NETWORKING: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

WHAT ARE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?
Simply stated, they are conversations designed to produce information and an effective way to network. Whether you are looking to explore career paths, finalize career choices or decide which organizations to apply to, no print or online resource can give you such personalized information!

SETTING UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS
When you request informational interviews, phone calls are often more effective than emails. But calls can feel more intimidating than emails, so practice what you'll say before you call. Be clear on:

- Who you are (student or recent graduate)
- What you are looking for (advice, industry information, suggestions to make more informed career decisions)
- How much time you need (15-20 minutes)
- Who referred you and the reasons for wanting to speak with this person in particular

When you call, make sure you have your resume with you, in case you’re asked to provide more detail about your background; your list of questions, in case the person you’re calling prefers to speak right away rather than schedule a meeting; and a pen and paper so you can jot down notes.

Also be prepared for voice mail. You can leave a quick message stating why you’re calling, how the person can reach you if they have the time to return your call, and when you’ll try reaching the person again.

DO YOUR RESEARCH
Make the most of the informational interview by researching in advance the profession you’re investigating and the company you’re visiting.

You can find basic information about different occupations using Career Cruising, which all current McMaster students can access on and off campus. Alumni can access Career Cruising in our resource area only (Gilmour Hall 110).

As well, ACE links has information, click on “Career Information to get started.

To research companies and follow current events by industry, visit McMaster Library’s online career and job resources.

Other sources of information include Sector Councils, Professional Associations and even Google and Wikipedia. Networking sites like LinkedIn.com also have a role to play, as they can help you:

- Access professionals who may answer your questions about career and educational paths and identify key issues in your field of interest
- Post questions on professional organization discussion boards
- Research how people in your careers of interest got their start
QUESTIONS TO ASK

Select in advance the questions you will ask, keeping in mind the amount of time you have requested.

ABOUT THEM
- How did you get into this field?
- How has the field changed since you started?
- What advice do you have for someone starting out in this work?
- If you weren’t doing this job, what other work would your skills and experience qualify you for?

ABOUT THE JOB
- What does a typical day look like in this job?
- What are the key competencies required to be successful in this line of work?
- What do you find most challenging?
- How has your job changed since you started? What changes do you anticipate in the future?

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY
- What is the employment outlook for this industry?
- Is there a shortage of skilled people in this field?
- What are some of the trends you have noticed over the years?
- Who are the most important people in this field today?
- Are there opportunities for self-employment in this field?

ABOUT THE COMPANY
- What made you decide to choose this company?
- What does this company do differently than its competitors?
- Why do customers choose this company over others?

SKILLS, EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION
- What could I do to make myself a successful candidate for a role in this organization or industry?
- What is the ideal educational path for someone in this position?
- If I’m willing to get that training at some point, but want to get involved in this field right away to test out whether it’s a good fit, where would I start looking to get my feet wet?
- Would you feel comfortable giving me some feedback on my resume? How can I market myself more effectively?
- Given my skills in X, Y and Z, what other types of work do you think I should consider?

ADVANCEMENT
- What is the background of the people in senior positions in this field today?
- Is there a typical career path for someone in this field?
- Is further education required for people who want to advance in this field? Does it seem likely to become a requirement in the future?
MORE INFORMATION

- What professional journals, organizations or websites do you recommend?
- Who else would you recommend I speak with? What information might they be able to share with me? May I use your name when I contact them?

**Note:** There are pros and cons to bringing your resume to an informational interview. On the pro side, you can get industry-specific feedback on your resume, and you can quickly give your interviewee an overview of your skills and experience. On the con side, your interviewee may feel that you’re trying to use the informational interview as a job interview, so make sure that you ask only for advice about your resume. Don’t ask your interviewee to keep your resume or to pass it on to anyone. If the person you’re interviewing offers to hang on to your resume, thank them, let them know when you plan to be on the job market, and offer to send them an updated resume at that time.

FOLLOW-UP

After conducting an informational interview, follow-up with a thank you letter to let your contact know their advice or referrals helped you. This will give the impression that you are professional and committed to career planning.

**SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER**

Dear ________,

Thank you for the time you spent with me on ________________. I found your insights on ______________ and ______________ very interesting. I also contacted ______________ as you suggested, and we are meeting on ________________ to discuss some current opportunities with his organization.

Thank you again for your time and interest in my career. I look forward to one day returning your generosity.

Sincerely,
MAC Student

FINAL THOUGHTS

The benefits of informational interviews go beyond immediate information gathering. Conducting informational interviews will enhance your performance as an ‘interviewee’ and increase your confidence in communicating one-on-one with people you don’t know well.

To help you get started [MentorLinks](#) can easily connect you with mentors in a variety of careers and industries.