

CREATING YOUR FUTURE

THEME OF THE DAY

NETWORKING-MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW / Resource Material

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OVERVIEW

Information interviewing is an effective means of collecting information about a specific field of interest, an occupation, or a job. An information interview generally consists of a meeting with someone who represents a field of interest or is actually doing a job that you want to find out more about. In many ways, it is more formal than networking which can occur on an ongoing basis through our natural interactions. It has the advantage of being a way to collect information that is relevant to your specific needs because you choose whom to interview and what questions to ask. Benefits of information interviews are listed in the following section.

Information interviews:

- Provide first-hand information and a realistic view of the field. You can learn about factors not covered elsewhere. If the interview is carried out at the work site (the preferred place), you can observe the work environment directly as well.
- Help build contacts with people who may be helpful in the future. (remember networking!) the person being interviewed may give you referrals to others in the field. This will enlarge the network of people who may be helpful to you.
- Are a great opportunity to practice communication skills and interviewing skills without the stress associated with a job interview.
- Are a chance to hear how others have developed their career paths. You can gain a more personal perspective, gathering not only traditional labour market information, but also learning important, but often neglected, information such as
 - What kind of personality or personal style is prevalent (most successful) in this type of work
 - What “values” drive the work
 - What are the primary rewards.
- Help individuals assess self-knowledge. For example, is my personality suited to this job/occupation/type of work? Do I value the same things as my prospective co-workers? Will the benefits of the job fulfill my needs?

To do information interviewing well, the following skills are required:

- *Building Rapport:* Conduct a discussion with participants on how to build rapport. Brainstorm with the group as many concrete strategies as possible and provide opportunities for coached practice.
- *Asking Open Questions:* Open questions are questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, but rather require some detail. Ask participants to work in pairs and try to carry on a one-minute conversation using

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only closed questions. Then have pairs shift to include open questions for one minute. Discuss as a large group how open questions encourage dialogue.

- *Summarizing:* Underscore the importance of summarizing at the end of an interview as a means of expressing appreciation, confirming accuracy of your understanding, and drawing the interview to closure. Provide opportunity for coached practice of summarizing.

7 STEPS TO GUIDE YOU IN CONDUCTING A MEANINGFUL INFORMATION INTERVIEW

STEP 1: IDENTIFY WHOM TO INTERVIEW.

- Begin by identifying the job/occupation or area of interest you want to learn about.
- Doing a little advance research may help you decide what sector you want to explore. Read the business section of newspaper(s). Use the internet and other resources to
 - Gather information about anticipated job growth in the coming years in specific sectors and in specific provinces.
 - Get a sense of what the job you are interested in might be like.
 - Obtain information about the training required for a particular occupation.
 - Verify that what you know about a particular occupation is accurate.
- Deciding whom to approach to best help you get “the inside story” can be a challenge. Here are some ideas:
 - To develop leads, start with your family, friends, or others from your Board of Directors. Ask them, “Whom do you know who works as a . . . ?” or “Who knows about . . . ?”
 - Research the organization or occupation you’re going to be interviewing the person about.

STEP 2: PLAN THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO ASK.

- On your own or with a friend, make a list of all the questions you can think of that you might like to ask. Then choose the ones that stand out as most important and put them in the order you’d like to ask them.
- Consider additional questions that may relate more directly to the occupation or the person being interviewed, within your 20-minute time frame. Use open-ended questions. Asking **open-ended questions** is one of the most used skills in interviewing. Sample interview questions are provided (Appendix B).

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STEP 3: LEARN ABOUT AND PRACTISE THE SKILLS OF INTERVIEWING.

Two of the most used skills in interviewing are open-ended questioning and paraphrasing.

▪ Open-ended questioning

A closed question is usually one that requests specific information and that can be answered with a single word (like “yes” or “no”) or other short answer. Open-ended questions encourage discussion by getting the person to tell you about or describe something. They often begin with the words “what” or “how” or “why” (for example, “What’s your favourite part of the job?” or “How did you first get interested in this field?”).

