

Informational Interview I

The **BIG** Idea

- What is an informational interview, and how can it help me find a satisfying career?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: Understanding the Informational Interview (10 minutes)
- II. Informational Interview vs. Job Interview (15 minutes)
- III. Generating Questions (15 minutes)
- IV. Wrap Up: If The Job Fits... (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 111, An Informational Interview
- Student Handbook pages 112 and 113, Informational Interview vs. Job Interview
- Student Handbook page 114, Got Questions?

FACILITATOR PAGES:

- Facilitator Resource 1, Benefits of Informational Interviews
- Facilitator Resource 2, Informational Interview vs. Job Interview Answers

- Laptop and LCD projector or overhead projector
- Chart paper and markers

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Understand the benefits of an informational interview, including its potential as a networking opportunity.
- Identify similarities and differences between an informational interview and a job interview.
- Generate a list of informational interview questions.

OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the purpose and benefits of an informational interview. To understand the benefits, students read a personal account of an informational interview. They identify benefits of that meeting. After noting differences and similarities between an informational interview and a job interview, students generate questions appropriate to ask in an informational interview. The lesson concludes with students analyzing a quotation about the value of finding a career that best “fits” your needs, interests, skills, etc., and how an informational interview is key to reaching this goal.

PREPARATION

- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook pages 112 and 113, Informational Interview vs. Job Interview**
 - **Student Handbook page 114, Got Questions?**
 - **Facilitator Resource 1, Benefits of Informational Interviews**
- List the day’s **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day’s vocabulary words and definitions on the board.
- Determine pairs for **Activity II, Informational Interview vs. Job Interviews**.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the famous career guidebook, *What Color is Your Parachute?* coined the term “informational interview,” describing this process as “trying on jobs to see if they fit you.” An **informational interview** is an essential step in the career search process. In addition to providing jobseekers an opportunity to learn more about a career field, it enables them to build a network of contacts within that field. The power of an informational interview should not be underestimated: Statistics reveal that just one out of every 200 resumes leads to a job offer with some studies claiming the number as high as one out of 1,500. In comparison, one out of every twelve informational interviews results in a job offer.* Another source suggests that as many as 90% of jobs are not advertised; thus the informational interview can help a

jobseeker gain insight into the hidden job market.** For all of these reasons, and many more, an informational interview should be treated as an integral part of students' networking and job-hunting plans.

Statistic Sources:

*http://www.quintcareers.com/information_background.html

**http://www.quintcareers.com/information_dress.html

VOCABULARY

Informational Interview: a meeting between a job seeker and someone working in a career field for the purposes of learning about an occupation, discovering whether more training or experience is needed, how one might get future job leads, and networking within an industry.

Networking: the art of building alliances or talking to people who can help you and whom you can help.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

DO NOW:

If you prefer, you may choose to use **Student Handbook page 111, An Informational Interview** as a DO NOW. Give the students 5 minutes to complete it. Once they complete the page, continue with the **Warm Up** discussion.

For **Activity I, Warm Up**, rather than use **Student Handbook page 111, An Informational Interview**, you can share your own informational interview experience.

For **Activity II, Informational Interview vs. Job Shadow**, you may prefer to have students work independently. If you are running short on time, you may have students record only the number corresponding to each statement in the Venn Diagram rather than rewriting each statement.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. WARM UP (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Do you have questions about your career goals? Do you wonder if you have what it takes to be in your dream career? One of the best ways to learn about a field is to talk, or **network**, with people in the field. Someone working in the career can tell you what a job is *really* like – the challenges, opportunities, outlook, and more. Conversations with people in the field are known as **informational interviews**. You'll have an opportunity to ask your host questions during your Job Shadow day – a chance to practice your information interviewing skills.

Why bother with an informational interview if there is no specific job available? One reason is that informational interviews could lead to a job down the road. Statistics show that one out of every 200 resumes leads to a job offer. In comparison, one out of every twelve informational interviews results in a job offer.*

In the next two lessons, you will learn more about the art of informational interviewing. Let's begin by reading about a sample informational interview.

