

ALBERTA WORK SEARCH ONLINE



Information interviewing is a research tool based on the idea that if you want to find out what it's like working for Company Z, talk to someone who works there. You talk with people you know, as well as those you're referred to.

Before you contact someone for an information interview, decide what kind of information you're looking for. It will probably fall into one of the three following categories:

- ▣ *Occupational information* – if you're thinking about moving into a different field of work
- ▣ *Industry information* – if you're planning to target your work search to a specific industry
- ▣ *Information about a specific employer* – if you want to target a particular company or organization.

Tip

Some people have used information interviewing as a ploy to get in to see employers so they can sell themselves as a potential employee. As a result, some employers refuse to grant information interviews. Don't be discouraged if you run into a few of these employers. If you use information interviewing in a sincere and honest manner, people will welcome your request for information.

Arranging and conducting an information interview

To prepare for an information interview:

- ▣ Prepare your questions.
- ▣ Prepare a script for each contact you want to interview.
- ▣ Make initial contact with the person. If you don't know the person, introduce yourself and say who referred you. Keep track of your calls.
- ▣ Briefly explain the kind of information you're looking for.
- ▣ Ask if the person would be willing to speak with you for 10 or 15 minutes.

Be prepared for one of three answers:

- ▣ "Yes, certainly." In this case, try to arrange a face-to-face meeting; an in-person contact makes a more lasting impression than a phone call. If that's not possible, ask to conduct the interview by phone or email.
- ▣ "No, I'm sorry." Accept graciously and, if appropriate, ask if the person can recommend someone else for you to talk to.
- ▣ "Let's talk over the phone right now." Always have your questions ready when you make your initial call!

Contacting people you know

Begin the information interviewing process with people you know. You may know someone who:

- ▣ Works for an employer you'd like to work for.
- ▣ Knows about an employer you'd like to work for.
- ▣ Can refer you to someone who works for an employer you'd like to work for.

Phone or email people in your network. Tell them that you're looking for work, and ask them for ideas or, if appropriate, conduct an information interview.

Contacting people you don't know

Through networking or other research, you may be referred to people you don't know who can provide you with more information or employers who may be in a position to offer you work.

What's the worst that can happen when you contact people you don't know? They may tell you they can't or don't want to talk with you. What's the best that can happen? You may contact an employer who's hoping to fill a position without all the work and expense of advertising for and screening candidates.

If you're nervous about making calls, practice on the phone or in a role play with your family and friends until you can introduce yourself clearly, calmly and in a professional manner. Your technique will improve with each call you make.

Identifying the right person to talk to

If you're making a cold call (a call to a prospective employer without a referral or a contact name), use these suggestions to help you identify who you should talk to:

- ▣ If you're contacting employers in person, call ahead and ask who has hiring authority for your type of work. Typical titles of people with hiring authority include foreman, supervisor, human resources manager or consultant, manager or assistant manager. Find out when this person may be available. When you walk in, ask for the person by name.
- ▣ When contacting employers by phone, ask for the name of the person who has hiring authority. If the person who answers is reluctant to put your call through to the appropriate person, call back another day and ask for the hiring authority by name.

>> Information Interviewing

- ❑ Using “To Whom It May Concern” in letters or email is usually ineffective. If you can’t find out by calling the organization directly, locate the names of specific people through your network, on the organization’s website or in a business directory.
- ❑ You may also want to talk to someone who doesn’t have hiring authority, such as an employee of the organization in a position similar to one you’re interested in. Explain to the person who answers your call what you’d like to do and ask to speak with someone who can answer your questions.

When contacting people, always:

- ❑ Do your research! Check out the company’s published material before you make contact. It’s unprofessional and inappropriate to waste your contact’s time by asking questions that are answered on the company’s website, in promotional material or from other sources (e.g. education requirements for an occupation).
- ❑ Ask for the names of the people you talk to, including receptionists. Write their names down and use them in conversation. If you have to call back, it’s helpful to know people’s names.
- ❑ Be polite.
- ❑ Keep your calls and emails short and to the point.

If you’re prepared and professional, people will be more likely to tell you what they know and refer you to others who may also be able to help you.

>> Tips for successful information interviews

- Call or arrive on time.
- Take only as much time as you’ve requested.
- 10 or 15 minutes should be long enough.
- When you make contact in-person or by phone, be sure to have your script, cover letter and resumé in front of you.
- Dress appropriately even when you make contact by phone. When dressed professionally, you’ll sound and act professional. Relax, speak slowly and clearly.
- Take detailed notes.
- Thank the person at the end of the meeting or phone call.
- Always follow up with a thank you card or email.