

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW OVERVIEW

Informational interviews are individual networking meetings with professionals who may be able to provide information or advice regarding your employment search, career and professional development. They provide an in-depth opportunity to get to know someone and learn about a particular career path. Since networking is an integral part of your employment search, informational interviews should be an aspect of your overall career strategy.

Informational interviews usually take place in your contact's office, but can take place at another mutually convenient location or by phone, and are generally quite short – 15 to 20 minutes. The purpose of an informational interview is not to get a job, but to learn: about the practice area or profession; what opportunities may exist in the field; resources; what employers are seeking from applicants; and how to get started. Informational interviews sometimes lead to contacts that may result in future employment, but that is not the purpose of the meeting. Informational interviews may lead to suggestions for potential entry-level opportunities or recommendations for specialized training.

You may learn through an informational interview that a particular career path is not for you. Or, you may be inspired to develop more specialized knowledge or relationships that lead to opportunities for you in the field. You may end up with a new mentor and new ideas about what you want to do after you graduate.

### **Tips for informational interviewing:**

- **Reach out to alumni.** Professionals usually are passionate about their work, and enjoy an opportunity to share their passion with others. Alums often are more than willing to meet with and help students from their school. To find alumni in a particular geographic and practice area, check Martindale, use Westlaw or LexisNexis or search the [Alumni Database](#).
- **Use your contacts.** Ask people you know if they know any attorneys or other professionals in the fields in which you are interested. Get permission to use your contact's name – and then use it!
- **Research!** Do your homework – learn something about your contact and their employer before reaching out. Then, conduct some additional research before your meeting, if one is granted. You may want to set up a Google or Lexis alert on your contact and his/her employer so that you keep up with any new developments prior to meeting.

- **Make initial contact.** Request an informational interview via email, explaining your interest in the practice area or field, and mention your connection (if any). If you choose to include your resume, explain that it is just so your contact will know something about you before meeting. Specify that you are asking only for a short period of time (15 - 20 minutes) at their convenience. You may offer to buy your contact coffee or lunch. Mention that you will follow up via email or phone by a specific date – and then do if you do not get a response to your initial outreach. Sometimes unsolicited emails are ignored or caught in the recipient's spam filter. You also could choose to send a letter via mail initially, with email follow-up.
- **Be professional.** Treat an informational interview as you would a job interview: dress professionally, bring an updated copy of your resume, and a portfolio to take notes.
- **Do not ask for a job.** It is possible the person you are meeting with has, or knows of, an available position. If so, that person should be the one to bring it up. Your goal is to learn about career paths and gain connections that may lead to a job in the future.
- **Develop an agenda for the meeting and direct the conversation.** Do not forget, in this situation, you are the interviewer!
- **Prepare questions.** Your research on the contact and his/her employer should enable you to ask intelligent questions about their work.
- **Prepare answers.** Just as with a job interview, you should be prepared to answer questions about your interest in the contact's professional area, why you attended law school, and your goals and aspirations. The person with whom you are meeting may be aware of current or future openings with their employer or within the field and may treat the meeting as a pre-interview session.
- **Be aware of time.** Be respectful of your contact's time. Acknowledge when your requested time has elapsed and offer to end the meeting if your contact is pressed for time.
- **Follow up.** Just as with a job interview, thank your contact for meeting with you via handwritten note or email. If you said you would do something (follow-up with another contact, etc.), let your contact know that you did so.
- **Stay in touch.** Your contact now has an interest in your plans, and will appreciate hearing about your progress – and may even be able to offer you additional leads that will help you along the way.

### INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did you get your start? What is the usual way people enter this field?
- What do you see for the future of this practice or professional area? Is this a good field for someone starting their career as a lawyer? What are the opportunities in [blank city?] Where are most opportunities located?

- Do most of the practitioners in this field work in smaller or larger firms, government, or non-profits? Is it more suited to work in a particular sector?
- What are the challenges for a person pursuing a career in this practice area or profession? How do people advance in their careers? What is a typical career path?
- What are the challenges facing someone in this field? What do you wish you had known as you were starting out?
- If you were starting out now, would you choose this practice or profession? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?
- What do you like most/least about this practice area or profession? I see you also do [X area of law] – do these combine well? What other practices fit well with this practice area?
- What courses do you think are most helpful for me to take for this career path? Are there seminars or continuing legal education courses that I should take? What kinds of summer opportunities would you recommend?
- Are there internship or volunteer opportunities in this field that I should take advantage of? What sort of experience should I get to prepare for this career?
- Is there a local bar section or chapter for people who practice in this area (or other professional association) that I should join? Are there law journals, periodicals or books I should read?
- What is your typical day like? What kind of interaction do you have with clients, other attorneys or other professionals?
- Who else would you recommend I speak with? Any other suggestions for me?

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

#### **Especially for public interest informational interviews:**

<http://www.idealists.org/info/GradEducation/Resources/Preparing/Interviews>

#### **Top ten questions about networking & informational interviewing:**

<http://www.classycareergirl.com/2013/01/the-top-10-networking-informational-interview-questions/>

#### **Why informational interviews are important:**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2012/01/26/the-other-kind-of-job-interview-you-have-to-know-about/>

#### **Using LinkedIn to create, expand, and effectively use your networking contacts:**

<http://blog.linkedin.com/2013/04/29/how-to-tap-your-linkedin-network-for-your-next-opportunity/>