

CAREER SERVICES GUIDE

**Informational Interviews:
The Best Way to Explore Potential
Careers and Get First-Hand Advice**



**HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY
CAREER & INTERNSHIP SERVICES**

Slane Student Center, Room 325 | 336-841-9025

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

An informational interview is a focused, informal conversation with someone who has a job you find interesting, working within an industry you might want to enter, or is employed by a specific company that you admire. This type of “career conversation” is an important and enjoyable part of the research that is required to learn what opportunities may be best for you. Most people love to talk about what they do and reflect on their career path, especially with a young person who is interested in their same field. You direct the interview, allowing you to create a stress-free and flexible way to gather valuable “insider” information, obtain expert advice, and expand your network.



Why do an informational interview?

- To **gather real world information** about specific career fields or organizations that interest you
- To **help you clarify** whether your interests are compatible with a particular field
- To **build confidence** in your ability to discuss your career interests and goals in future internship and job interviews
- To **develop** effective strategies for internship and job searches
- To **expand your network** of key people in your areas of interest
- To **access current information** about employment trends
- To **obtain leads** for conducting additional informational interviews
- To obtain expert advice about **job search strategies**
- To **discover “hidden” jobs** and internships

"Informational interviews are very underutilized," says Hallie Crawford, a certified career coach and the founder of the career coaching service Create Your Own Career Path. "People do not know about them and they do not use them. College graduates are better about using them because their career centers encourage it."

WHERE DO I START?

Decide on the careers you would like to research...

Take stock of your personal network...



- Ask people you know for suggested contacts in the career fields you plan to research:
 - Family, neighbors, friends, friends' family members, professors, former employers, coaches, etc.



Identify HPU alumni through LinkedIn who are working in your fields of interest...

Research a specific company or organization website to identify an appropriate person to approach...

Prepare a brief overview of yourself that includes your reason for asking for 20-30 minutes of the person's time...

Contact the person by e-mail, phone, or LinkedIn to request a meeting, mentioning how you got his or her name and that you are looking for information and NOT for a job!

Here is a **sample e-mail format** you can use when requesting an informational interview:

Dear Contact Name:

Explain to the reader your name, your major and where you go to school. Share your career interests and industries. If appropriate, mention something you admire about the company.

Ask the contact if he or she would be able to meet with you briefly and discuss their career path as well as the culture of their organization. Share days and times that you might be available to meet either in person or speak over the phone.

Explain that you will follow-up by phone to confirm details. Thank the contact for reading this letter.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Sample Scripts for Requesting an Informational Interview

Phone call:

Hello, Ms. Smith, my name is _____. I am a sophomore Accounting major at High Point University and was given your name by one of my professors, Dr. Debit. Is this a good time for you to talk?

I am enjoying my accounting courses very much and I would love to learn more about the difference between tax and audit accounting work at a public accounting firm. Dr. Debit speaks very highly of your extensive background in audit. Would you be willing to meet with me for 20-30 minutes to discuss your work experience as an audit manager?

E-mail:

From: you@highpoint.edu

Subject: Introduction

Dear Ms. Alumna,

My name is _____ and I am currently a junior Human Relations major at High Point University. My career advisor, _____, mentioned that you might be open to meeting with me to share some insight into your experience working in human resources at Cornerstone Healthcare. I am very interested in pursuing a similar career and would love to speak with you. Would you be available for a 20-30 minute meeting in the next two weeks?

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Your Name

LinkedIn connection request:

Dear Mr. Smith,

My name is _____ and I am a senior Strategic Communication major at High Point University. I noticed your profile in the High Point University Alumni group and would love to connect with you and learn how you got your start in public relations after graduating from HPU. Would you be available to meet with me for 20-30 minutes sometime in the next two weeks?