▪ Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves giving back to the other person in your own words what you understood them to say.

- Paraphrasing shows the person that you are listening and wanting to understand or clarify what they are saying.
- Paraphrasing helps you to check for yourself whether you understood correctly.
- Paraphrasing is important, but should not be overused or you will sound as if you are “parroting” the other person. You should use this skill most when you are genuinely wanting to clarify your understanding of what the person has said.

STEP 4: ARRANGE FOR THE INTERVIEW.

Contact the person by email, telephone, or in person. Consider using the following script to help you plan your email or conversation:

I am a grade 11 student. I have been doing research about _____, and I am seriously considering this as a future occupation. I would like to learn more about this field, including skill requirements for new hires and the potential for work. I have a few questions, and I would appreciate 20 minutes of your time to get your perspective.

Set up an appointment—agree on the date, time, and place. Assure them that you will take no more than 20 minutes of their time. Reinforce that this interview will help you to make a well-informed choice about your future.

Make it convenient for the person you are interviewing.

It’s best to give the other person and yourself a few days of lead time before the interview. Since they are doing you a favour by offering you some of their time and energy for an interview, you may need to be the one that goes out of your way in making arrangements that are convenient to them.

Handling ‘Rejection’

Many people are more than willing to participate in an information interview. However, not everyone will be able to accommodate your request. Don’t take ‘rejections’ personally, because chances are that person’s reasons for not participating have very little, if anything, to do with you!

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STEP 5: CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW.

- Establish rapport with the person you are interviewing. Thank the person for taking the time to meet with you, comment on something you like in their workspace, or say something like, “It’s exciting for me to have a chance to learn from you about [whatever it is]! I have known about your work for some time through...” Assure them that it will take no more than 20 minutes of their time.
- To keep you focused, have written questions prepared. Once a person starts telling their story, if you don’t bring your recorded questions and ideas, you may forget entirely what you were hoping to find out about.
- Taking notes during the interview is also a good idea, because chances are you’ll want the information for reference later. It also shows that you’re interested and value the information the person is providing. If you wish to record the interview, ask the other person for permission to do so.
- It’s important to respect the other person by staying within the time you’ve set. If necessary, acknowledge that the allotted time for the interview is near completion. If you have more questions, you might say, for example, “I notice we’re about out of time. I have just one more question. Would it be OK if I asked it to you now or should I get back to you later?”
- Leave open the possibility of a follow-up visit or call, if necessary.
- Be sure to thank the person for their time and the information.

STEP 6: FOLLOW UP ON THE INTERVIEW.

VERY IMPORTANT! After the interview, write a short follow-up email or letter thanking the person for their time and the information. They would probably also appreciate knowing if anything of importance happened after the interview related to the points you discussed. You may also have a specific request or question you want to pursue with the person after the interview, to which they will usually be happy to respond.

STEP 7: REFLECT ON YOUR LEARNING.

Points to ponder

- Although this appears as the “final” stage of Information Interviewing, you need to be reflecting on your learning all along if you are to benefit from each of the steps you take. Ask yourself reflective questions such as the following:
 - What did I expect to learn going into this interview?
 - What surprised me most about the interview?
 - What did I like best about what I did?
 - Did I find out what I wanted to know?

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- Is there anything I'd change for next time?
 - What did this interview teach me about what I need to pay attention to in my learning going forward?
 - What did I learn about potential opportunities in this field in the future?
 - What did I learn about what employers are looking for when they hire young qualified workers?
-
- After an Information Interview, it's helpful to ask yourself or discuss with someone
 - How does what I learned fit with my previous research?
 - Are the work environments in this occupation appealing to me?
 - What about the tasks?
 - What is the employment outlook? Is this an area to explore further?
 - Does what I learned change my pathway planning?
 - What should my next steps be?
 - How could I use this information in looking for a job or work placement?
 - Should I investigate something further or investigate something else?

