

Health Professions

Informational Interviews

Find out the most about your Health Professions Pathway!

- ✓ Explore It
- ✓ Research It
- ✓ Take Action



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Informational Interviewing

Not sure where to start? Begin to build rapport with a health care professional by doing an informational interview. Informational interviewing is just what it sounds like. It is a great way to explore and research a chosen health professions pathway. It is the process of spending time with one of your network contacts in a highly focused conversation that provides you with key information you can use to decide which path is right for you. Research shows that the best way to predict if you will be happy in a future profession is to talk to someone currently working in that field and ask them if they are happy with the work and why they are happy.¹

BENEFITS OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational Interviews can help you:

- ✓ Explore health professions pathways and clarify your career goals
 - ✓ Gain a better understanding of a specific health professions
 - ✓ Build rapport with health care professionals and find out about future shadowing opportunities
 - ✓ Learn from people who work directly in your area of interest
 - ✓ Better understand a work environment
 - ✓ Learn how to break into a field and find out if you have what it takes to succeed
 - ✓ Broaden your network of contacts for future reference
 - ✓ Build confidence for your professional school interviews
 - ✓ Access the most up-to-date industry information
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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING IS.....

- A proactive process initiated by you. You set the tone of the conversation with a prepared list of questions.
 - Not a plea for shadowing opportunities. People will be happy to talk to you about their experience and path. Be clear that you are just asking for information and would like a few minutes of their time. You can approach them about shadowing after you have done your informational interview and built up rapport with them.
 - Your opportunity to gather information and begin to build rapport with the person.
-

GET STARTED – STEPS TO CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

1 Identify the Health Professions Pathway you want to Learn About

- **Think about what health professions fields interest you:** Identify your interests, abilities, values, and skills, and evaluate labor conditions and trends to identify the best fields to research. The Health Professions Office, Discover Health Careers website can help you with this: <http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions/new-pre-health-longhorns/discover-health>

2 Prepare for the Informational Interview

- **Research the Health Professions Pathway:** Read all you can prior to the interview to gain a basic understanding.
- **Decide:** What information you would like to obtain about the profession. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered. See page 4 for sample questions and page 5 for a preparation worksheet.
- **Dress professionally:** Think of the impression you want to make. See our Professional Dress Guide: http://cns.utexas.edu/images/CNS/Health_Professions/PDFs/InterviewDress_cobranded_CDC_HP.pdf

¹ Gilbert, D. T. (2006). *Stumbling on happiness*. New York: A.A. Knopf. ISBN: [1400042666](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1400042666)

3 Identify your Connections & Connect!

After you have decided which health professions pathway you want to explore it is time to start making connections! Identify people to Interview. Most people enjoy talking about their work. You can learn a lot just by having a casual conversation with almost anyone. Here are some suggestions of where you can start:

- **Connect with people you know!** Friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, neighbors
- **You can also connect with people using:**
 - ✓ Professional organizations
 - ✓ A Google Search or Reference USA (database available through UT library online)
 - ✓ Organizational directories
 - ✓ LinkedIn
 - ✓ You may also call a company and ask for the name of a person by job title
- **Arrange the Interview:** Contact the person by telephone; or by an email followed by a telephone call.
 - ✓ Contact the individual and ask for 30 minutes of their time
 - ✓ Make it clear you are not seeking employment; just advice
 - ✓ Be certain to identify a date, time and location for the interview and a phone number you can use later to confirm the meeting (approximately one day in advance). Remember to be flexible in your scheduling as the interviewees are voluntarily spending their time with you.
- **Tips on Making the Call:**
 - ✓ Introduce yourself
 - ✓ State who referred you (*If you have a direct connection always state their name*)
 - ✓ State the purpose of your call

"Hi, my name is _____. I am a Pre-____ student at The University of Texas at Austin. I am researching health professions career choices and I am interested in learning more about being a _____. Jane Kim said you'd be a great person to speak with about this profession because of your experience and knowledge. I would like to speak with you more to learn about your profession. Would it be possible to schedule an appointment to meet with you for about 20-30 minutes? I am generally free on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and will be flexible to arrange a time at your convenience."

4 Conduct the Informational Interview and Follow Up

Consider conducting several interviews! Do at least three in each area that interests you. This will enable you to hear a wide range of experiences and viewpoints. The information you gather is valuable and can help you build rapport and work towards setting up a shadowing experience.

- **Conduct the Interview:**
 - ✓ Show up 5-10 minutes early. Do not be late!
 - ✓ Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional.
 - ✓ Give them a firm handshake and make eye contact.
 - ✓ Restate your purpose and why you are interested in talking with this person.
 - ✓ Refer to your list of prepared questions. Take notes and be prepared to initiate conversation since you are the interviewer. Stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Adhere to the original time request.
 - ✓ Do not put them on the spot about shadowing! You may ask them how they gained experience before applying to their professional school program. Then you may ask them if you could follow up with them about setting up a shadowing experience with them.
 - ✓ Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts.

- **Follow Up:** Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered.
 - ✓ Be sure to send a thank-you note (preferably hand-written) to your contact within one week of the interview. Keep in touch with them and let them know how helpful it was.

Sample Thank You Note:

Dear Dr. Seher,

I appreciate the time you took to talk with me today about _____. Your views and advice on the field have been very helpful to me. If there is every anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best Wishes,

Joe Health Professions Student
UT Student
521-555-0000

5 Put the Information to Use!

- **Take Action, Reach out for Shadowing now!** Review your notes and evaluate what you learned. Analyze the information you gathered. What kinds of adjustments do you need to make to your classes, plan, or goals?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Choose several questions that are based on what you would like to learn. Most of these are open-ended questions that do not require a yes or no answer so that you can engage in conversation and learn more. Keep your conversation friendly, upbeat, brief and focused on the purpose of the meeting.

- ✓ How do you get into this line of work or career field? Can you describe your career path?
- ✓ What are your roles and responsibilities within the organization?
- ✓ What do you like best about your job? What do you like least about your job?
- ✓ What education/training or degree do you need to be prepared for your job?
- ✓ What courses should a person take?
- ✓ What are some common problems you face, and how do you handle them?
- ✓ What trends or issues do you see shaping the direction of this field?
- ✓ What does it take to become successful in this field?
- ✓ What is the entry level salary range for this occupation? Fringe benefits? Personal benefits?
- ✓ What are some of the entry-level positions in this industry?
- ✓ How difficult will it be to get a job in this field after graduation from college?
- ✓ What is a typical day like for you?
- ✓ Where do you see your career advancing from your current position?
- ✓ What do you do to avoid burn out?
- ✓ How flexible can you be in this field? Do you work varied hours?
- ✓ What are some typical mistakes or errors which prevent a person from advancing in this field?
- ✓ How would you advise someone to start building a career in your field today? Where would they start? What steps would they take and experiences should they acquire? In what companies, departments, and positions?
- ✓ If you were hiring someone for this position, what kind of person would you look for? What qualifications would that person need? Which skills and personal qualities would you consider most important?

ALWAYS ASK: Who else do you know that would be helpful for me to talk to in this field? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Complete this worksheet before each informational interview you conduct. You may make copies of this worksheet.

Date: _____

Contact Person: _____

Title: _____

Company Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number (s): _____

Email: _____

Who referred you to this contact person? _____

What do you know about this contact person? _____

What is your primary goal for this informational interview? _____

Select 5-10 questions you want to ask during the interview based on the sample questions on page 4. Rephrase questions to reflect what you want to learn about during the interview:

1)
2)
3)
4)
5)
6)
7)
8)
9)
10)