in editing and would like to learn about your assistantship with the University Communications Office. Additionally, any insight that you could provide about the graduate school application process would be very appreciated. Could we arrange a 30-minute meeting in the near future? I am available via phone or Zoom.

Thank You,
Kate Johnson

No specific referral:

Dear Ms. Lange,

My name is Kate Johnson, and I am a student at Nebraska Wesleyan University. I am a junior majoring in biology and I plan to attend law school with the goal of working in environmental law. I recently learned of your advocacy through the Nebraska Wildlife Federation. I am intrigued by your role and curious if you would be willing to share information with me about your career and the professional and educational path that led you there. Could we arrange a 30-minute meeting in the near future?

Thank You,
Kate Johnson

Referral for a Career Assistance Network member:

Dear Ms. Smith,

My name is Kate Johnson, and I am a student at Nebraska Wesleyan University majoring in math. I received your name from the Career Assistance Network and would like to learn more about your current position at ABC Company. Specifically, I would like to learn about your day-to-day work as an actuary and the training that you received to prepare for your career. Could we arrange a 30-minute meeting?

Thank You,
Kate Johnson

QUESTIONS

The questions below may serve as a starting point for your information interview. Be sure to develop additional questions that are specific to your interests and career goals.

Personal Views:

- How did you become interested in this area of work?
- What was your undergraduate major?
- Did you have any practical experiences or training other than college prior to your current job?
- What type of lifestyle can I expect if I enter this field?

Benefits and Frustrations:

- What are the major rewards of your job?
- What are major frustrations you encounter in your job? How do you deal with these frustrations?
- What fringe benefits are offered to you at your job?
- What is a possible salary range for someone in your occupation?

Occupational Requirements and Experience:

- What college courses have been the most helpful to you in your career?
- What types of tools or equipment, if any, are necessary to perform your job?
- Is special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree required for your job? If so, what?
- What personal qualities do you see as important for success in this occupation?
- What kinds of on-the-job training exist in your field or organization?
- Is there much travel involved in your job? If so, how much and what types?
- Are there opportunities for relocation?

Occupational Environment:

- How would you describe the environment in which you work?
- How would you outline or describe a “typical” day at work (i.e. your routine or duties you perform on a regular basis)?
- What hours do you normally work? Is there a busy season?
- How much “outside” work is involved (outside normal working hours)? What does this work involve?
- How much autonomy do you have on the job?
- What portion of your work involves interacting with others, such as co-workers and/or the public?

Outlook:

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field?
- What is the current demand for people in this occupation?
- Do you foresee any changes in this demand in the future? If so, what or how?
- How is this field being affected by technological changes?
- What are the major issues or trends in your field?

Job Search Advice:

- If you were hiring someone to assist you in your line of work, what criteria would you use to make your selection?
- Are there professional groups I can join which would be beneficial? Are there journals to which I should subscribe?
- Do you know where I can find further information about this occupation?
- Do you know of any other people in this field who might be willing to talk with me about their experiences?
- How could someone with my background, interests, and skills be best utilized in a setting such as this?
- Do you think there are other kinds of organizations I should be considering?
- What job search strategies work best to target a career in this field? (For example, a teaching career may have different requirements from medicine or freelance photography.)