Thank you,

Your Name

Before your informational interview:



- Prepare a brief overview or “elevator pitch” promoting yourself, your education, and your career interests
 - Plan to write down several **open-ended questions** to ask during the interview
 - Learn as much as you can in advance about the person you will be interviewing; research his or her background and interests, looking for something you may have in common
 - Research the company or organization’s website

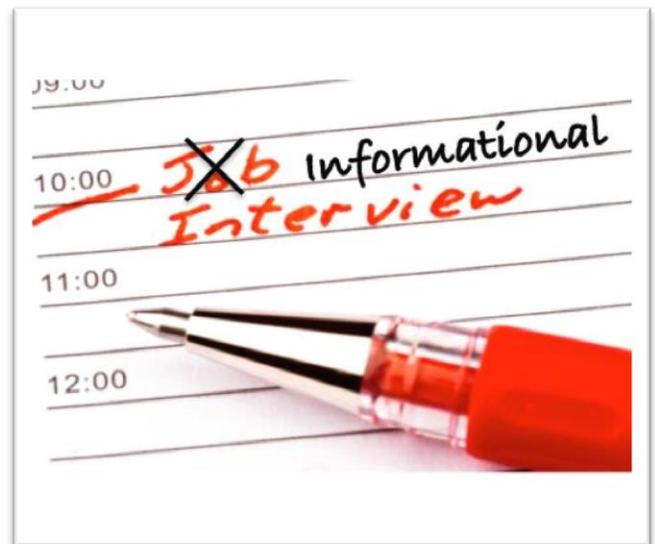
- Choose a professional outfit to wear that is appropriate for the setting
- Print copies of your resume on resume paper and carry them in a professional portfolio
- Be sure to take a pen!

The day of your informational interview:

- Dress professionally and arrive early
- Introduce yourself and thank the person for his or her time
- Give the brief overview of yourself that you have prepared
- Ask open-ended questions, be a good listener and follow the conversation where it takes you!
- Take brief notes as needed – you can record more details after the interview
- If positive rapport has been established and you feel comfortable doing so, ask for feedback/advice about your resume, qualifications and research strategies
- As you near the end of the interview, ask for referrals to others in the field
- Never overstay your welcome – remember, your interviewee’s time is valuable!



- **DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB...** remember, you requested the meeting to obtain advice and information only! The person you have just interviewed may feel put-off if you ask if there is a position for you!
- If the possibility of a job does come up, gather as much information as you can so that you can follow-up if you are genuinely interested
- Thank the person you have interviewed for taking the time to speak with you!



After your informational interview:

- Once you have left the interview site, take a few minutes to **record more detailed notes** from the meeting
- **Send a thank you message** by email, LinkedIn or handwritten note within 24 hours
- If you have not done so yet, **connect with the person on LinkedIn** (be sure to send a personalized connection request)
- **Follow up promptly** with anyone to whom you have been referred
- **Report back to the person you have interviewed** on how you have followed up on suggestions or referrals



What If...?

Q: I have not yet decided on a major, much less a career path! When should I begin conducting informational interviews?

A: As early as your freshman year! Informational interviews should be used throughout your college experience to help refine your interests. Do as many as you can!

Q: The person I want to interview does not want to meet but is willing to have a conversation with me immediately when I call?

A: Always be prepared to interview the person on the spot, including over the phone!

Q: The person I have contacted does not respond? Is it rude to e-mail or call a second time?

A: Do not get discouraged or take this personally... some people are just too busy to talk to you! Move on to another person but feel free to request a meeting in the future.

Q: I tend to be shy and the thought of interviewing someone terrifies me. How can I become more comfortable with this process?

A: This is a very common question! Try reaching out to someone you know personally the first time you conduct an informational interview. You will see how comfortable this type of interview feels and build confidence before reaching out to someone new!

Q: The person I am interviewing mentions a specific internship or job opportunity during the interview and asks if I am interested?

A: Gather as much information as you can so that you can follow up if you are genuinely interested in the position.

Q: I would like to get back in touch several months later with the person I interviewed? Is it okay to reach out again when I begin my job search?

A: Report back to anyone you have interviewed with updates, both as a courtesy and to keep them interested and involved in your career plans. As you begin your job search, you may send out an approach letter and enclose your resume. Let your contacts know that you are beginning your job search and would welcome any news of potential openings.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW



- Could you describe a typical work day, week, or month?
- How did you get started in this field? How did you find your first job out of college?
- What are your favorite and least favorite parts of your job?
- How do you see your industry changing in the future? What are the emerging jobs and trends?
- What advice would you give someone who wants to get started in this field?
- What experience, certifications, degrees, or computer skills will I need?
- What does your company/organization look for when hiring someone? What strengths and skills do you value most?
- Is there anyone else you would suggest I talk with? May I use your name when I contact that person?
- Would you be willing to give me feedback on my resume?
- In your experience, what salary range is common for entry-level hires?