

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW & JOB SHADOWING GUIDE

Conducting an informational interview with a working professional or shadowing at a company that you are curious about is an excellent way to get a firsthand picture of what the job entails. There are numerous benefits to doing this kind of experiential learning, including:

- Receiving firsthand, relevant information about the realities of working within a particular field, industry, or position. This kind of information is often not available online.
- Learning about career paths and positions you did not know existed.
- Gaining tips and insider knowledge about how to prepare for and land your first career position.
- Learning what the environment and culture are like at a specific organization.
- Initiating a professional relationship and expanding your network of contacts in a specific career field.
- Confirming your interest in a field or revealing that this is not the right career path for you.

CAREER COMPETENCIES

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has identified 8 core competencies that company recruiters want college students to have mastered prior to being hired in their organizations. Conducting informational interviews or job shadowing utilizes these core competencies: **Career & Self-Development, Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity & Inclusion, Leadership, Professionalism, Teamwork, and Technology**. Before participating in these experiences, review your skills in these areas and think about how you will use them professionally.

Identifying Potential Interviewees or Job Shadow Locations

Students often underestimate how large their own network already is. You know more people than you think, and every contact of yours has a network of contacts as well. When you start asking around, you will find a web of contacts that will lead you to the right people. Start with these people and places:

- Existing network (friends, parents, friends of parents, former bosses or coworkers, etc.)
- Faculty members/professors/instructors/staff
- LinkedIn and other professional networking sites
- Indiana State University Alumni Association – alumni events, Homecoming, etc.
- Alumni from your high school, sorority/fraternity, campus organizations, etc.
- Campus organizations or community volunteer locations
- Professional Associations for your chosen career/industry area
- Company websites - look for staff directories or departmental managers. Don't be afraid to call or e-mail someone in the Human Resources department.

Initiating Contact

Take into consideration that an informational interview can last between 15 – 60 minutes, whereas a job shadowing experience might last a couple of hours to a couple of days. Remember that professionals are busy, so provide them with plenty of advanced notice (1 week for an informational interview and at least 2-3 weeks for a job shadow).

- Contact the person by e-mail or phone (see sample e-mail script on next page).
- Mention how you got their name.
- Explain briefly why you are contacting them.
- Emphasize that you are looking for information, not a job.
- Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for them.

Request an Informational Interview or Job Shadow Sample E-mail Message:

Subject Line: Information Request from [Insert Major] Student at Indiana State University

Dear [Insert Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name],

My name is [Insert your first and last name], and I am a [Insert your current year of education] at Indiana State University. I am very interested in someday working in the field of [Insert industry type], and would like to learn more about the field. Although I am not currently looking for a job, I am gathering information so I can make positive career decisions. [Would it be possible to schedule 20 to 30 minutes with you at your convenience to ask a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter this field? I am available to visit your office or to have a phone conversation.] OR [If you are willing and your office allows students to shadow, I would welcome an opportunity to observe your work and learn about the culture and environment at [Insert company name]. My class schedule allows me to spend a couple hours on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday mornings off campus, and I would be able to work around your schedule.]

I realize that you are busy and your time is valuable. I appreciate your consideration of this request. I can be reached at [email address] or 812-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,
First and Last Name

Feel free to personalize the language in this sample but keep it professional. Read over the text a few times before you send the e-mail to make sure that there aren't any typos or grammatical errors.

Note – if you do not hear back from your potential interviewee immediately, please wait patiently for a response. It's fine to follow up one more time, then move on to someone else if you haven't heard back.

THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

This type of interview has nothing to do with being evaluated for a job opening, but it does involve learning as much as you can about a specific career industry, job position, or company. It is preferable that you meet for the informational interview in person, but if that is not possible, a phone or virtual conversation is fine.