 - You could explore these questions by
 - Discussing them with a parent/guardian, teacher, or member of your board of directors
 - Journaling about your experience
 - Creating a short video answering some or all of the reflective questions and explaining what you learned from your experience.

REMEMBER

- Taking time to reflect on your learning can make all the difference in continuing to grow and improve.
- A journal can be a really useful ally in this process. It can be very valuable in your reflections “after the fact” and can help you see how far you've come!
- Celebrate your successes and take the time you need. Your future is worth the investment.
- Be sure to ask yourself if each of the occupations you are exploring align with your interests, values, skills, and lifestyle preferences.

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APPENDIX A: MOCK INFORMATION INTERVIEW

Practice in a safe environment with a topic students are comfortable with before students conduct the real information interview with a person in the labour market!

- Ask each student to write down 2–3 things that they know about/could teach someone. Their list might include a previous work experience, an educational initiative, a volunteer experience, or a hobby. Ask students to choose a partner (preferably someone they do not know well). Review the following directions and the roles of each partner:
 - Exchange lists.
 - Choose initial roles—one will be the interviewer, the other the interviewee.
 - The interviewer is asked to
 - Read your partner’s list and choose the topic that most genuinely interests you.
 - Take a few minutes to prepare the questions you most want to ask. (for students, this preparation time will be critical.)
 - Interview your partner for 10 minutes. In addition to eliciting relevant information, try to practice the following skills: be prepared; build rapport (e.g., Establish and respect the time frame, make appropriate eye contact); ask open questions (i.e., Questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, but rather require some detail); summarize (i.e., Conclude the interview with a summary statement that highlights key learnings/relevant information, for example, “thank you for your time. What I got most from this interview is...”)
 - Change roles.
- In a large group, highlight key learning points.
 - What kinds of questions were most effective in eliciting information?
 - How did it feel to be interviewed? (Most people are tickled to be asked.)
 - How did it feel to be the interviewer?
 - Have any of you conducted some sort of interview before this experience? Have any of you been interviewed before? If so, in what context? What did you learn from that experience?
 - What additional steps might we need to take so that you feel well prepared to conduct an information interview in the community?

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APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INFORMATION INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

Name of the occupation, field, job, or other topic you are interviewing the person about:

1. What do you like MOST about this occupation, job, or field? What do you like LEAST about it?
2. The website I visited predicted a growth rate of ___ in this sector over the next five years. What are your thoughts on this prediction?
3. Is this a promising field for work opportunities in NAME OF YOUR PROVINCE (If yes, ask about the types of opportunities. If no, ask if there are related fields that might be a more promising choice).
4. What kind of training or education is needed to pursue this pathway?
5. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to someone who is considering this field?
6. When you hire a new worker, what skills do you specifically look for? How can a young person demonstrate those skills?
7. If two people applied with degrees/diplomas/certificates from the same place, what other skills or experiences could tip the scale in favour of one?
8. What opportunities does your sector have for summer employment, job shadowing, or co-op placements that might be helpful for me to know about?
9. Whom might you recommend for me to talk to next? If so, may I tell them you suggested them?

Thanks for taking the time to talk to me today! It's been really helpful!

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

ALL SET!	NEEDS WORK	INFORMATION INTERVIEWING: ASSESSING YOURSELF PLEASE RATE YOURSELF BELOW.
_____	_____	1. I know the job/area of interest that I want to investigate.
_____	_____	2. I can identify whom to interview.
_____	_____	3. I have a good list of questions to ask.
_____	_____	4. I know the skills I need to interview well, have practised them, and feel good about my readiness to interview.
_____	_____	5. I'm clear about what to do to set up the interview and am prepared for all kinds of responses.
_____	_____	6. I'm ready to conduct the interview.
_____	_____	7. I know the steps involved in following-up after the interview and am ready to do them.
_____	_____	8. I have a process in place to reflect on what I've learned.

The areas I need more information on are