

An “**information interview**” is a great way to tap into someone else’s experience. By learning from them what it’s really like to do particular work, you can assess the match between what you’ve got to offer and what’s required. It prepares you for making choices, and for expressing yourself well in a job interview. And, yes—generally, if you are polite and professional, people will want to talk with you.

Just by talking with people about their work, you can quickly see the skills they use and the judgement they've come to count on. And when you get a sense of what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes,

you get an idea of what they love to do, what they're good at and what's important to them. Match these to your interests, skills and work/life fit preferences, and you're in a good position to make informed choices about your next step.

Two ways to do an Information Interview—

1. Request *formal* information interviews (brief business appointments that you request in advance)

2. Be ready for *informal* information interviews (chance encounters with friends, or friends of friends, who happen to mention they are doing something that intrigues you.) Sometimes even relative strangers eagerly share their career

Make arrangements respectfully. In asking someone to spend 10 minutes talking with you, you're asking them to give you a valuable commodity—their time. Therefore, be courteous makes plans in advance and at the convenience of the person you are interviewing.

Prepare well. An information interview is a conversation in which you, the student, ask questions of a professional who seems to have charted a course similar to one you would like to take. Your goal is to get accurate, current information about the work so that you can make informed career choices. To make sure you're able to ask meaningful questions about essential factors in the other person's work, you need to do some advance research. By doing so, you'll be professional in your approach and you'll convey respect.

Some practical considerations

- Before you contact someone, be able to say your “30-second introduction” by stating what really interests you (your focus), what you're good at (your skills) and possibly what's important to you (your values, needs and work/life fit preferences) *that would be relevant to them.*
- Decide on a mutually acceptable time and place.
- Dress appropriately for the work environment and arrive five minutes early.

- Take along prepared questions. Ask if you can take notes ; if you do, pay attention to the person)
- Give a mini-introduction of yourself to briefly recap why you came to speak with them. Then, let the conversation begin.
- Remember—keep to the time limit.
- At the end of the meeting, express thanks. Then follow up with a concise thank-you letter. In it, acknowledge something you learned about the field or the work, and perhaps indicate what you've done to act on their suggestions.

Before You Go—to Information Interviews

Read a little about the work in the files at Career Services and in the media. **Remember—it's a good idea to keep a Target Portfolio** including articles from newspapers, magazines, the internet and company literature as well as notes taken while watching TV programs or listening to radio specials. The information you get from these can be conversation starters in an Information Interview.

Set aside time to contact many people and to **conduct a number of Information Interviews**. The more you do, the better picture you will get of the match between you and the field of work. Prepare a list of questions that, when answered, will help you determine your next step. As you go along mentally match people's answers to the first 3 questions with things you know about yourself. When you sense a good fit, the answer to question 4 will be very important.

Sample Questions—for Information Interviews

1. What interests or passions keep you going in the work?

(in other words, what does the person love to do in the work?)

2. What skills are essential in doing the work?

(in other words, what does the person have to be good at to do the work?)

3. What are your work/life fit preferences (values and needs) that are met in this work?

(in other words, what is really important to them about how they contribute to the work and what it offers them?)

4. If you were going to start again in this field of work today, what would you do to be really ready? *(What training and experience would you need to have? What would be great ways to get it?)*

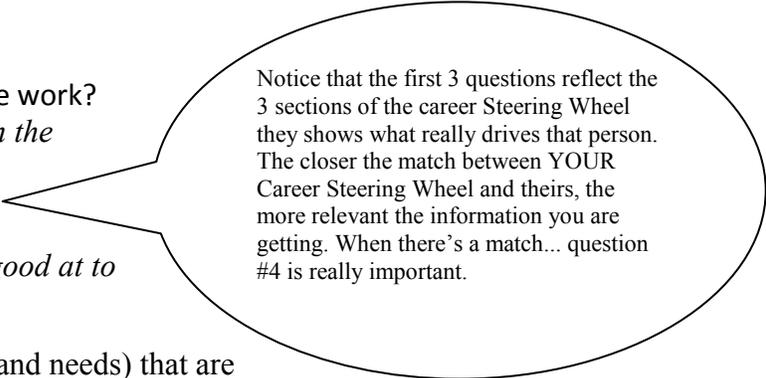
5. What professional associations do you rely on to keep up to date? *(By knowing this, you can contact these groups yourself and get even more information.)*

6. Where do you foresee growth or change in the work/field in the next few years?

7. What's a typical day, week, month or project like?

8. What is fun, or frustrating, about what you do?

9. What other fields could someone work in with this training and these skills and interests?



Notice that the first 3 questions reflect the 3 sections of the career Steering Wheel they shows what really drives that person. The closer the match between YOUR Career Steering Wheel and theirs, the more relevant the information you are getting. When there's a match... question #4 is really important.

