

CONDUCTING INFORMATION INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONALS

Researching job responsibilities, fields, and employers is an essential part of choosing a major and preparing for your job search. It is important to learn about the field and careers in which you are interested. But looking at websites and reading trade journals is not enough. You need to talk with professionals working in your area(s) of career interest.

Talking with professionals will not only provide you with valuable insights about skills you need to develop, salary expectations, typical career paths, and particular organizations, it will also help you begin to make contacts. Since **80-85% OF JOBS ARE SECURED THROUGH SOMEONE THAT YOU HAVE MET OR KNOW**, it is essential that you talk with as many people in your area(s) of career interest as possible.

It is not easy at first to conduct information interviews with professionals. You may fear that business people will brush you off. Occasionally, that may happen. But most people are pleased to talk about their work and to help out college students. The best way to be successful and to gain confidence is to begin early (as a sophomore, not a senior) and have lots of practice. Summer, Fall Break and Spring Break are especially good times to conduct interviews. Remember, the payoff for making a contact often comes months or even years later. It is also easier to interest professionals in participating in information interviews when you can honestly say that you are planning ahead and seeking information and are not looking for a job.

The key steps are to generate and interview as many contacts as possible, to prepare for those information interviews thoroughly, to express appreciation immediately, and to stay in touch once you've made the initial contact. First, **how do you generate names of professionals that you can contact?** You can:

- (1) ask your friends and family;
- (2) check to see if organizations to which you belong have alumni listings;
- (3) check alumni listed on the websites for majors that interest you;
- (5) consult Ohio University publications (e.g. The Post, Ohio Today, Perspectives) for articles about professionals and upper-level students in your field; and
- (6) check your hometown newspaper for recent appointments or articles on particular professionals working in fields and/or for organizations that interest you.

Be sure to **prepare thoroughly for information interviews** by conducting self-assessment; visit <http://www.ohio.edu/careers/students/upload/Career-Choice-Checklist.pdf> for more information, and by thinking through and practicing the questions you plan to ask (typical questions below). You can generally ask for about 30 minutes of a professional's time; however, always plan to spend additional time in case the person is willing to grant a more extended interview. Realize that at any time, the interviewee could switch roles with you and begin asking questions about your education, work and extracurricular experiences, goals, interests, and values.

After the interview (within 24-36 hours), you should **write a letter thanking the professional**; visit <http://www.ohio.edu/advising/upload/Thank You Letters.pdf> for tips. Then stay in touch with the professional, sending a note once or twice a year (at the end of the quarter, for example) updating the person on your school and extracurricular activities. If you find an article that you think may interest the professional, send that.

Here are a few of the typical questions:

1. Why did you choose this career?
2. How did you get your first job?
3. Tell me about your job history.
4. Describe a typical day.
 - a) What skills and abilities are most important in your work?
 - b) What are the things you like most about your job?
 - c) What are the parts of your job that are necessary but least enjoyable?
 - d) What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
5. What are the entry-level jobs in this field of work?
 - a) What is the typical background of people who get those entry-level jobs?
 - b) What is the typical starting salary range for those jobs?
6. What developments do you see in this field in the next 5-10 years? What do you see as the best opportunities for people entering this field?
7. Why did you choose this company?
 - a) How would you describe the work environment?
 - b) What is the organization's philosophy? (try to research first if it's a large company--then you could ask how that philosophy operates in the organization).
 - c) How is this company different than its competitors? (try to research 1st)
 - d) Any other strengths?
 - e) What are ways in which the company could improve? (only ask if you have a high level of comfort and trust with the interviewee)
 - f) What training does the company provide?
 - g) What are the opportunities for advancement?
8. How do you stay abreast of developments in the field?
 - a) What professional organizations do you belong to?
 - b) What publications would you recommend that I read?
9. What advice would you give me when I look for a job in this field?
10. Who else could you recommend that I talk to about working in this field? (get name, title, phone, address-- take your time here and write down information carefully)
When I talk to _____, may I say that you suggested that I call to find out more information?

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWING:

- Begin with easy-to-answer questions to get the person talking right away (e.g. questions #1, #2, and #4).

- Avoid asking questions that one answers easily with "yes" or "no." Good words to begin questions with include How, Why, Describe, and Tell me about.
- Bring a small notepad so that you can take notes. But it's very important to make eye contact, look interested, and listen carefully. Don't try to take down every word.
- Listen carefully and give interested nonverbal feedback (smile, nod head, etc.). Probe for more information if the answers are brief or superficial or confusing (Please tell me more about...).
- Don't rush your questions--Use silence as well as phrases like "Go on" or "Please tell me more" or "Mm-hmm?" to dig for more in-depth information.
- Know your questions; don't be tied to them, though. Be willing to pursue a slightly different order of questions according to the interviewee's answers.
- Be prepared for the professional to ask questions about your interests and goals.
- Always end the interview with questions #9 and #10. One of your goals is to learn about another potential professional that you can interview.
- Be sure to get the professional's first and last names (correct spelling), title, and organization name and address so that you can write a thank you letter. You can ask the professional for a business card.
- Watch the time so the professional doesn't have to rush you out, thank the person at the end, tell her/him how much you've learned, shake hands, smile and make eye contact.
- Write a thank you letter, preferably within 24 hours, visit [http://www.ohio.edu/advising/upload/Thank You Letters.pdf](http://www.ohio.edu/advising/upload/Thank%20You%20Letters.pdf) for tips. This important follow-up could lead to an internship or job at a later time.