

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

### Background and Benefits:

An **Informational Interview** is simply talking with professionals who are currently in occupations you are considering in order to gain information and insights about a career, industry or company. This information can be used in choosing a major, exploring career options, or preparing for a summer or professional job search. Be clear with yourself and the professional you are interviewing that this is **not a job interview**.

Informational interviews are an important part of career preparation and a good supplement to your academic knowledge because they can provide:

- "Real World" information about careers
- Suggestions on how to use your college years to gain experience and prepare for the job search
- A network of contacts for your job search/internship search
- Insights into what employers look for in candidates
- An avenue to explore potential job search questions such as: "Why did you choose this field?" or "What skills are required for success in this job?"

### Preparation and Procedure:

Before you request valuable time of a professional in the field, learn as much information about the career or industry as you can. This will allow you to ask more in depth questions and make better use of the time.

If you are just beginning to sort through career options, you may want to speak with your **college specific Career Consultant at the Career and Professional Development Center**

[http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students\\_alumni/successguides/pdf/career-center-services.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students_alumni/successguides/pdf/career-center-services.pdf)

to better define which careers you most want to explore. Schedule an appointment through the receptionist to meet with your career consultant, 412-268-2064.

If you clearly know which careers you want to explore and why they interest you, familiarize yourself with written information about the field. The Career and Professional Development Center in the University Center, Lower Level has many resources to do this. Meet with your Career Consultant for ideas specific to your major or degree.

Informational interviews can be conducted with people you already know or with professionals referred to you through informal contacts--faculty, family, friends, alumni, professional associations, and the Career and Professional Development Center staff. Using the networking tab in TartanTRAK will help you connect to alumni mentors who have specifically volunteered to assist students with informational interviews. In addition, you may want to inquire of the Alumni Relations Office as well as research the [Alumni Website](#) to learn about events of Alumni organizations and other opportunities for networking. The [Alumni Directory](#) is a resource available to you and is an excellent tool to find potential connections. To identify other leads, consider browsing recent and back issues of the Carnegie Magazine, which contains alumni career information. The Career and Professional Development Center also has employer information in [TartanTRAK](#) and the [Recruiting Business Card Database](#) available for contacts. Speak with your Career Consultant about these and other resources and strategies. Some academic departments may also have formal or informal alumni lists.

Informational interviews can also be obtained through "cold calls". If you know an organization you want to explore or identify one through the Yellow Pages, simply ask for the appropriate department or explain your request to the personnel office, and they may refer you to someone.

In arranging for an informational interview, contact individuals at least a week ahead, either by telephone or through an introductory letter followed up by a call to arrange an appointment. Two sample request letters are included at the end of this resource handout. Ask them for about a half hour of their time. Always clarify your objective - that you are seeking information rather than a job.

## **The Interview:**

The following questions should give you some ideas of information to seek. After reviewing written career information you should be able to add more specific questions to the list.

1. What is a typical day like on this job?, or What did you do yesterday?
2. What do you like most about your work? Least?
3. How did you come to choose this profession? This particular job? What steps did you take to get where you are?
4. Approximately how many hours do you work per week?
5. What types of people do you deal with?
6. Do you find your job satisfying? What makes it that way? What effects (positive and negative) does this job have on your family and personal life (leisure time)?
7. What personal qualities are necessary to succeed at this type of work?
8. Do you think that the prospects for success for a person entering this field will grow or decline over the next decade?
9. What kind of position could a college graduate anticipate when entering this field?
10. What is the starting salary range for a college graduate? The eventual range?
11. Are there courses that you would advise taking in college to help prepare for this career?
12. What are your career goals for the future?
13. If you could give only one piece of advice to a young person seeking a career such as yours, what would that advice be?
14. What methods would you recommend for doing a job search in this field?

Prepare the questions that you want to ask ahead of time. Having them in writing and taking some notes is fine. Preparation, promptness and staying on target are important, since after all the person you are seeing is doing you a favor. Since you initiated the contact and have some control of how the interview goes, keep your purpose in mind and get your questions answered. You'll find that people love to talk about themselves and their careers and may likely digress.

At the conclusion of your meeting ask for two or three other names of people to contact for informational interviews so you can begin building your "network." Confirm permission to use the individual's name when contacting the referrals.

