

Find a Mentor

Conduct an Informational Interview

As you know from your coursework in this unit, active participation in the learning process leads to college success. In particular, on an interpersonal level, interacting with your professors, instructors, advisers, other students, and professionals in your chosen field is a beneficial practice that will enrich your overall learning experience.

At this point in your college career, you may be exploring options such as declaring your major, adding a major, or even changing your major. You may also be considering a co-op work experience or workplace internship, or thinking about pursuing medical school, law school, or other post-secondary degree programs. One great resource for making these kinds of decisions is to talk with people who work in the field you are exploring.

Choose Someone To Interview

This assessment asks you to pause and take a look at how you are moving toward your chosen professional career, and how you can find someone who is knowledgeable in this field with whom you can conduct an informational interview. Such a person might include (1) an instructor in your chosen major, (2) an upperclassman or graduate student in your chosen major, or (3) a professional who is already working in your field.

To find someone to interview, you can start with your current courses. Is there an instructor in your major department whom you would like to learn more from? What about a teaching assistant or other upperclassman? You may also find someone in a professional organization or through a networking platform such as LinkedIn. In addition, if your college or university has a career counselor or alumni association, these organizations may also be able to help you find someone to interview.

Once you identify an interview subject, write a professional email or make a call that reaches out and asks the person whether he or she would be open to your conducting a brief interview. Introduce yourself, your educational background, and your career interests, and give the person an overview of what you are seeking from him or her. Before you conduct your interview, think more about your own career and academic goals. Be prepared to answer questions from the person about why you are seeking his or her assistance.

You may want to write a brief script ahead of time. Below is an example of a script you might use to introduce yourself and set up your interview.

“Hello, my name is _____, and I am a student at _____ University/College who is majoring in (or considering majoring in) _____. In the course of my career research, I came across your name as someone who has experience working in the field, and I would like to ask you for advice on how to make a successful transition from my college major to a

professional career. Can I make an appointment with you to ask you a few questions about your work?"

When communicating with your interview subject, be respectful of his or her schedule and complimentary of his or her expertise. Remember that your interview subject's time is valuable, and that he or she is doing a service to you by agreeing to an interview.

Interview Format

You may conduct the interview in person, by phone or video chat, or, as a last resort, by email. An in-person, face-to-face interview is best, but you also will want to make the meeting as easy on the interviewer as possible. Go with the format that works best for your subject.

Preparing for the Interview

Do your research. Find out as much about your interview subject as you can ahead of time, including his or her roles at his or her current and past organizations. Be sure to prepare a list of questions ahead of time, and do not be late for the appointed time.

Some Example Interview Questions

- Can you describe your career path?
- What advice do you have for a student who is pursuing this career?
- How did extracurricular activities, study abroad, or other activities influence your career?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- What has been the most valuable experience for you in this career?
- What is a typical day/week/month/year like in your job? Do you have a routine?
- What is most satisfying about this career?
- What do you need to do to succeed in this career?
- What kind of experience is required for this career (e.g., internships, work experience, etc.)?
- Would further education (beyond an undergraduate degree) be of benefit in this career?
- What kind of professional and other organizations did you belong to as a student, and/or belong to now?
- What resources do you recommend for more information?

Conducting the Interview

- Relax. This is your chance to have a conversation with someone in your field. There are no right or wrong answers. If you enjoy the conversation, your interview subject will, too.
- Be polite and professional.
- Be respectful and listen attentively.
- Take notes, but use a pad and paper (not a laptop); you do not want a physical barrier between you and your interview subject.
- Don't overstay your welcome. Wrap up the interview before the end of your agreed-upon time. Show that you respect your interview subject's time.

Wrap-Up and Follow-Up

- Don't forget to send a handwritten thank-you note within a day of your interview.
- Review your notes and reflect on the interview. What did you learn?
- Are there specific tips or strategies you learned about that you can use now and in the future?
- Is there anything that you feel you need to research further?
- Did the interview subject refer you to other professionals or organizations, or recommend any specific resources (e.g. books, periodicals, websites, etc.).

When you have completed the interview process, write down your overall reflections about the experience in the space below. Consider other interviews you might conduct in order to further expand your knowledge of your field. Be sure to keep in touch with your interview subjects, in case you have further questions or would like to leave the door open for future communication with these people. By expanding your outreach to academic and career professionals, you will build a network of possible mentors who can provide guidance to you throughout your college and professional careers.
