

UTM CAREER CENTRE TIPSHEETS:

Information Interviewing



INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

You have thought about several career areas that are of interest to you and have a general idea of what professionals in those fields do; however, you still have many unanswered questions. What is a typical day like? What are the entry-level positions in that particular industry? How can you gain experience?

It is important that you begin to find answers to your questions before making career decisions or pursuing further education. Where can you find the answers? Browsing the internet (e.g., reviewing company information; Canadian association web sites) referring to print resources. These are all starting points for your research.

To supplement your preliminary research, the next step is to gather information by talking to people who work in your field(s) of interest. This technique is **INFORMATION INTERVIEWING**.

The insights gained from an information interview will enable you to make informed decisions, whether you are planning your career or looking for a job. Information interviews can be useful for students in ALL years of study and disciplines, including new graduates and graduate students.

Please note: Information interviewing is NOT interviewing for a job – it is a way for you to find useful and specific information that you could not find in books or on the Internet!

THE BENEFITS OF INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

- Get a reality check about what a career actually entails and/or decide whether an occupation suits you.
- Gain insider tips regarding what courses to take, what experience is required, and how to market yourself when actively searching for similar positions.
- Develop knowledge of the industry, recent trends and developments, and jargon.
- Build new contacts in your field of interest.
- Develop communication skills and confidence in meeting/talking with new people.

GETTING STARTED

General information on the company and the occupational area will help structure the questions you would like to ask, helping you get the most specific information. It is crucial that you do some preliminary research before your meeting, as the interviewee will not be impressed if you spend time asking questions that you could have easily found answers for elsewhere. Making a good impression is key because the contacts you make at this stage may *later* lead to experience building and/or paid work in the area. That said, most contacts would not expect you to know everything about their company or occupation, since this is the primary function of the information interview.

OCCUPATIONAL AND INDUSTRY RESEARCH

Find out as much as you can about the career area and related associations, conferences and/or trade fairs and anything else that might affect the industry, (such as political decisions and economic factors).

A great starting point is to use *Career Cruising*—an electronic career guide available with over 450 careers through the CLN <https://cln.utoronto.ca/home.htm>. Login using your Utorid and see the Resources Tab. Each career entry features an informational interview of two professionals.

Use the resources in the Career Centre Resource Library, such as the occupational binders, books, and videos to help you with your research.

COMPANY RESEARCH

Take the time to investigate your contact's organization and industry, both general and specific information. This can include a company's organizational structure, or the specific occupations represented in the organization. **Visit the company website and read it thoroughly. Another excellent resource for objective company information is Industry Canada:** <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icc-ic.nsf/eng/home>

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Brainstorm a list of questions that cover the **general information** you would like the contact to address such as: "What interested you about this field?" and "What did you study?" This preparatory research is invaluable because you take the lead, have the balance of control and your interviewees will expect you to let them know what information you want.

The next step in this stage is to **narrow the focus of your questions**. This is necessary as some contacts may have a limited amount of free time to speak with you. Incorporate some of your research into your questions to structure your interview so that you obtain answers that are more detailed. Try asking open-ended questions, not questions that will elicit simply a yes or no answer.

Sample questions:

1. How did you get into this field? What is your educational background? What was your career path to your current position?
2. How did you get your job? What are the other job search methods that are useful in this field? What are typical entry-level positions?
3. Are there any courses/types of jobs/volunteer positions you would recommend as preparation for this field?
4. Do you think this field is expanding or stable? Are there any significant changes you can foresee regarding this industry?
5. Can you give me a description of a typical day?
6. What are the challenges and rewards of your position?
7. What skills/qualities do I need to be successful?
8. Are there associations in the field to contact or professional journals that you subscribe to?
9. Whom else might I talk to for more information?

FINDING CONTACTS

How do you find people who will talk to you? Ask contacts within your network: "Do you know anyone who's working in my field of interest who might speak with me?" This is networking and it will be one of the most important steps of your job search when you get to that stage. (For more on networking, see the Effective Networking tip sheet at the Career Centre). If you are on LinkedIn, this is a great place to start looking for contacts. The following are other sources of potential contacts:

- Professors, friends, family, neighbours—you could be surprised by who they know!
- The *Career Centre's shadowing Program*—job shadow someone working in a career area for up to a week. For more details, visit [Career Learning Network](#) upon signing in go to Resources tab and then to Programs to UTM Career Exploration.
- External organizations devoted to mentorship and networking such as 10,000 Coffees. This database is easily located in the [Career Learning Network](#) upon signing in, under the 'Resources' tab and can also be found at: <https://www.tenthousandcoffees.com/>
- LinkedIn Alumni Tool – you can access over 300,000 University of Toronto Alumni by reviewing University of Toronto school page and select alumni
- Related *associations and company directories*—the Career Resource Library has a diverse collection of directories available for your use. Professional trade journals / newspapers and *fairs* (e.g., Career Centre events/panels, association events, etc.).

ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW

When reaching out to calling your contact, explain that you are preparing to make some career decisions by researching potential occupations. Remember, although this is not an employment interview, you will leave an impression by being courteous, prepared and informed. This person may pass your name along to a colleague who is in a position to hire in the future.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE NERVOUS

Many people feel shy or apprehensive **about doing information interviews**. Here are some ideas to help overcome that: practice interviewing someone you know, have a friend read over your questions, and ask for suggestions from parents, family, friends, or set up an appointment to meet with a Career Counsellor or Employment Strategist at the Career Centre for help in preparing. While an information interview is more formal than a regular conversation, it is not as formal as a job interview. Most people enjoy talking about their careers and are eager to help!

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Pay attention to the duration of your meeting. Remember some employers are very busy and can only talk for a specific amount of time. Ask **for 20 mins to chat and manage your time to stick to it!**

- **Practice engaged and active listening to demonstrate your interest.**
- Thank the contact for their time, both verbally and in a thank-you follow up email.
- Do not ask to submit a resume; remember the purpose of this is to gain information. However, if the employer requests, you can provide one.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Informational Interview Handbook: Essential Strategies to Find the Right Career and a Great New Job* by Jeff Neil (2017) - available in the Career Resource Library
- *Information Interviewing Tutorial*: Quintessential Career's site provides an in-depth tutorial to help you master the art of information interviewing:
- <https://www.livecareer.com/resources/interviews/prep/informational-interviewing>

Please remember during this time of COVID 19 in person meetings may not be possible

Please note that this information is subject to change. Updated May 2020)