

## Informational Interview Guide

An informational interview is an important part of the career exploration process. It allows you to learn about education requirements, career-path options, industry standards, and other relevant information from a professional. It is typically conducted by interviewing the professional at their place of employment. You will need to find someone to interview through a referral, through research, or by networking within your desired field. Informational interviews are usually 30 minutes in length and are not interviews for employment.

For assistance with networking and outreach see CPD's **Outreach Communication** resource.

### Purpose of the Interview

- To gather career information from a professional in the career and/or field of interest
- To serve as a networking tool to meet in person with someone in the field and learn about their career path
- To gain a better sense of the necessary steps to enter your desired profession
- To develop personal relationships and build your personal creative network or to find a mentor

### Network to Build Interview Resources

- **ArtCenter Community:** Career + Professional Development, faculty, class presenters and alumni
  - Attend industry events, hand out your business cards, and collect business cards at class presentations.
- **Personal:** Family and friends
  - Reach out to family and friends for possible contacts.
  - Use your personal sources to find out who you know.
- **Individual:** Research and affiliations (*clubs, organizations, memberships.*)
  - Research your desired field to stay up to date on trends.
  - Register with relevant professional organizations and clubs; volunteer or become an active member.
  - Make lists of inspirational organizations or companies of interest and locate professionals within these organizations to contact by phone or email.
- **Social Media:** LinkedIn, Instagram, Behance, Art Station, etc.
  - Join professional groups and organizations.
  - Collect and research contacts such as classmates and professionals.
  - Communicate with a professional and personalized message.
  - Present your work on online platforms.
  - Make use of LinkedIn's alumni search tools to find ArtCenter alumni at organizations you are interested in.

## How to Request an Informational Interview:

(Reference: CPD's **Outreach Communication** resource.)

- Introduce yourself and include your background (*school, major, year, your professional area of interest.*)
- If someone referred you, let the reader know who and what the connection is (*school, alumni, organization, family, etc.*)
- Briefly describe the type of interaction, in case the reader is not familiar with the term "informational interview".
- State that you are interested in a 30-minute meeting on site at their organization.
- Explain your professional area of interest. Why are you interested in this area of art or design? What are your career goals?
- Be specific about why you want to meet and what are you hoping to learn (Is it about education? possible career paths? what a job is really like? industry knowledge, etc.?)
- Express appreciation for their time (to read the email, to possibly meet with you).
- Give the reader your availability and how to reach you in order to schedule a meeting.
- If you would like to receive professional feedback, include a link to or attachment with your portfolio.

## How to Dress

Although it is not a job interview, you are making a first impression and hopefully a new professional relationship. Here are a few tips and suggestions.

- **Dress to Show You Care**
  - Dress professionally. Each design industry has a unique sense of style and general professional standards. Although a suit is not generally needed for an informational interview, err on the side of being more formal if you are unsure.
  - Remember that you are a guest at the organization, and that you are representing yourself, ArtCenter, and the person who referred you.
- **Personal Appearance**
  - Present a neat, clean, and tidy appearance.

## What to Bring

Supplies, questions and a great attitude!

- **Resume**
  - You can provide the person you are interviewing with your resume at the conclusion of the meeting.
  - Keep in mind that this is not a job interview.
- **Notepad**
  - Taking notes during the interview helps you remember the key points and important resources that are mentioned.
- **List of Questions**
  - Bring a prepared list of questions with you.
  - Ask questions that allow you to learn about the individual's career, education, and industry.
- **Portfolio**
  - Only bring your work if you have asked for feedback prior to the interview, or the other person has requested it.
  - Portfolio review should be conducted after the interview.

### Suggested Questions

- How did you get started in this industry?
- What education is required for this position?
- Is an internship required for this position?
- Can you start this position at entry level?
- What is a salary range for this type of position?
- What are the culture and benefits of working for a larger/smaller company?
- What is the professional path to this position?
- What type of skills does a person need to be successful in this position?
- What advice would you give to someone starting out in the profession?
- What are the challenges in this industry and/or position?
- How competitive is the field?
- What are strategies to set myself apart from other applicants?
- Is there anyone else you can refer me to that might have additional insight into this career field?

### During the Informational Interview

- **Be Friendly and Professional**
  - Show enthusiasm.
  - Introduce yourself and shake the other person's hand.
  - Express your sincere excitement at meeting them.
  - Be authentic and open to learning.
  - Remember that it's not about you!
- **Stay interested**
  - Ask relevant follow-up questions.
  - Learn their story and gain insight.
  - Maintain eye contact.
  - Write notes.
- **Close with gratitude**
  - Shake their hand and express your appreciation for the interview.

### After the Informational Interview

*(Reference: CPD's **Thank-You Messages** resource)*

Send a thank-you note or email 1-2 days after your interview and include the following points in your message:

- Express gratitude for the time taken out of the other person's schedule for the interview and for the information learned/gathered during the interview by referencing a key topic.
- Emphasize your interest in the field and in striving to achieve the necessary steps to enter this career or industry.
- Mention that you are open to any relevant positions in the field or open to meeting with others in the field that they can recommend.