If the meeting goes particularly well, you may feel comfortable asking the individual if you could spend some time "shadowing" him/her during a typical day's activities. If getting work experience or exposure is your goal, you may consider volunteering your services on a project that needs attention - this may later lead to a job contact or reference.

## **After the Interview:**

Immediately following the meeting, go to the nearest relaxation spot, take some notes and debrief. Analyze the interview. Think about the information that you obtained and evaluate it objectively. Ask yourself the following:

- Did I get answers to questions I needed to have clarified?
- What did I leave out? What new questions do I have?
- Do I feel caught up in the enthusiasm of this professional?
- Do I need to see more people to obtain a more objective opinion?
- What characteristics did this person have that I need to or want to develop?
- What ideas for future career advancement strategies did I obtain?

A most important follow-up to the meeting should be mailing **a letter thanking the individual** for his/her time and assistance

[http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students\\_alumni/successguides/pdf/employment-letters.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students_alumni/successguides/pdf/employment-letters.pdf).

Keep a record of your contacts. At a future date you may want to contact them for additional advice.

### **What to do if the Informational Interview turns into a Job Interview:**

This may occur if the interviewer likes you and feels you would be an asset to his/her organization. How do you handle that kind of possibility? You have several alternatives:

- If you are comfortable and prepared, you can accept the job interview on the spot.
- If you are not prepared for a job interview at the time, you can honestly state that your purpose today is to obtain information. Thank the person and make an appointment for a later date for a job interview.
- You can thank the person, and state that you will contact them at a later date, since you are considering other job offers.

Whatever you choose to do, be definite in your answer, and follow through with what you decide.

- **REMEMBER TO SEND A THANK YOU NOTE!!**
- **REMEMBER TO ASK FOR NAMES OF OTHER CONTACTS!!**
- **HAVE FUN WITH THE PROCESS!!**

# The Introductory letter

An introductory letter, written much like a **cover letter** without the job pitch, is a great way to get your name out there.

[http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students\\_alumni/successguides/pdf/employment-letters.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students_alumni/successguides/pdf/employment-letters.pdf). Although an introductory letter should be typed, neat printing is acceptable. Your

letter should include:

- A brief introduction about yourself;
- Why you are writing to this individual;
- A brief statement of your interests or experiences in the person's field, organization or location;
- Why you would like to converse. Be straightforward; tell him/her you are asking for information and advice.
- The last paragraph of the letter should always include a sentence about how and when you will contact this person again.

**Make sure to follow up the letter as you mentioned!** Usually this follow-up involves a phone call to set up a phone appointment or an informational interview. Never expect the person to phone you. If you have difficulties contacting the person, ask the receptionist for a convenient time to phone again. Finally, **proofread all correspondence and save copies!**

**Request Letter with Contact Name**

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Professor George Helpful, my faculty advisor at Carnegie Mellon University, suggested I contact you about my interest in the fields of law and politics. He suggested you could be particularly helpful since you had previously practiced law and are currently working as a lobbyist.

As a sophomore Policy and Management major, I am beginning to explore these fields so that I can plan my electives and work experience to make the most of my time in college. I've been reading about the career possibilities through the Career and Professional Development Center, and look forward to your insights about what a typical workday is like. I'd also like to hear what you liked and disliked about each job and about typical kinds of summer jobs that exist to help one gain experience and exposure.

I'll be in New York City on March 23 - 27 for my spring break and would like an opportunity to meet briefly with you then. I will call next week to see if a time is convenient for you. If you would like to speak with me in the meantime my phone number is (412)123-4567 and my email address is [yourname@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:yourname@andrew.cmu.edu). I look forward to our telephone conversation and to meeting you in March.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

**Request Letter with Contact Name**

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Ms. Beth Gordon, a faculty member in the Humanities and Social Sciences Department at Carnegie Mellon University, suggested I contact you. I have been meeting with Ms. Gordon as a means of exploring the field of advertising as a potential career option and she has been extremely helpful.

Based on my conversations with Ms. Gordon and others, I believe my interest lies in the area of copywriting. I would love to speak to you, to complete an informational interview, to learn more about your experience in the copywriting industry and your firm. I have enclosed my resume for your review, as a means of you learning just a bit more about me.

