

# INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is an excellent way to practice your interviewing and interpersonal skills while gaining valuable information about possible career paths. You can also practice networking skills as you develop contacts in your field of interest. Keep in mind that you can use this skill anywhere and at any time you meet someone who can share information about your job interests.

Keep in mind that informational interviews are NOT job interviews, but opportunities for YOU to ask questions, gather information about a career field or organization, learn about job options and career paths, and make contact with people who can help identify opportunities in their fields.

Informational interviewing should become a cornerstone of your job search strategy. We have compiled some suggestions to get you started, but there are a variety of questions and strategies for making the most out of an informational interview. We encourage you to talk with a CAPS counselor for more guidance in this area.

## **ADVANTAGES OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:**

Informational interviewing is a very effective and important activity to master because it allows you several advantages as a job seeker. When done well, these interviews or conversations with working professionals allow you to gain insight into:

- Particular fields, organizations, or industries
- Job market in those fields
- Variety of jobs available within each field or organization
- Skills, educational background, and experience necessary for various job opportunities
- Average workday of someone employed in a field or organization
- How different kinds of organizations recruit and hire new people
- Professional organizations and publications associated with the field
- Salary ranges, jargon, job titles, etc., in the field or organization
- Career paths of professionals in the field

## *Practice and improve*

### Your interviewing skills by learning to:

- o Present yourself and your goals
- o Polish your written and spoken communication skills
- o Listen carefully to others and engage them in conversation
- o Ask informed questions
- o Comfortably meet and greet new people with poise and self-assurance.

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## *Become a better*

### Job candidate by:

- o Having a greater understanding of the organization or industry
- o Internalizing the language of the field or industry and learning to communicate like a professional in that field
- o Building a network of professionals who know you and want to help you
- o Learning how to target interesting jobs as well as the individuals making the hiring decisions
- o Using the knowledge you've gained from your contacts to rule out some job possibilities and investigate others
- o Gaining confidence in yourself (your knowledge of the field, your interviewing skills, etc.) and enthusiasm for the field you've decided to pursue.

# *tips for a successful*

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

## PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW:

**Think about what fields you want to explore:** What kind of work would you like to do? What jobs have you dreamed about doing in the past? What kind of work environment appeals to you? If you are in the early stages of your job search and/or don't know exactly what you want to do, you might start by doing some research in the CAPS Career Library about different kinds of jobs in various fields and/or making an appointment with a Career Counselor.

**Develop a list of possible contacts.** Start by thinking of friends, relatives, neighbors, friends of your family, friends' parents, alumni, and/or professors who have colleagues working in your field of interest. Whenever possible, try to talk to people who are doing the job you want to do, since they are closest to the job search themselves and may be able to offer you tips from their own experience. Other contacts include: old schoolmates, university staff members (e.g. your favorite librarian or computer tech), casual acquaintances, on-campus recruiting events, interesting people you read about in an article, or former supervisors or co-workers.

**Determine your goals.** As you continue to "network," you'll develop more specific goals and more focused questions. Your general goals are threefold: you want to learn more about the career path you're considering, you want to learn more about the organization and the type of work your contact does there, and you want to meet additional contacts in the field. From these general goals, you'll want to think about what specific goals you have based on your own interests.

**Develop a contact strategy.** Start with your closest contacts – those people you know personally or who know someone close to you – then try the Alumni Careers Network (<https://alumniservices.uchicago.edu/Careers/>) before moving on to cold calls and letters. Keep track of all information on your contacts using the "Sample Contact Record" or another record-keeping system of your own design.

**Write a sample script.** Although your script will change for different contacts in different fields, it's a good idea to have something in front of you to guide you through the interview. A few sample questions are included in "Sample Dialogue I" later in this packet. At this point, it is good to have an "elevator speech" prepared and memorized. This is basically a short, pithy, interesting summary of who you are and your interests, etc. For more information about "elevator speeches" (also known as "personal pitches") see *Networking for Everyone* or similar titles in the CAPS library. You should practice this pitch many times with friends.

## ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW:

**Write an email requesting an informational interview.** Introduce yourself and express your intent to gather information only. Indicate why you want to interview your contact, and add a sentence or two about your own background and goals. Finally, request to do an informational interview over the phone request a telephone interview – about 20 minutes in length. Be sure to accommodate the interviewee's schedule. You may include your resume, but make it clear that it is only for reference. See the sample later in this packet for an example.

**Follow up:** Two weeks is usually adequate time for the contact to receive your email, but don't wait too long since the contact might forget about your request. Tell the contact you are following up on your email. If your contact prefers to meet with you in person, accept the invitation, arrange a meeting in a public place, and try to pick up the tab for any meals, coffee, etc.

## ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW (cont.):

**Conduct additional research.** Your contact will probably be more engaged and forthcoming with information during your interview if you are well prepared for your meeting and serious about your job search. It *cannot be emphasized enough* how incredibly important researching the industry, the company, and, whenever possible, the interviewee is. Do not appear unprepared! Prepare questions ahead of time (see Sample Dialogue 1 for some ideas).

## CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW:

**Be prompt for both phone and personal interviews.**

**Conduct the interview, keeping to the time limit agreed upon.** Always be courteous, respectful, and appreciative of your contact's time and energy.

**Ask for suggestions of additional contacts** at the end of the interview, after you've developed a relationship with the contact.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

**Make notes about the interview on your contact sheet.** Keep track of all correspondence and phone calls with your contacts, as well as the names of any new contacts. See the "Sample Contact Record" below for an example.

