

Sample Questions for Behavioral/Social Scientists to ask in Informational Interviews

Informational interviews help you explore the wide range of career opportunities available to someone with your training, skills, experience and interests. **The purpose is to ask for information, not a job.** They are approximately 20-60 minutes in length, can occur in person, via email, or over the phone. After you briefly introduce yourself, the bulk of the conversation should focus on them: their position, their background, their career trajectory, their advice. At the end of the interview you can return the focus to yourself, and ask questions about potential contacts, advice about your CV, etc. But for the most part, consider yourself a journalist, curious about teasing out their experience. After several interviews, you'll have enough data points to draw some conclusions about what job possibilities are available, how you should organize your job search, and prepare for the interview and compensation negotiation process.

Interview Goals: By the end of your conversation, you should understand and be able to explain five things:

1. A sense of that person's job responsibilities.
2. An understanding of how they found the position and succeeded as a job candidate in the interview process.
3. An awareness of future career opportunities for someone in that position.
4. Information about 1-2 other individuals who can share their experiences with you.
5. Information about 1-5 organizations you should explore.

As such, use your own judgment to determine which questions will get the conversation rolling and give you the answers you need to meet those five goals.

Remember, most Informational Interviews cover 4 areas:

- **Present:** (Information about their current responsibilities and the organization they work for.)
- **Past:** (Information about their academic and professional background, how they found the position, what the interview process was like, etc.)
- **Future:** (what type of opportunities do they see opening up 5-10 years down the road)
- **Advice:** (to you about individuals and organizations you should seek out, about your CV or next steps)

General informational interview questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your current responsibilities?
2. Could you describe a typical day?
3. What types of skills and experiences are key to succeeding in your position?
4. What are common qualities of individuals who are successful in your position?
5. How did you get into this field? What path led you to this position?
6. How did you organize your job search?
7. What was your interview process/job talk like?
8. What's been particularly rewarding about the path you've taken? What would you do differently?
9. What are some of the future career opportunities for someone in your position?
10. What was the most obvious difference between working in academe and working in this field? (non-academic question)

11. Can you talk about the norms working at research focused institution and how they differ from a teaching focused institution are in terms of hours/ responsibilities/ expectations,, typical compensation packages including vacation, salary range, etc /work-life balance?
12. What advice would you give someone in my position who wants to be successful in the field?
13. When you think about your first year in this position, what actions/activities were key towards your success (engaging other staff, attending meetings, your research, etc.)
14. I have a copy of my resume. Could you look at it and let me know what you think?
15. From the research and informational interviews I've done so far, I've developed a list of organizations in our field that I am interested in. Can you tell me anything about them? Are there firms I've left off that I should look at more closely?
16. Do you know of any organizations that might be expanding or hiring in the next [6] months?
17. Can you recommend anyone else for me to talk to, either with a background similar to mine (in terms of research, or international citizenship), are in the area of X?

Questions about an individual's organization:

1. What makes the organization a particularly good place to work?
2. How would you describe/what do you like about you work environment?
3. I How would you describe the culture, management style and organization here?
4. What's the history of this organization
5. Do you know of any UCSF alumni who currently work at this organization?
6. I'm interested in using my background in a somewhat unusual way (e.g., health policy, research analyst.) What advice would you have for me?

Remember, at the end, thank the person for their time and advice and be specific about what you found valuable. Also ask to keep in touch. A final statement could be something like:

Thank you so much for sharing your perspective and background. I appreciate you taking the time. I have found your advice about preparing for interview, your suggestions for my CV, and directing me towards Kofi Annan at RAND. I'll contact him in the next week. May I have your business card? I'd like to keep in touch with you as I move forward in this process. And if I can ever return the favor, please don't hesitate to contact me.

And remember to write and send a thank you note in 24-48 hours! This is the beginning of building your professional network. There are sample thank you notes on the OCPD website! Also, if you have additional questions or would like to practice a mock interview, definitely contact the OCPD!

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