I realize your time is very valuable but would it be possible to meet for 20-30 minutes at your convenience? I would enjoy a chance to ask you some questions and learn from your expertise. I will contact your office within 10 working days to follow up with this letter. Should you wish to reach me sooner, you may contact me at (412) 555-5555 and my email address is [yourname@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:yourname@andrew.cmu.edu). Thank you in advance for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

**Request Letter with Contact Name for Job Shadowing**

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, Chairperson of the \_\_\_\_\_ Department at Carnegie Mellon University and my advisor, suggested I contact you because of your expertise in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry and your extreme interest in helping students through job shadowing experiences. I am writing today to see if such an experience might be arranged.

Throughout my college career, I have been actively involved in learning all I can about the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I have completed over half of my core coursework in \_\_\_\_\_ and have achieved a 3.6 overall GPA. In addition, I am the current Vice-President of the \_\_\_\_\_ here at Carnegie Mellon; successfully leading a campaign to grow our membership from 32 to 50 and increasing our campus presence by sponsoring varied activities.

A natural progression in my learning is to spend the day with a professional in the workforce. Having heard about \_\_\_\_\_'s recent accomplishments in restructuring manufacturing areas, I am obviously excited about the possibility of spending the day observing you and your operations.

I will be in contact with you by March 10<sup>th</sup> to see if such a meeting is possible. Should you wish to reach me sooner, you may contact me at (412) 555-5555 and my email address is [yourname@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:yourname@andrew.cmu.edu). Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

***Request Letter through Independent Research***

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ :

Your name came to my attention in an Aviation Magazine article while researching the aerospace industry as a place to apply my skills and experiences. At this time, I am exploring a variety of professional roles as a way to discover those that would be the most appropriate focus for my attention in a job search.

I will complete my Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering next May at Carnegie Mellon University, and am using these months to plan ahead for that time. My coursework has led me to believe that there are several possible directions my career could take. During the summers between academic years, I have worked at XYZ Auto in the Quality Control area, which I found very interesting. I am interested in other areas of manufacturing management, as well as design.

Based on your knowledge of the industry, you could help me considerably by discussing the typical kinds of jobs that exist for a recent graduate with my background and interests. I would also like to learn more about your career path and some of the experiences you have had.

Within the next week, I will contact your office to arrange a convenient time for our meeting. I know you are busy, and will keep our conversation to 30 minutes. If you would like to speak with me in the meantime, I can be reached at (412)123-4567 or by email at [yourname@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:yourname@andrew.cmu.edu). Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

## ***Request Letter Through Independent Research***

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am student a Carnegie Mellon University School of Design, beginning my second semester. Design has been of interest to me since attended a pre-college program as a high school student. Your firm has an outstanding reputation in the field.

I am not sure what my area of concentration will be and I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you briefly and discuss the practice of your firms' specialty. I am especially interested in your views regarding graphic versus industrial design as well as working for a design consultancy versus a larger corporation in an in-house design department. Any further insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

I will contact your office the week of February 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss setting up a mutually convenient time for an informational meeting. If you would like to speak with me in the meantime, I can be reached at (412)123-4567 or by email at [yourname@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:yourname@andrew.cmu.edu).

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

***Thank You After Information Interview***

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ :

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me Thursday to discuss the professional possibilities in the healthcare industry. I was impressed by your knowledge of today's complicated issues and appreciated your insight regarding the ways I can apply my Business Administration major to contribute to hospital administration.

You gave me the name of Harriet Health at ABC HMO to contact, and we have an appointment early next month when she returns from a business trip. I appreciate your referral very much and know that it will help me to continue to learn more about the healthcare industry.

I will be in contact from time to time, to keep you posted on my career research. I will send a copy of my resume to your office as soon as it is ready and thank you in advance for your generous offer of a resume critique. Thank you for your help and valuable information.

Sincerely yours,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

## Letter Thanking Someone for an Informational Interview Referral

Your Address  
City, State, Zip  
Today's Date

Name  
Title  
Organization  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms Gordon:

I wanted to drop you a quick note of thanks for referring me to Ms. Williams of the ABC Advertising Agency. I have written her a letter requesting a 20-30 minute meeting at her convenience. It is my hope that this meeting will be as helpful and informative as my interactions with you have been. Again, thank you.

Sincerely yours,

(Your signature)

Your name typed

*Letters adapted from: Information Interviewing, Martha Stoodley, 1990 and Introductory Letters, Indiana State University Career and Professional Development Center, 2000*