What is an information interview? This involves contacting people currently working in a chosen field, and asking them questions to gain real life information to help you make decisions about your future career direction.

The benefits of information interviews

- Gives you an opportunity to talk to people directly involved in a role, organisation, or industry, rather than relying solely on anecdotal information.
- Helps you build professional contacts in your field of interest.
- Provides an opportunity to get insider information on how to break into a specific field or company.
- Enables you to learn about trends, growth potential, areas of expansion and important issues in the field.
- Uncovers areas of interest and career paths you may not have previously considered.
- Alerts you to potential gaps in your knowledge or experiences and provides you with an opportunity to identify some strategies for improving your skills.

Finding people to interview

- Find industries, a specific field, a company, or an occupation to target from the internet, newspapers, trade magazines and job advertisements.
- Use your network of contacts to identify potential people to interview — your fellow students, co-workers, neighbours, friends, and friends’ parents, lecturers, professional associations, alumni, contacts from professional meetings and casual business invitations you may have received.
- Always thank people in your network if a person they suggest agrees to an interview.
- While it’s usually easier to talk to an acquaintance or a referral than cold calling, if you do need to approach a company directly, do your research and know the position you are targeting for the interview, such as head marine biologist or events coordinator and ask how best to contact them.

Setting up an interview

- Build a list of existing contacts and ask them to provide you with an introduction to key people in the industry.
- Calling potential people and using your contact’s name as a conduit is an effective mechanism to line up an interview; however, an email with your request, followed up by a phone call could also work well.
- Think about how you want to conduct the interview; a face-to-face interview or a shorter 15-minute phone interview may be more convenient and appropriate. Be prepared to conduct the interview at the time of requesting one.
- When you get through to your contact person:
  1. Introduce yourself and state where you are from (e.g. a student at Southern Cross University).
  2. Explain you are conducting personal research about their career and would like to talk with them for 20-30 minutes to find out more about that field/occupation.
  3. Ask for a time that is convenient for them.
- If your contact is unable to help you, ask whether they can suggest another contact for you.
Preparing for an interview

- Create a brief introduction about yourself, who you are, where you are from, and why you are requesting an interview.
- You are the interviewer, so prepare your questions in advance.
- Learn as much as you can about the company or field before the interview.

Example questions you can ask

- What did you do to get into this line of work?
- What changes are happening in your industry right now? Is it a growing field?
- What qualities and qualifications do you need for this type of job or industry?
- How did you acquire the necessary skills required for the role?
- What type of work experience/volunteer work would you suggest for someone wishing to enter the field?
- What are the great things about the job?
- What are the challenging aspects of the job/organisation/industry?
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- How would you describe the work environment? (i.e. low/high pressure, formal/informal, fun)
- What are the usual working hours for this type of role?
- What opportunities do you see in this field?
- What do you wish you had known when you were just starting your career?
- What advice would you give someone in my position?

For a more comprehensive list of questions you can ask, refer to the Information Interviewing module in the SCU Career Development Program on MySCU.

Helpful tips

- Always be polite and professional. Ask permission before you take notes. Stick to the time limit.
- Ask open-ended questions (what, when, and how) to gather more information. While you may gain information about the hidden job market (unadvertised positions), never ask for a job or ask to be recommended for one in an information interview. You are not asking for a job; you are asking for information, advice and possibly further contacts!
- Have a spare copy of your resume available if you are asked for it.

Checklist — evaluating an information interview

- Have I worked through the Information Interviewing module in the SCU Career Development Program.
- Have I contacted the interviewee to thank them?
- Did the interviewee ask to be updated on my progress? If so, contact them with the results.
- Did I stick to my time limit?
- Did I learn something new? Positive or negative.
- Did this change or inform my approach?
- Do I have further avenues to pursue?
- Would I change the way I conduct an interview next time?
- What did I learn from this experience?
- What other questions would have been useful to ask?
- Was the overall process beneficial? Do I need to conduct more interviews?

Where to find more help

- SCU Career Development Program on MySCU – learn.scu.edu.au
- Visit careerhub.scu.edu.au for job vacancies, events and resources
- Email for a careers consultation: careers@scu.edu.au
- For further resources and fact sheets go to scu.edu.au/careers