

Tapping the Hidden Job Market Through Informational Interviews

By Dr. Kim Hogelucht



What is an Informational Interview?

An informational interview is an interview conducted with a business professional in order to fine tune career goals and network in one's career field.

What do former students say about this assignment?

Hi Professor Hogelucht!

I just wanted to check-in and let you know that I have just been offered a job in the marketing department at the PatagoniaHQ in Ventura, CA! I'm not sure if you remember, but when I had you my junior year (2 years ago), I did an informational interview at the Patagonia HQ and was so excited about it... That was when I knew it would be a goal/dream for me to work there one day. Little did I know, that dream would come true so soon! Your assignment led me to this wonderful company, so I just had to take the time to say THANK YOU and encourage you in the work/teaching that you do. You are a blessing to so many and your class motivated me and inspired me to reach for the stars. ~ Hailey Keeter, Marketing Associate, Patagonia

The informational interview context fosters an environment of comfort, flattery, flexibility, and most of all, understanding. It is a wonderful learning and networking tool. 😊

Tips on Setting Up an Informational Interview

1. **Decide on a career field of interest.** If you cannot narrow down to one career field, then it is okay to interview professionals in different fields. If you do know the career field (i.e. marketing) then try to interview three marketing professionals about their occupation. I tell students to shoot for the stars with this assignment. Try to find people high up in an organization and with many years of experience, as these individuals will have many valuable lessons about not only their job but life.
2. **Find professionals in your field of interest.** In securing your informational interviews, talk to your parents' friends and your friends' parents. Tell people what you are interested in. I also pass out a list of local professionals who have taken part in informational interviews in the past who are willing to be interviewed again by students from my classes. This list serves as a starting point for my students, but I encourage them to make new contacts for this assignment. Try to reach out to a professional who has never been interviewed about his/her job. Professionals

who have never been interviewed are usually very impressed with this unique assignment and the student's interest in their career.

3. **Set up interview with professional.** Be sure to only ask for 20 minutes of time. To professionals, 20 minutes of time sounds reasonable. Thirty minutes or more sounds like a large amount of time and less than 20 minutes is not enough time. I have found that, in most cases, the professionals enjoy this process so much that they give students more than 20 minutes of time. They love talking about their jobs! For many professionals, it is somewhat self-affirming. They have a chance to listen to themselves talk about why they love what they do. I recommend my students use the following phone script (it can be used for e-mail as well).

4. **Script:** *"Hello my name is _____. I am a student at Point Loma Nazarene University. Would you be willing to give me 20 minutes of your time for an informational interview. An informational interview is when I interview you about what you do. This information is intended to help me fine-tune my career goals. I realize how difficult I am to be reached, so please e-mail me at _____ (spell out slowly and clearly) or call me at _____ between the hours of 1 p.m. – 5 p.m. I am available to meet with you Monday, Wednesday, or Friday between the hours of 1 p.m. – 5 p.m. Thank you for your help."*

Please note: If you haven't heard back from the professional within a few days, contact him/her again. If you have not heard back after a week, then start calling other professionals.

5. **Tip:** Once you have secured an informational interview, a good way to find additional professionals in your field of interest is simply to ask the professional you are interviewing if they know of anyone else in this career field who would be willing to talk to you. Most professionals know people who do what they do in other organizations, so this is a great way to connect with additional professionals.
6. **If possible, conduct the informational interview with the professional in person.** I tell my students there is a lot to be learned by going to a professional's workplace. You not only learn about the company culture, but you are able to make a more personal connection with the professional by meeting him/her in person. You are also able to pick up on nonverbal cues that may be overlooked if you conduct the interview over the phone.
7. **Arrive early, dress appropriately, and be prepared.** I recommend that my students always error on the conservative side when it comes to appearance. When in doubt, dress up. If going to a larger corporation such as a bank, I recommend my students wear a suit. If they are going to a more casual organization, such as a surf shop, I recommend they dress business casual. This way, they are dressed as formal if not more formally than the professionals they are interviewing. Dressing formally shows respect and definitely puts your best foot forward.
8. **Ask thoughtful questions and probe for details.** I do not specify what questions my students must ask the professionals that they interview, but I do give them some example questions (See below). I encourage my students to dig deep for details by asking follow-up

questions. For instance, if they ask the professional: “What do you love about your job?” And the professional responds, “It’s just exciting!” I tell my students to follow up with, “Can you give me an example of something exciting that happened recently at your job?” I recommend that my students have about 15 questions prepared. If they dig deep for details, they probably will not have time for all 15 questions, so I recommend they put the most pressing questions first.

Sample Informational Interview Questions

- How did you get into this career field?
 - Can you tell me about your education?
 - What are your job responsibilities?
 - What do you enjoy most about your job and what is the greatest challenge?
 - What opportunities for advancement do you have at your job?
 - What is your company’s mission? Do you feel that your own personal mission is in line with your company’s mission?
 - What are your future career aspirations?
 - Is there anything I haven’t asked that you recommend I know about this career field?
9. **Take good notes.** I tell students to take notes during the interview. If they are concerned that they will miss some details, I tell them that they could record the professional, but to always ask for permission from the professional to record before assuming it is all right.
10. **Send a thank-you note.** After the interview, I require my students send a handwritten thank-you note that is specifically tailored to each professional they interviewed. By highlighting something specific that they learned from each professional, the professional realizes that the student was truly listening.

