

---

---

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Office of Career & Professional Development  
© 2014, UC Hastings College of the Law

---

---

## WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

- **A meeting** to gain insights about someone's field/job/employer.
- **An informal discussion** in which you gather information on areas of law, types of practice, employer culture, legal trends, career options, and other topics.
- **A way to build your network of contacts** while your contact also increases theirs.
- **An entry** into the hidden job market.
- **It is NOT a job interview.** People are more likely to help you if you come seeking information, not focused on a job.

## WHY SHOULD I CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

To obtain information you need to make your best job choice, background to enhance your application materials, and to build valuable connections in your chosen field or practice area. Both you and the person you interview receive benefits.

*You benefit because you:*

- **Meet new people** and explore different career paths.
- **Find out what people do**, day to day, in their jobs.
- **Gather** first-hand information on particular employers, practice areas or industries.
- **Make contacts** that could result in a job or internship lead.

*The people you interview benefit because they:*

- **Talk about themselves.** You might be surprised how much people enjoy doing this!
- **Mentor** someone starting out.
- **Increase their network** and meet people who potentially could fill future openings.

## WHEN DO I CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

**All the time!** Do informational interviews throughout and after law school.

## WHOM DO I CONTACT FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

### ***Start With Those You Know:***

**Make a list of people** you know. Think about the different circles in which you live, professional and personal. This includes:

- Family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and out-of-town relations
- Co-workers, supervisors, former co-workers
- Service industry businesses you regularly use (doctor, dentist, hairstylist)
- Professional association contacts
- Social and religious organizations (sports team, gym, classes, churches, etc.)
- Academic contacts (professors, other students, administrators)
- College alumni contacts (look up undergraduate friends - call your school)
- Create or update your LinkedIn profile, and reach out to connect with these contacts

### ***Think About Who You Would Like To Know:***

**Make a list of practice areas/fields** you would like to explore and attorneys in them:

- Attorneys in the news (read The Recorder, Daily Journal, California Lawyer, etc.)
- Alumni practicing in your field of law, employer, or city of interest
  - For Alumni: Ask the Career Office for assistance in obtaining alumni contact information.
  - For Other Attorneys: Lexis/Westlaw search; Martindale-Hubbell search
  - If you have a firm, company or organization in mind, use LinkedIn to see if you have a connection to it, or can introduced through a connection you have.
- People in fields outside the law to learn about alternative careers

### ***Get Out There And Meet New People:***

Possible networking arenas for attorneys include:

- Alumni Mentor Program, Career Office
- Career Office panels and programs
- Bar Association events, meetings, training sessions
- Continuing legal education classes
- Alumni events for UC Hastings, and your undergraduate and graduate schools
- Volunteer positions at non-profits or other civic organizations
- Sports teams, golf games, sporting events, gyms, religious functions, etc.

## HOW DO I SET UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

### By Phone:

- **Introduce Yourself.**

Give your **name, school, year in law school, any particular interest** you have, and additional information which would pertain to why you are calling.

**For example**, speaking to a criminal defense attorney, you might say:

- I'm interested in criminal defense because I want to be a litigator and I'm concerned about protection of individual rights.
- I've taken Criminal Procedure and Evidence and I'm planning on taking the Criminal Justice Clinic next semester.
- I clerked for the Oakland Public Defender's office last summer.
- I worked as a Counselor for a Delancy Street program for homeless youth prior to law school.

- **State How You Got Their Name.**

If it is a **Cold Call**:

- State how you found them: Alumni search, news article, etc.

If it is a **Referral**:

- Name who referred you.

- **Ask if they have 15-20 minutes to meet to discuss:**

- their area of law, employer, job, and how they got there
- legal or industry trends
- the state/nature of the legal market in your field/city
- career planning advice during law school and after
- **TIP:** It is best to meet in the attorney's office so as not to waste their time. If they prefer not to meet in the office, you can ask to meet for coffee or lunch. If they agree to meet, send a thank you email confirming the time.
- **TIP:** If they seem busy but friendly, ask for names of others they might refer you to and if you can use their name as a referral source.
- Make it clear that you are seeking **information and advice** (and *not a job*)

- **TIP:** If you have a good rapport, you can offer to email your resume before the meeting so they know something about you and you can get their feedback on it. Make it clear you are seeking feedback on the resume (not submitting it for consideration for a job.)
- **IMPORTANT!** Have a **list of questions** prepared in case the contact is unable to meet with you but is willing to speak over the phone at that moment (although that does not happen often).

#### **If you get voicemail:**

- First, **try calling at different times** to catch them in person. Try calling at 8-9 a.m. or 5-7 p.m. You can even call their receptionist or assistant and ask for the best time to call.

#### **If you have to leave a voicemail message:**

- Clearly state your name, phone number and reason for calling.
- Say that **you will call back**. Follow-up, and again try calling at different times.
- **State your name and number again** at the end to avoid the need to replay your message.
- **TIP:** You can say that you will also send an email so they can respond to you in whichever way is most convenient for them.

