

Conducting an Information Interview

One of the best and most overlooked ways to get accurate information about a career is to *interview* professionals who are actually working in that career, which is known as “information interviewing.” An information interview has multiple advantages for your career exploration and development, which include

- getting “inside” information about what a career is really like,
- networking with professionals in the field (may lead to future employment contacts), and
- enabling you to gain experience and confidence with interview situations that may help you prepare for future job interviews.

For this assignment you have the option to work in pairs or alone and will be required to find someone who is working in the engineering discipline you select and set up an information interview with that person.

To help locate possible interview candidates, consider speakers who have come to our class to talk (or those scheduled to come), friends of your family, or someone suggested to you by someone in the field or your family. Any of these people may be working in the career you selected and may be good interview candidates, or they may know other people who could be good candidates. The Career & Advising Center and the Alumni Association on campus may also be able to provide you with graduates of your college (alumni), or professionals working in the local community near your college, who are willing to talk about their careers with students. Lastly, you might consider using the Yellow Pages or the Internet to find names and address of possible candidates. Send them a short letter or e-mail, asking about the possibility of scheduling a short interview. Mention that you would be willing to conduct the interview in person or by phone, whichever would be more convenient for them.

If you do not hear back within a reasonable period of time (e.g., within a couple of weeks), send a follow-up message; if you do not receive a response to the follow-up message, then consider contacting someone else.

When conducting the information interview with the professional who has agreed to speak with you use the following strategies and questions to help guide your interview.

Strategies for Conducting Information Interviews

* *Thank* the person for taking the time to speak with you.

This should be the *first* thing you do after meeting the person, *before* you officially begin the interview.

* *Take notes* during the interview.

This not only benefits you—by helping you remember what was said; it also sends a positive message to the person you’re interviewing—by showing the person that his or her ideas are important and worth writing down.

* *Prepare* your interview *questions* in advance. Here are some questions that you might consider asking:

1. How did you *decide* on your career?
2. What *qualifications* or *prior experiences* did you have that enabled you to *enter* your career?
5. How does someone find out about *openings* in your field?
3. What specific *steps* did you take to find your current position?
4. What advice would you give to beginning college students about things they could start doing now to help them *prepare* to enter your career?
6. During a typical day's work, what do you spend *most* of your *time* doing?
7. What do you *like* most about your career?
8. What are the most *difficult* or *frustrating* aspects of your career?
9. What personal *skills* or *qualities* do you see as being critical for *success* in your career?
10. How does someone *advance* in your career?
11. Are there any *moral* issues or *ethical* challenges that tend to arise in your career?
12. Are members of *diverse racial and ethnic groups* likely to be found in your career field? (Note: This is an especially important question to ask if you are a member of an ethnic or racial minority group.)
13. What impact does your career have on your *home life* or *personal life* outside of work?
14. If you had to do it all over again, would you choose the *same career*?
15. Would you recommend that I speak with *anyone else* to obtain additional information or a different perspective on this career field? (If the answer is "yes," you may follow-up by asking: "May I mention that you referred me?")

Note: This question is recommended because it's always a good idea to obtain more than one person's perspective before making an important choice or decision, especially one that can have a major influence on your life—such as a career choice.

Final Note: If the interview goes well, consider asking if might be possible to observe or "shadow" your interviewee during a day at work.

Personal Reflection Questions

After completing your interview, take a moment to reflect on it and answer the following questions:

1. What information did you receive that *impressed* you about this career (if any)?
2. What information did you receive that *distressed* or *depressed* you about this career (if any)?
3. What was the *most useful* thing you *learned* from conducting this interview?
4. Knowing what you know now, are you still be *interested* in pursuing this career? (If "yes," why?)(If "no," why not?)

Your final report will need to have a brief summary of interview and address all of the above reflective questions. All reports need to be typed, formatted appropriately with a title page, have an introduction, body, and conclusion, along with correct spelling and grammar.

Grading rubric for Engineering Interview Report

Total Points	Category	Sub-category	Points
50	Interview content	Interview summary	10
		Reflective question 1	10
		Reflective questions 2	10
		Reflective question 3	10
		Reflective question 4	10
50	Writing	Title page	10
		Intro/body/conclusion	10
		Spelling/grammar	10
		Logic, flow, paragraph structure	20

Appendix

The Career Development Center and your College Library are key campus resources where can find a wealth of reading material on careers, either *in print* or *on-line*. Here are some of the most useful sources of written information on careers:

- *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*

This is the largest printed resource on careers; it contains concise definitions of over 17,000 jobs. It also includes such information as:

- specific work tasks that people in the career typically perform on a regular basis;
- type of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required for different careers;
- the interests, values, and needs of individuals who find working in their careers to be personally rewarding;
- background experiences of people working in different careers that qualified them for their positions.

- *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*(<http://www.bls.gov/oco>)

This is one of the most widely available and frequently used resources on careers. It contains descriptions of approximately 250 positions, including information on the nature of work, work conditions, places of employment, training/education required for career entry and advancement, salaries, careers in related fields, and sources of additional information about particular careers (e.g., professional organizations and governmental agencies). A distinctive feature is that it contains information about the *future employment outlook* for different careers.

- *Encyclopedia of Careers and Vocational Guidance* (Chicago: Ferguson Press)

As the name suggests, this is an encyclopedia of information on qualifications, salaries, and advancement opportunities for a wide variety of careers.

- *Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Online* (<http://online.onetcenter.org>)

This is America's most comprehensive source of *on-line* information about careers. It contains an up-to-date set of descriptions for more almost 1,000 different careers, plus lots of other information similar to that found in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*.

In addition to these general sources of information, your Career Development Center or your College Library should have books and other published materials relating to specific careers or occupations (e.g., careers for English majors). You can also learn a lot about careers by simply reading advertisements for position openings. You can find them in your local newspaper or on-line, such as careerbuilder.com and monstertrak.com. When reading job descriptions, note the particular tasks, duties, or responsibilities that they involve, and ask yourself if these positions "fit" your profile of abilities, interests, and values.