-Sample Thank You Message-

Dear Mr. Jackson,

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak with me about your career field. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Rip Curl and your occupation as Marketing Director. During my interview, I was excited to learn that your position requires “thinking outside of the box.” This really became apparent when you told me about your new product line coming out in March. It sounds like that was an exciting project to work on.

Once again, thank you for your time and willingness to meet with me. I hope to keep in touch and will let you know how my informational interview presentation goes.

Sincerely,

Kim Johnson

Excerpt from Bus. 313 Syllabus- Informational Interview Assignment Requirements – Hogelucht

Informational Interview Package (100 pts.) This written and oral assignment is designed to help you gain valuable information about your future career. This could possibly be one of the most meaningful assignments you do in your college career (I've heard this from so many students). Contacts made through this assignment could become leads for future jobs.

Part One: On the day 1st day of presentations, all class members are required to turn in the following documents in Canvas:

- I. One typed page (double-spaced) with three paragraphs highlighting:
 - a) How your career goal is clearer, has changed or been adapted because of what you learned from this assignment.
 - b) What you learned about the process of conducting an interview?
 - c) Advice you would give students doing this assignment in the future
- II. Scanned copy of each of the thank you letters you sent to interviewees and a copy of the addressed, stamped envelope to each interviewee. Each thank you should be different in that you should highlight something specific you learned from each person. You may type or write these. If you write them, make sure your writing is legible.
- III. Scanned copies of the professionals' business cards.

Part Two: Informational Interview Presentation Format (8-10 minute PowerPoint Presentation)

- I. **Introduction** (*Recommended 1 slide for each part of intro.*)
 - A. Attention-getter (interesting story, rhetorical question, etc.)
 - B. Area you are interested in/ career field
 - C. Preview of points covered in body (for each interview, mention name, title, and lesson learned from each person/ keep this brief as you'll go into detail in the body.
- II. **Body** (*Recommended 3-4 slides for each interview—highlighting 4 parts*)
 - A. Career field/occupation #1
 1. Name of person interviewed
 - a. Job title
 - b. Rationale for Choosing Person
 - c. How did you discover this professional (list, FBFI, parent's friend, friend's parent, website, went to business)
 2. Company
 - a. background information on company
 - b. description of workplace (describe the environment, decorations, attire, lighting, workspace—open or cubicles)
 3. Position Details

- a. Describe briefly the skills needed for the position
 - b. Explain the job responsibilities of professional.
 4. Highlight one lesson you learned about this career field or position from your informational interview
 - a. State lesson clearly, i.e. "Every day is different"
 - b. Tell detailed/specific story to support lesson
(*You must dig deeper in interview to get them to tell you these interesting stories, i.e. Tell me specifically how today is different from yesterday; what did you do each day?)
 5. Assessment
 - a. Would you want to work for this company? Why or why not?
 - b. Could you see yourself happy in this position? Why or why not? If yes, what are your next steps to make this a reality?
- B. Career Field/Occupation #2 (Please note: It's O.K. to interview three people in the same career field/same occupation or you may interview people in three different career field).
 1. Name of person interviewed
 - a. Job title
 - b. Rationale for Choosing Person
 - c. How did you discover this professional (list, FBEI, parent's friend, friend's parent, website, went to business)
 2. Company
 - a. background information on company
 - b. description of workplace (describe the environment, decorations, attire, lighting, workspace—open or cubicles)
 3. Position Details
 - a. Describe briefly the skills needed for the position
 - b. Explain the job responsibilities of professional.
 4. Highlight one lesson you learned about this career field or position from your informational interview
 - a. State lesson clearly, i.e. "Advanced Education is Important"
 - b. Tell detailed/specific story to support lesson
(*You must dig deeper in interview to get them to tell you these interesting stories, i.e. Tell me specifically how today is different from yesterday; what did you do each day?)
 5. Assessment
 - a. Would you want to work for this company? Why or why not?
 - b. Could you see yourself happy in this position? Why or why not? If yes, what are your next steps to make this a reality?
- C. Career Field/Occupation #3
 1. Name of person interviewed
 - a. Job title
 - b. Rationale for Choosing Person
 - c. How did you discover this professional (list, FBEI, parent's friend, friend's parent, website, went to business)
 2. Company
 - a. background information on company
 - b. description of workplace (describe the environment, decorations, attire, lighting, workspace—open or cubicles)

3. Position Details
 - a. Describe briefly the skills needed for the position
 - b. Explain the job responsibilities of professional.
4. Highlight one lesson you learned about this career field or position from your informational interview
 - a. State lesson clearly, i.e. "Exceed Expectations"
 - b. Tell detailed/specific story to support lesson
(*You must dig deeper in interview to get them to tell you these interesting stories, i.e. Tell me specifically how today is different from yesterday; what did you do each day?)
5. Assessment
 - a. Would you want to work for this company? Why or why not?
 - b. Could you see yourself happy in this position? Why or why not? If yes, what are your next steps to make this a reality?

III. Conclusion

- A. Provide summary including name/title and lesson learned from each person.
- B. Next steps (secure internship and/or how career goals have been reinforced or changed).
- C. Creative tie-back to your attention-getter