**Send a thank-you note or email.** Be sure to thank the interviewee for his or her time and advice. Writing a thank-you note is not simply a courtesy, but another chance for you to leave your name and number with your contact – another chance for your contact to remember you when he or she hears of a great job available in your field.

*sample*

# CONTACT RECORD

Use this sample, or another record-keeping system of your own design, to keep track of your correspondence and conversations with your contacts.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Field: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Source of Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Letter Sent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Call 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Call 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank-you Letter Sent: \_\_\_\_\_

Feedback: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*sample*

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## EMAIL

Dear Mr. Hireman:

I am a third year student at The University of Chicago majoring in History. In exploring the Alumni Careers Network, I noticed you have been working in consulting for the past three years.

Now that I find myself in the position of exploring my next steps, I wanted to ask if you could offer twenty minutes of your time to discuss ways in which to enter the consulting industry. I feel it is important for me to gain a practical, real world, perspective about the field and hope that you will be able to share your career path. I have attached my resume for your review to offer any suggestions.

Please let me know when would be convenient time for us to talk over the phone. I am happy to work around your schedule. You can reach me at [davids@uchicago.edu](mailto:davids@uchicago.edu) or call me at 773-111-1111. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank You,  
David Szymanski

*sample dialogue:*

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## AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

### **Introduce yourself:**

**Contact:** "Hello – Paul Jones."

**You:** "Hello. This is Sarah Evans. I made an appointment with you last week for an informational interview. Is this still a convenient time for you to speak with me?"

**Contact:** "Yes, hello, Sarah. Hang on for one minute – I'm on the other line...OK, I'm back. How can I help you?"

### **Build a relationship:**

**You:** "As I mentioned in my letter, I'm graduating from the University of Chicago in June and I'm exploring different career paths and opportunities in the field of \_\_\_\_\_. I'm simply gathering information at this point – not looking for a job. If you're willing, I'd like to ask you some questions about what you do and get your perspective on the field."

**Contact:** "Sure – go ahead."

## CONTINUED

### Ask questions:

At this point, you will engage your contact in a conversation about his or her work, allowing him or her to be the expert. Be friendly, pleasant, and upbeat throughout the conversation. As well as you can, let the conversation flow naturally – don't force the interview to follow your script exactly as you've written it. It is always good to "warm up" the conversation by starting out with open-ended questions that ask the interviewer about him or herself. Some questions you might ask:

- What do you do? What kinds of projects do you work on?
- How did you get started in this field?
- What is your typical day (week) like at \_\_\_\_\_? What different kinds of activities are you engaged in? How many accounts do you work on? What kinds of clients do you serve? What kinds of services do you provide?
- What do you enjoy most about what you do? What do you enjoy least?
- What kinds of skills and abilities are required for this type of work?
- What kinds of people are successful in this field (this organization)?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- Can you describe the work environment in your organization in terms of individual effort vs. teamwork, pressure, deadlines, workload, etc.?
- What publications are especially important for people in your field?
- If you were starting out now, how would you get into this field? What strategies would you use to get your foot in the door? What advice would you give to someone in my position?
- What makes a resume go to the top of the pile?
- How does your firm or organization differ from others in your field?

### Provide background on yourself:

**You:** "Thank you. This has been so helpful to me. If it's okay with you, I'd like to give you a little background about my interests..." (Provide a **brief** sketch of your educational background and current interests. Practice this sketch in advance so you'll express yourself comfortably and briefly.)

**Contact:** "It sounds like you've thought a lot about what you want to do, which is great."

### Ask for additional contacts:

**You:** "Yes, I have, although it always helps to talk to people like you who are actually employed in the field. Earlier in our conversation, you mentioned that someone with my background and interests might be interested in pursuing \_\_\_\_\_ as a career path. Do you know anyone in \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ who might be willing, like yourself, to talk with me about these possibilities?"

**Contact:** "Let me think. Two people I used to work with at \_\_\_\_\_ are now at \_\_\_\_\_. You should talk to Paula Smith or Dan Emery – I'll give you their numbers before I hang up, but don't call them until Monday so I can let them know you'll be contacting them."

**You:** "Thank you."

**Contact:** "There's another guy who works at \_\_\_\_\_ who might be helpful – I met him at a conference. I'm not remembering his name at the moment, but I'll call you back later when I think of it. He's working in the \_\_\_\_\_ division and might be able to give you some insight about that side of the business."

### Thank your contact:

**You:** "Thank you so much – you've been very helpful, and it's been a pleasure to talk to you today. I really appreciate your time."

**Contact:** "You're welcome, Sarah. It's really no bother – I'm glad to be helpful. It's been a pleasure to talk with you, too. I'll call you with that name later today or tomorrow."

**You:** "Thank you again. Goodbye."

*sample*

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# THANK-YOU NOTE

David Szymanski  
5454 South Shore Drive, Apt. 9F  
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February 10, 2007

John Hireman  
Company Name  
Company Address

Dear Mr. Hireman:

I'm writing to thank you again for speaking with me this morning. I enjoyed our conversation about McKinsey, and the interesting turns your career path has taken. In particular, it was great to hear your perspective on how your University of Chicago degree prepared you for your first position in consulting.

Our discussion regarding the role of hedge funds in this economy was especially enlightening. I'm enclosing an article I found on this subject from *The Economist*, which provides yet another point of view on this topic.

Finally, I wanted to thank you for providing me the names of Susan Brown and James Doe. I plan to contact them tomorrow morning.

Thank You,

David Szymanski

Revised by LC 09/07