Statistic Source:

*http://www.quintcareers.com/information_background.html

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Turn to **Student Handbook page 111, An Informational Interview**. Read the story about an informational interview, and then answer the questions at the bottom.

[Give students five minutes to complete the activity. When time is up, invite volunteers to share their responses to the questions on the handbook page. Write their responses on the board or chart paper.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Are you surprised by how much this job seeker got out of the informational interview? Explain your answer. [Give students a minute to discuss their ideas.]
4. [Project **Facilitator Resource 1, Informational Interview Benefits** on the LCD panel or overhead projector.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: In addition to the benefits you identified, there are a number

of others you may not have considered! Let's review them together.

[Invite volunteers to read each of the benefits as listed on the overhead transparency. Elaborate on any they may not understand by giving an example.]

II. Informational Interview vs. Job Interview (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** An informational interview is not the same as a job interview. Because you are not interviewing for a job, and *you* are the one who gets to ask the questions, an informational interview is less stressful than a real interview. Even though there may not be an actual job opening, the informational interview is a great opportunity to practice for the real thing. The process can help you build the necessary confidence required for a job interview.
2. [Project **Student Handbook page 112, Informational Interview vs. Job Interview**, and have students turn to this page.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: By identifying similarities and differences between informational and job interviews, you will gain a better understanding of the goals and purposes of each type of interview. Working with a partner, read each statement on **Student Handbook pages 112 and 113, Informational Interview vs. Job Interview**. Then decide whether it describes an informational interview, a job interview, or both, and write it in the correct place on the Venn diagram. If a statement is true of both interviews, write it in the space where the circles overlap.

3. [Model how to do the activity. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the first statement: "Research the company prior to interview."]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Researching a company before interviewing for a real job is essential. Researching before an informational interview is important, too. Since an informational interview generally lasts no more than 20 minutes, you want to use your time wisely by asking questions you can't find answers to online or in company literature. Researching a company before an informational interview helps you come up with intelligent and relevant questions. So, I will write the statement "Research the company prior to interview" in the overlapping section.

4. [Divide students into predetermined pairs. Allow pairs 10 minutes to complete the activity. After, have the class come together to share how they categorized each item. Encourage students to provide a rationale for why they categorized each item as they

did. For guidance see **Facilitator Resource 2, Informational Interview v. Job Interview Answers.**]

III. Generating Questions (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Remember, an informational interview is your opportunity to answer questions about a career that really interests you. In this activity, we will explore and generate good questions to ask on an informational interview.
2. [Have students open to **Student Handbook page 114, Got Questions?** Instruct them to take the next few minutes to write down three questions they would want to ask someone working in the career they plan to pursue.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** There are some questions that you may want to know answers to, but may be too personal or sensitive to ask. For example, did anyone ask about salary? [Give students a chance to respond, and if possible, ask students to share how they asked this question.] It's okay to ask about salary, but you need to ask in a tactful and polite way. For example, instead of asking, "What do you make?" you can ask a more general, less personal question, such as "What can a person in an entry level position expect to make in this career field?"
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Did anyone ask a question such as, "What does this company do or make?" Why might you *not* want to ask this question? [Give students a chance to respond.] As we discussed in the previous activity, there are many questions you can find the answers to by researching the company in advance, enabling you to use your limited interview time to ask questions you can't find answers to elsewhere. To research, you may review the company's web site, read their literature, or even browse a general career web site, such as CFWV.com (or other website students are familiar with), and look up your career to see what it entails.
5. [Project **Student Handbook page 114, Got Questions?** on the LCD or overhead projector.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Let's come up with more questions to make sure you take full advantage of this opportunity. Look at the question categories at the bottom of **Student Handbook page 114, Got Questions?**. See if you can come up with one question for each category, and write it in the box next to its category. For example, you should ALWAYS ask a couple of **networking** questions, as this is one of the main goals of the informational interview. You might ask, "Who else would you suggest I speak to?"