#### **By Email:**

- If truly uncomfortable on the phone, you can write an email incorporating the same introduction as above, but be ready to switch to directly calling for better results.  
**NOTE:** This is **NOT the best initial approach** as emails are just as easy to dismiss or disregard as they are to send. It is best to initiate contact live, and use email to continue the connection.
- State that you will follow up by phone to determine a mutually convenient time to meet.
- **Do not send an email with all the questions you have prepared.** It is inconsiderate of the person's time to expect them to respond thoughtfully to multiple questions over email.

## **HOW DO I CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?**

#### **Prepare Ahead of Time:**

- **Research** your contact, their organization and practice.
- Arrive early and **dress professionally**.
- Bring a copy of your resume and offer it only if:
  - They request it.
  - You established a rapport and feel comfortable asking for advice about it.

- Have your **list of questions** and skills summary ready. Be prepared to take notes, but don't let your note-taking detract from the natural flow of the conversation.

### **At The Meeting (Format):**

- **Thank** your contact for meeting with you!
- **If a Referral:** Begin the meeting by mentioning the person who referred you or the mutual connection and your reason for setting up the meeting.
- **Overview:** Give a brief overview of yourself and your areas of interest.
- **Ask your questions.** Bring a list of questions, but keep the conversation going by asking follow-up questions.
- **Listen!** This is not a job interview so the focus is on the person with whom you are meeting. For the most part, you should be listening rather than speaking.
- **Get names** of other people in the field, practice area or organization with whom you might speak. Ask **who** else you can talk to.
- **Watch the time.** If time is running out, mention this. If they say it is all right to stay, then do so.
- **Ask to stay in touch** and thank the person for their time and advice.
- **Ask for referrals!** Who else might be helpful to speak with?

### **Possible Questions to Ask:**

**Ask open ended questions to encourage conversation.** These sample questions should help you formulate your own questions.

- How did you obtain your job? What career track did you follow?
- What career paths have you seen other people follow to this particular practice area?
- In your opinion, what areas of law are experiencing the most growth?
- What are the legal trends in your area of law?
- What changes do you anticipate in your practice area in the next five years?
- What is your employer/job like? What is a typical day/week/month like for you?
- What project(s) are you working on right now?
- When you first started out (with this employer), how long did it take for you to have the opportunity to conduct a deposition? Argue a motion? Conduct a trial? Handle a closing?
- What excites you about your work? Why did you choose this job/field/employer?
- What type of training is necessary to enter this practice area/field? How did you obtain specialized training?
- What type of skills does your office look for when you hire people in this field?
- What professional associations or groups are advantageous to join in this field?

- What type of person succeeds in this field? What are the skills necessary?
- What problems or issues are facing this employer/practice/area of law?
- What opportunities exist for growth, professional development, and client development?
- What are the major rewards/frustrations of your job?
- If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?
- What do you wish you had known when entering this field?
- Do you have any advice on the best way to market oneself to enter this field?
- Do you have any tips on interviewing successfully?
- Would you mind taking a look at my resume and giving me any advice or suggestions you might have for its improvement? (Ask for this near the end of the informational interview because you don't want to cut the conversation short.)
- What professional materials/publications should I be reading in this field?
- \*If you have salary concerns, this is a great time to get that information by asking about salary ranges for given jobs or levels.

#### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW:**

- **Review your notes**, formulate new questions, ask yourself how you feel about the field /work/employer.
- **Send a thank you letter within 24-48 hours.**
  - By Email: In most cases it's fine to do this via email (as long as you avoid casual email format/spelling/grammar), but use your judgment, based on the rapport between you and your contact.
  - By Mail: If they are more formal ("old school"), send a hardcopy thank you note or letter.
  - Mention the topics you discussed and whether or not you utilized their referrals.
- MOST IMPORTANTLY, **keep in touch with the practitioner.**
  - Send links to articles they might be interested in, holiday cards, or notes updating your progress.
  - Follow up on suggestions and update them that you did so.

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD RECORD-KEEPING**

Keeping good records while searching for a job is very important. For example, you will want to remember that you left a voicemail message for someone who calls you two months later.

- **Organize a file folder**, notebook, or an electronic cross-referencing system. For instance, if Abby Attorney gives you a referral to Joe Corporate, note it on both Abby's and Joe's files or cards.
- **Cross-reference** by name of organization, type of law, name of individual.
- **Note the dates you called**, met with, or wrote to individuals. Also note whether you said that you would take a certain action by a specific date to ensure follow-through.
- **Keep copies** of all your correspondence.

### **ADDITIONAL READING**

(available in the Career Office):

Cynthia Chin-Lee, *It's Who You Know: The Magic of Networking In Person and on the Internet* (BookPartners, Inc, 1998)

Kimm Walton, *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Thomson/West, 2008)

Marcy Lerner, et al., *Vault Guide to Schmoozing* (Vault.com Inc., 2001)

Donna Gerson, *Building Career Connections* (NALP 2007)