Informational Interviews

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

-Confucius

An informational interview is the process of contacting people in an industry or role that you would like to learn more about, to gather more insider information on if it would be the right fit for you. The most relevant, accurate and up-to-date information is often from the professionals currently in the field.

Why is this important?
· Uncover the realities of a particular industry and get insider tips on making yourself a desirable candidate
· Get career planning and job search suggestions from those who have been there
· Decide if your skills, experience and values are in alignment with the job field
· Increase your skill and confidence in networking with professionals
· Get access to the 'hidden job market'
· Obtain a referral to other professionals in the field

What can I ask?
Topics to discuss can include:

Work environment	Ideal skill set / qualifications	Industry trends	Career path of interviewee
Lifestyle	Typical compensation	Challenges / rewards	Career ladder in field

How do I set up an informational interview?
There are a number of ways to make contact with someone; either through your own <u>personal networks</u> (your friend's boyfriend's mother's boss), a <u>cold call</u> (found a phone number in the yellow pages) or a <u>written request</u> (email or snail mail).

Many career counsellors suggest emailing first to introduce yourself and why you are contacting them, followed up by a phone call a few days later. Having a plan for what you want to say often makes the process easier. If your contact cannot meet, be sure to thank them for their time, and ask if they can recommend anyone else you could speak to.

How to ask…

A written email could look like:

Dear Mr Jones

I am currently studying at Nipissing University and interested in learning more about the _____ industry. My aunt Tessa McDonald suggested that you may be open to sharing your experiences with me and answer some questions I have about the field.

Although I am not currently looking for a job, I have become very interested in _____ and would like to learn as much as I can while I am studying.

I am happy to meet you for a coffee or at your office, whatever is easier for you. I will call later in the week to confirm a convenient time to meet. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,
Anne White

I've booked the interview, now what?!

How to prepare for the informational interview is essential to learning as much as you can. Before you meet the person, be sure to:

1. Read about the career area and organization the interviewee is from
2. Be up-to-date on current affairs within your field of interest (policy changes, industry trends)
3. Be able to speak about your own interests, skills and experience and how they relate to the field
4. Prepare a brief introduction on yourself and why you contacted with them
5. Have a number of open ended questions prepared to ask, but let the conversation flow naturally
6. If meeting face to face (which is preferable), dress professionally, as if for a job interview
7. Arrive 5-10 minutes early, and finish on time
8. Be sure to shake hands and ask for their business card, to follow up if they are open to it
9. *Send a thank you card or email the day after the interview, to recognize their time and availability

Possible informational interview questions (what do you *really* want to know?):

· How did you become interested in this field?
· What is a typical day (or week) for you?
· What do you like most about your work?
· What do you like least about your work?
· What do you find most challenging?
· What are some common / or uncommon career paths in this field?
· How do most people get into this field? What are common entry-level jobs?
· What would you recommend to someone just starting out in this industry?
· What do you wish you knew when you were just starting out?
· Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?