10. What advice would you have for me?

11. What associations are key in gathering information about this work? What publications, organizations or people do you suggest I contact for more information?

Starting the Conversation—in Information Interviews

It may seem a little daunting to think of asking someone you don't know for information about work that interests you. Take heart. Generally, people are keen to help, particularly if you are polite and professional in your approach, and if you can suggest a "graceful exit" for them or alternatives if they are not in a position to speak with you directly.

Top 3 reasons why people will spend time talking with you

- You are asking for something they can give you—information. Most people do not want to say no; in fact, they would rather be helpful, especially if you're respectful and don't take too much of their time. As long as you are looking for information—and not a job—you're well on your way to talking with them.
- Many people like to reward initiative. As they see you in your quest for good career information, they may recognize their "younger self" and want to help you find information that they wish they had found when they were beginning.
- You are asking them to talk about their favourite subject—theirself. That's a compliment to them, and people respond well to endorsement.

Step 1. Your 30-second introduction

It's important to be polite and succinct in your introduction, and to give a clear, concise picture of yourself as it relates to the information that you think the person could provide. Clearly introduce yourself stating your complete name and your connection to them. Then, Indicate that you are interested in.....and would like to learn more about particularly related to (keyword)..... , (keyword)..... , (keyword)..... .

Step 2. Your request for information

Briefly state your request, and suggest ways they can offer you information without spending a lot of time with you. Here's one way to ask for help:

"I understand that you are busy, but as I investigate work that's done in this area, I wonder if you could offer information about the field? If you are available for a 10-minute conversation sometime, or a phone chat, that would be great. If you are not available, perhaps there are sources that you recommend—publications I should read, organizations or associations I should connect with or people I should contact. Thanks very much. I appreciate your help."

Leaving a message?

Repeat your name, telephone, and email,

and perhaps indicate that you'll contact them again in a few weeks.

NETWORKING

—It's about
exchanging information

Start early

It takes time for people to get to know you well enough to feel comfortable referring you to others or to give you the kind of information you need to make solid career choices. Don't wait until school is over to start cultivating your network. Take advantage of opportunities available to you right now in the form of clubs or student memberships in associations. Choose essays or projects where you can investigate or work with organizations within a sector that interests you.

Be prepared and be specific

1. Know what interests you, what you want and what you can offer. Be able to describe it succinctly and pleasantly in a way that's positive, memorable and gives a snapshot of you in action. Here's one example: "My name is Helena Javitz. I'm interested in production-related work in the food and brewing industry. I'm currently studying chemical engineering, I have one summer of directly-related experience in quality control and I recently completed a major project on yeast culture enhancement. I would like to talk to you about how my background relates to work you do."
2. If you're after information about trends in a field of work, the nature of a profession, or advice from knowledgeable workers on career direction, say so.
3. Help people remember you. Give them a "contact card" with your name, address and phone number. (A local photocopy business can provide you with an inexpensive supply.) Mention what you are doing at Queen's University (in your program, volunteer work or extra-curriculars) to remind them of the context. If you have been referred by someone, say so.

Be open-minded

Sales clerks, taxi drivers, and your aunt's second cousin can be just as helpful to you as a director of marketing. Networks are different from bureaucracies. In a bureaucracy there is a hierarchy or a ranking, but in a network everyone is equal. The focus is on exchanging information.

Set Realistic and Achievable Goals

No matter how good your network is, other people cannot make things work out perfectly for you. You won't always find exactly what you are looking for, but you'll always learn more.

Don't Be Afraid To Ask

In your summer work as a receptionist or in a restaurant wait staff position, you probably got to know some of the customers or sales representatives quite well. Perhaps a few gave you their business cards, telling you to call if you needed anything. You do now—you need information. So, don't dismiss their offers of help—call them. Most people like to help others.

Give As Well As Receive

Networking is a two-way street. People are more inclined to help you, if you help them. If a friend is looking for information about a career in journalism and you happen to know someone that could help, offer to introduce them. Think of the information, knowledge or skills you have that could be useful to someone else, and share it.

Say Thank You

Express your appreciation. If someone has helped you, let him or her know that you are grateful for their time and assistance. You can simply say thanks, or you can send an email, leave a voice mail or write a letter.