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Inside Track

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING – SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Prior to your informational interview, you may wish to prepare a list of questions to help guide your conversation. Think about the information that you'd most like to find out about the organization, the particular career field, or the person. Remember to ask open-ended questions to encourage and facilitate a fruitful conversation.

Following is a list of sample questions you may choose to ask during your interview. These questions represent different levels of inquiry. Develop your questions based on your overall goals and what you are most interested in learning. The intent of informational research is to understand how your interests, skills, and value align with the goals and tasks of an organization, department, or career field.

Organization / Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These questions focus on the overall mission, function, and structure of the organization or department.• The goal is to understand how work is organized, and the keys skills and knowledge that are needed for the organization to accomplish its objectives.
Career Field / Profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These questions concentrate on gaining an overview of a specific career field or profession.• The goal is to understand job roles, tasks, and the experiences, education and development needed to be successful.
Person / Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These questions zero-in on the specific experiences of the person being interviewed.• This approach provides an opportunity to learn about an individual's career choices, preferences, and reactions to different kinds of work.



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ORGANIZATION and DEPARTMENT

Department Trends

How would describe the overall mission and goals of your organization?

What are the challenges facing the department?

What are the key strategic initiatives?

What priority projects or services have been identified?

What are the core activities, and services of this department?

How would you describe internal or external clients? What is important to them?

Where do you see growth or change occurring in the organization?

Job Roles Overview

What skills and knowledge are most critical in this organization?

What personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this department?

What are some typical job roles in this department? Entry? Mid-Level? Senior roles?

What job roles would utilize skills in (e.g. marketing, presentation, data analysis, negotiating)?

What do you see the opportunities for growth and development?

Structure/Culture

What is the management style in this organization?

How are decisions made? Do people feel included in the process?

Is there a dress code?

What is a typical day like?

What are normal work hours?

Do people work long hours? Is there flexibility? Do people take vacations?

How does your use of time vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?

How would you describe the pace and cycle of work in this area?

Are the time demands of your job specific to this department, or would anyone in this career be expected to work similar hours?

What factors would most improve your capacity to provide quality service to your organization?

I've built a target list of organizations in this field to research. Would you be willing to look at my list and give me suggestions you might have?



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CAREER FIELD and PROFESSION

Career Pathing/Occupational Outlook

What are typical job roles available in this profession? Entry? Mid-Career? Late Career?

What are typical career paths in this field?

What experiences, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?

What did you do to make yourself marketable?

What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?

Is the field growing? If so, in what areas? What are the biggest challenges facing this field?

What trends would likely to affect someone just entering this profession? At mid-career?

How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?

What changes in demand have you seen in the profession?

Where do you see the growth opportunities for the profession?

How does this career affect your lifestyle and work/family balance?

How can I learn more about the field (e.g., journal, publications, professional associations, workshops, seminars, conferences, etc.)?

What special advice would give a person entering this field? At mid-career? Late career?

What do you wish you had known about this field or organization before you entered it?

Success Factors

What are the characteristics and competencies of people who are successful in this field?

What does it take to be successful in this type of career?

What does it take, in your view, to succeed in this field, department, division, role?

What type of person is best suited to the work in this area?

What specific functional or technical knowledge is critical to this work?

What sacrifices may be necessary to be successful?



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Education, Training & Skills

What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?

What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in this job?

How did you learn these skills?

What are the educational requirements for this position or field? Is graduate school recommended/required?

What personal qualities or abilities are important for success (in this field, organization, or position)?

What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?

What kind of background or training is desirable for this work? Are there certain classes or training programs you would recommend?

What degree or certification do employers look for?

Compensation

What are the typical salary ranges in this profession? Entry? Mid-level? Senior level?

Aside from such tangible compensation as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc., what kinds of satisfaction and reward does this profession yield?



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PERSON and POSITION

Interviewee Information

What is your background (both academic and experience)?

How did your background lead you to this position?

How did you become interested in this type of work and how did you get your present job?

How long have you worked in this field?

What is the most challenging/rewarding aspect of your work/career?

Job Characteristics

How would you describe your day-to-day responsibilities?

What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of this job role?

What is unique about your job as compared with others, which are similar?

Approximately what percentage of time is spent on each type of job responsibility?

What kinds of problems and challenges do you face this role?

What constraints, such as time and funding, make the job more challenging?

What kinds of decisions do you make?

Describe some of the toughest situations you've faced in this job.

To what extent do you interact with customers/clients?

With which other departments, functional units, or levels of the hierarchy do you regularly interact?

How much flexibility do you have in determining how you perform your job?

Can you manage your own workflow, or does the nature of your work dictate the pace?

Do you work individually or predominantly in groups or teams?

How are work teams or groups organized?

What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? Least satisfying?

Is multi-tasking a skill that is required for this job?

What projects have you worked on that have been particularly interesting?



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REFERRAL/ SUGGESTIONS

Are there other departments or organizations that you would recommend as part of my research?

Can you suggest others that I might contact? May I use your name?

Based on my interests, are there professional organizations that you would recommend?

Human Resources/Career and Talent Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
400 Main Street, E19-238
Cambridge, MA 02142

(617) 452-2670 • progress@mit.edu • <http://web.mit.edu/hr/careers/>