- Dress professionally as you would for any type of job interview (visit the Career Center's clothing closet for free professional clothing).
- Arrive on time or a few minutes early.
- Ensure your phone or internet connection is strong with no background distractions for a virtual or phone interview.
- Have your list of questions with you and take notes in a notebook or padfolio.
- Provide a brief overview of yourself, including your education/work background, and reiterate why you are interested in this field/job/company.
- Be prepared to direct the interview but let the conversation flow naturally. The interviewee should do most of the talking.
- Respect the agreed-upon timeframe for the conversation.
- Ask if they have suggestions of other contacts so you can gain different perspectives.
- You can bring a résumé, but first establish a rapport with the person before asking for feedback.

Potential Questions/Information to Obtain

- How many years have you been with this company?
- What education do you have? Was that major/degree necessary to get this position?
- How did you get started in this field?
- What previous jobs led you to your current position?
- What is a typical day / week like for you?
- What are the most significant pluses/minuses about working in this field?
- What do you like/dislike about your job?
- What kind of decisions do you regularly make?
- Describe the various careers and career paths in this industry/field.
- What is the outlook for this career field?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?
- What specific skills, interests or values are important for a person to have in this job?
- Where might I be after 5 years with an organization like yours?
- If I left this career field after 5 years, what other occupations might be options for me?
- What current issues and trends in the field should I know about/be aware of?
- What kind of training is necessary for this career field? Are there any specific college majors that relate well to this position?
- What salaries are earned in an entry-level position in this career field? (Do not ask the interviewee what they make a year)
- What is the top job you can aspire to in this career?
- What kind of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
- Are there any courses or activities a student should get involved in that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
- Can you recommend trade journals, magazines, or professional associations which would be helpful for my professional development?
- What advice would you give someone entering this field?
- What is the best way to obtain an entry-level position in this career field?
- Can you refer me to someone else in this field so I can get an additional perspective?

Follow-up After the Informational Interview

- Write down what you learned, what more you'd like to know, and what your next steps should be.
- Send a personalized thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given. This may be a brief handwritten note, an e-mail, or a business letter.
- Stay connected with the person; let them know that you followed up on their advice and the outcome. This person could become an important part of your network.

THE JOB SHADOW

Job shadowing entails following a professional in their work environment for a specified amount of time to get a sense of what a particular position involves. A job shadow experience can last for a couple of hours, one day, or multiple days. Remember these tips to get the maximum benefit from job shadowing.

Before You Go:

- When setting up the shadow experience, be specific about what you would like to see and learn. Is there a specific department, job function, service, or product you are interested in learning more about? Can they introduce you to someone in HR or Recruiting who can answer questions about their hiring process?
- Research the company and employees ahead of time so you are prepared. Write down pertinent questions you think of during your research that can create a good impression and help you learn more from the experience.
- Remember to ask where you will job shadow, what time you should arrive, and what you should wear. Research location directions, how long it will take to get there, and where you should park.
- Bring a notebook/padfolio and pen to take notes.

Learning During the Experience:

You will be expected to be a sponge and soak up all that is happening around you. You will also be expected to ask intelligent questions.

- Pay attention to the practices in place that keep things running smoothly: do teams seem to communicate well internally? What is the company doing well and where is there room for improvement?
- Pay attention to who reports to whom, how often, and why. Does this model of command seem to be working well, or is it too complex?
- Do employees seem to be enjoying their work? Do people generally feel appreciated by their managers?
- Ask insightful questions to gain knowledge. Any of the questions outlined in the Informational Interviewing section would be good to ask.
- Focus on making good impressions, shaking hands with every person you meet, maintaining eye contact, and addressing them with their formal titles unless you are told otherwise. Thank every person for their time and ask for their business cards.

Follow-up After the Visit:

- Write down what you learned, what more you would like to know, and what your next steps should be.
- Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to every person who spent significant time with you. Handwritten notes will be appropriate given the amount of time the employees spent with you.
- Stay connected with the people you met; let them know that you followed up on their advice and the outcome. These people could become an important part of your network.