

Informational Interview Assignment

What is the purpose of an informational interview?

Informational interviews are an incredibly valuable way to learn more about a profession. It is a chance to hear first-hand—from someone who actually works in a certain position—what it is like to do a particular job, what they like or dislike, and what school and career choices they made in order to be where they are today.

Students in introductory courses at the Community College of Vermont (CCV) complete information interviews because those kinds of experience and information can help shape their education and career goals. It is a chance to learn sooner whether a certain field or job is a good match for your interests, strengths and the kind of life you envision for yourself in the future. It's also a great way to start developing a network of professional contacts.

How can do you find someone to interview?

- Use your personal networks. Do you have friends or family who do this kind of work? Does anyone in your immediate circle know someone else who might be willing?
- Ask your CCV instructor. Do they have anyone in their personal or professional networks who might be willing to be interviewed?
- Ask your CCV advisor. Do they happen to know a CCV faculty member or someone else who works in a particular field who is open to an interview?
- Ask CCV's Career Services. Do they know of individuals or organizations that are open to students approaching them for informational interviews?

How do you contact someone to interview?

- If someone in your personal network or at CCV knows of a great person to interview, see if they'd be willing to send an email introduction to connect you.
- Send an email explaining that you'd like to interview them in order to better understand their field, the kind of work they do and their career pathway. Note that you aren't looking for a job. Ask whether certain days and times are more convenient, and be sure to say that you'll be thoughtful about their time and anticipate needing only 15-20 minutes.
- Try to find someone who is willing to speak with you in person or over the phone. An email interview should be a last resort and requires instructor approval.

How do you prepare for the interview?

- Visit the website of the business, organization or agency where your interviewee works. Become more familiar with its mission and the kinds of work they do.
- Explore CCV's online career services tools like Focus2, which among many other things, allows you to explore different kinds of positions and the job outlook for each.
- Be on time for your meeting, have a notepad and pen ready, and wear a watch to make sure you are respectful of your interviewee's time.

What questions should you ask?

Occupational Questions:

These questions help uncover information about the educational pathways and career pathways for individuals who do this kind of work.

1. What is your specific job title? Are there other commonly-used titles for this position?
2. How did you start in this field? What was your pathway from college to this position?
3. What level of education and type of degree(s) are typically required for this job?
4. What types of professional certifications or licensure requirements exist for this job, and what kind of continuing education are professionals in this field required to do?
5. What kind of work or internship experience would employers look for in a job applicant, and how might a person obtain this experience?
6. What personal qualities and skills are most important for success in this field?
7. Are there specific courses you'd recommend I take at the beginning of my college career in order to explore this field and start developing the skills it requires?
8. What other kinds of jobs (besides this particular position) could I do with these kinds of degrees, certifications or licensure?
9. What opportunities for advancement exist in this field? What kinds of additional credentials and experience do those opportunities require?
10. What are the different salary ranges for occupations in your field?
11. Is this a rapidly growing field? Is it possible to predict future needs for this work?
12. What are the job prospects for this kind of position regionally and nationally? It is easy to find this kind of training and work locally, or is it likely I would need to move?

Functional Questions:

These questions give you a sense of your interviewee's daily life on the job.

1. What are the major duties performed in a typical week, month and year?
2. What does a typical work day look like? Do you have a set routine? How much variety do you experience day-to-day?
3. Do you have choice in the amount of hours you work each week and in how your shifts or days are scheduled?
4. What are the different settings (i.e., educational institutions, businesses, non-profits) where people in this occupation may work?
5. What are the other kinds of workers frequently interact with this position?
6. What are the toughest problems, decisions or pressures you face?
7. What are the most satisfying aspects of your work? Are they typical in this field?
8. What are the most dissatisfying aspects of your work? Are they typical in this field?

What should you do immediately following your interview?

- Write up the responses to each question while it's still fresh in your head. If you do this the same day you interview, you'll be able to fill in more of the details they shared than if you wait several days to start this process.
- Send a thank you note (on paper or by email). Be sure to do this within a day or two of your interview. Include a specific example of something you found valuable or interesting so that it's clear you appreciated the experience. This is a simple but important gesture and one that will make a very positive impression.

FINAL PRODUCT: Informational Interview Highlights & Reflections

Use the following template to share highlights from your informational interview and to organize your personal reflections. Be sure to address all of the prompts, use details and examples in your written answers and proofread your writing before submitting it.

Interview Details:

Name:

Profession:

Employer:

Contact Information:

Date Interviewed:

Educational & Career Pathways:

- What was their personal pathway from college to this position? What was their background, education and previous work experience?
- What are the typical educational requirements for this work? What kinds of degrees, certifications, licensure and/or other training make someone well-qualified to do this job?
- What opportunities for advancement exist in this field? What additional professional credentials and experience are necessary for advancement?
- What kinds of courses, internships or experiences did they recommend and why did they think those opportunities are important?

Job Outlook:

- What are the job prospects in this field locally, regionally and nationally? Did this match your expectations or does it potentially change your plans in some way?
- What other jobs could you do with this kind of education and/or background? Do any of those other occupations or career pathways sound like a good match for you? Why or why not?
- What are the salary ranges for occupations in this field? Does this match your expectations and to what extent does it align with your personal financial goals?

Career Fit:

- What kinds of personal qualities and skills are important in this field? In what ways might this kind of job a good match for you? In what ways might you be challenged?
- What does it look and feel like to do this job? To what extent would this position be good match for the kinds of settings you prefer, the kinds of tasks you like to do, the level of interaction you enjoy and how you like to spend your days?
- What were the most helpful, interesting or thought-provoking things you learned in this interview? Why did those particular things stand out?