Informational interviewing is the process of gathering career information from people working in areas of interest to you. By contacting people who are doing the kind of job you would like to do, you can get a better idea of where you might use your skills and which work environments best suit you.

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**getting started**

1. The first step in the process is to identify the career field(s) of interest to you.
2. Identify the specific person or persons with whom you want to talk. Ask family, friends, and professors if they know anyone in a job close to your interests, or in a company you wish to explore. The Carleton Career Center can help you utilize the Alumni Database to find contacts. You can also call an organization directly and ask to speak to someone in a particular department.
3. Contact the person and ask to set up a 15-30 minute appointment at their convenience, preferably at an on-site meeting, or by telephone.

If you would like guidance or more information on what career paths might line up with your interests:

- talk to a Career Center counselor
- check out the link to Spotlight on Careers on the Career Center’s website
- try the BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook for an exhaustive list (http://www.bls.gov/oco/)

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**NOTE:**

Even if you already have a certain area of work in mind, it’s a great idea to do this kind of research anyway. It may help clear up any misconceptions you had about an industry or its workforce. It can also help specify your understanding of the field, allowing you to make strong first impressions.

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By conducting an informational interview... you gain **exposure** to the work setting get a **detailed description** of a job’s responsibilities, learn the **vocabulary** that pertains to the career field and develop **rapport** with someone who has first-hand experience in your field(s) of interest.

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**the bottom line**

**Informational interviewing is a way to fine-tune your career interests and do some background research. This should enable you to locate the best jobs and compete effectively when you do find openings.**
Informational interviewing may confirm your career goals and motivations, or maybe prompt you to realize that your “dream job” may not actually be a good fit. Either way, it is a productive step to take when investigating opportunities for your future.

**Ideas for interview questions**

- What are your professional responsibilities on any given day?
- What are the greatest pros and cons of the work that you do?
- How did you get into the field? What were your credentials and experience? If you could start over again, would you do it differently?
- How many hours a week do you typically work? Do you often work evenings or weekends? Do you travel?
- What are the qualifications for your type of position currently i.e. educational background, experience, etc.? Do you have any suggestions for how I could better prepare myself for entry into this field?
- What kinds of on-the-job training exist in your field (organization)?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? What does a typical career path look like in this field?
- What is your prediction outlook for this field?
- What are the major issues/hot topics in your field today? What is the broader context that you try to keep in mind?
- What are the average salary ranges for entry-level positions in this field?
- What books, journals, professional organizations, training programs, etc. might be useful for me to know about?
- Can you suggest any other people or organizations with whom I might talk for additional information about this industry?
- Would you be willing to give me some feedback or advice on my resume?
- FOR WOMEN: Are there any special considerations for women beginning a career in this field? If relevant or of interest: How does your organization feel about flexible hours, job sharing or part-time work?
- FOR LGBT STUDENTS OR STUDENTS OF COLOR: Are there any special considerations for LGBT students or students of color interested in beginning a career in this field?
- Before your interview: Do your background homework on the organization and the alum/professional you are planning to talk with. Consider taking a look at the “Alumni Networking” tip sheet also available in the Career Center. Background knowledge is key to good self-presentation.

**Given that 80% of all positions are unadvertised, informational interviewing can enable you to build a network of contacts which will help you tap into the unadvertised job market.**

It is important to remember that informational interviewing is not a method of asking for a job. It is instead a tool that helps you to inform and prepare your future plans and interests.

**Following up after the interview**

After you have interviewed someone, send a short letter to thank him/her for helping you develop a clearer picture of the work you want to do. If you did not leave a resume after the interview and you are interested in learning about possible job openings, enclose a copy with your thank you. You might also want to inquire about future employment possibilities. For example, “Should you learn of any job postings in your company, please keep me in mind. Enclosed is a copy of my resume to further acquaint you with my background.” You might also ask if it would be all right to call back from time to time.

Keep good records of your informational interviews for future reference. You may want to keep a journal listing:

- Contact: name, title, address and phone number
  - Date of appointment, time and place
  - Reactions to your meeting and what you learned
  - Follow-up: resume sent, thank you, re-contact date
    - New contacts suggested