6. [Model the kinds of questions you can ask, pointing out that it's okay to ask questions about the employee's personal experience. Read aloud and point to the category: "What I Need to Do to Get a Job in this Field."]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Rather than asking the generic question, "What do I need to do to get a job in this field?," the informational interview is a perfect opportunity to ask a person working in the career about his or her personal experiences. People enjoy talking about themselves and sharing their successes. What are some questions you could ask to get this conversation started? [Students respond.]

7. [When students finish writing questions for each category, bring the class back together. Invite students to share questions in each category, and use their responses to create a class list of best questions to ask on an informational interview.]

IV. Wrap Up: If the Job Fits... (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** "Informational interview" is a term created by the Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the best-selling career book *What Color is Your Parachute?* Bolles describes the process of informational interviews as "trying on jobs to see if they fit you." What do you think Bolles means?
2. [Have students discuss their ideas about the quotation. If the following point does not come out of their responses, be sure they understand that meeting with, and asking questions of, people working in careers of interest enables them to see if the job is one that best "fits" their needs, interests, abilities, etc.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great job today! Next week, you will research the companies you'll be visiting and practice informational interviews with a partner.

Benefits of Informational Interviews

Informational interviews help you...

- Learn more about a career and the skills required to succeed.
- Grow your network of contacts by receiving referrals to other professionals in your field of interest.
- Clarify your own goals as you explore different career paths.
- Uncover the hidden job market: up to 90% of all jobs are never advertised.
- Develop confidence and gain practice for real job interviews. (Informational interviews tend to be less stressful than job interviews).
- Evaluate whether the career is compatible with your skills, interests, values, personality, lifestyle, and goals.
- Get the most up-to-date career information.
- Gain insight on needs and opportunities in your career field.

Source: Adapted from <http://career.ucla.edu/Students/ExploreCareers/WhatsAnInformationalInterview.aspx>

Informational Interview vs. Job Interview Answers

Informational Interview

- No expectation of receiving a job offer after interview
- Main focus is on gaining more knowledge about a company and career field
- Interview may be with an assistant or someone without hiring power
- You are the interviewer

Both

- Research the company prior to interview
- Follow up with a thank you note
- Dress in business casual clothing
- Don't use slang or act too casual around the company contact
- Is a professional meeting
- Ends with a plan of action*

Job Interview

- Main focus is promoting yourself for a specific job opening
- You are the interviewee

*Explain to students that when completing a job interview, they should know in advance what the rest of hiring process looks like and when they should check back with the company. For informational interviews, students should know who they will talk to next, or decide whether they are prepared to apply for jobs.

An Informational Interview

YOU: a junior in high school, interested in a career in construction, but not sure what kind of education you'll need or next steps to take

JOE SMITH: a friend of your next-door-neighbor's, he owns a small construction company

THE SET-UP:

Your neighbor encourages you to call Joe Smith to learn more about your future career, so you do. While you're on the phone, Joe interrupts you twice to yell instructions to one of his workers. Joe is on a tight deadline this week, and can't meet with you at all, but offers to give you 15 minutes of his time first thing Saturday morning, 8am sharp. On Friday afternoon, he calls to let you know that first thing tomorrow won't work. He's scheduled the cement mixers to arrive then, and suggests you meet at noon instead.

THE CONVERSATION:

When you arrive, Joe invites you to sit with him in his truck, and he spends a half hour telling you what he knows between bites of baloney and cheese sandwiches and gulps of coffee.

He learned the business from his father, he says, but would recommend further education for someone starting out today. He mentions a good program at the community college, where you can also take the management and accounting courses you'll need if you want to run your own company one day.

He also recommends two apprenticeships – one for carpenters and one for electricians. He describes one of the local trade schools as "lousy." He says "the guys who graduate from there are a bunch of know-nothings."

He says he loves being in business for himself, loves seeing the finished product, loves problem-solving, and hates the stress of being behind schedule. Just then, someone knocks on the truck window and says they're running behind schedule. He laughs, says he needs to get back to work, shakes your hand, and tells you to call him if you "need anything – anything at all."

THE FOLLOW-UP:

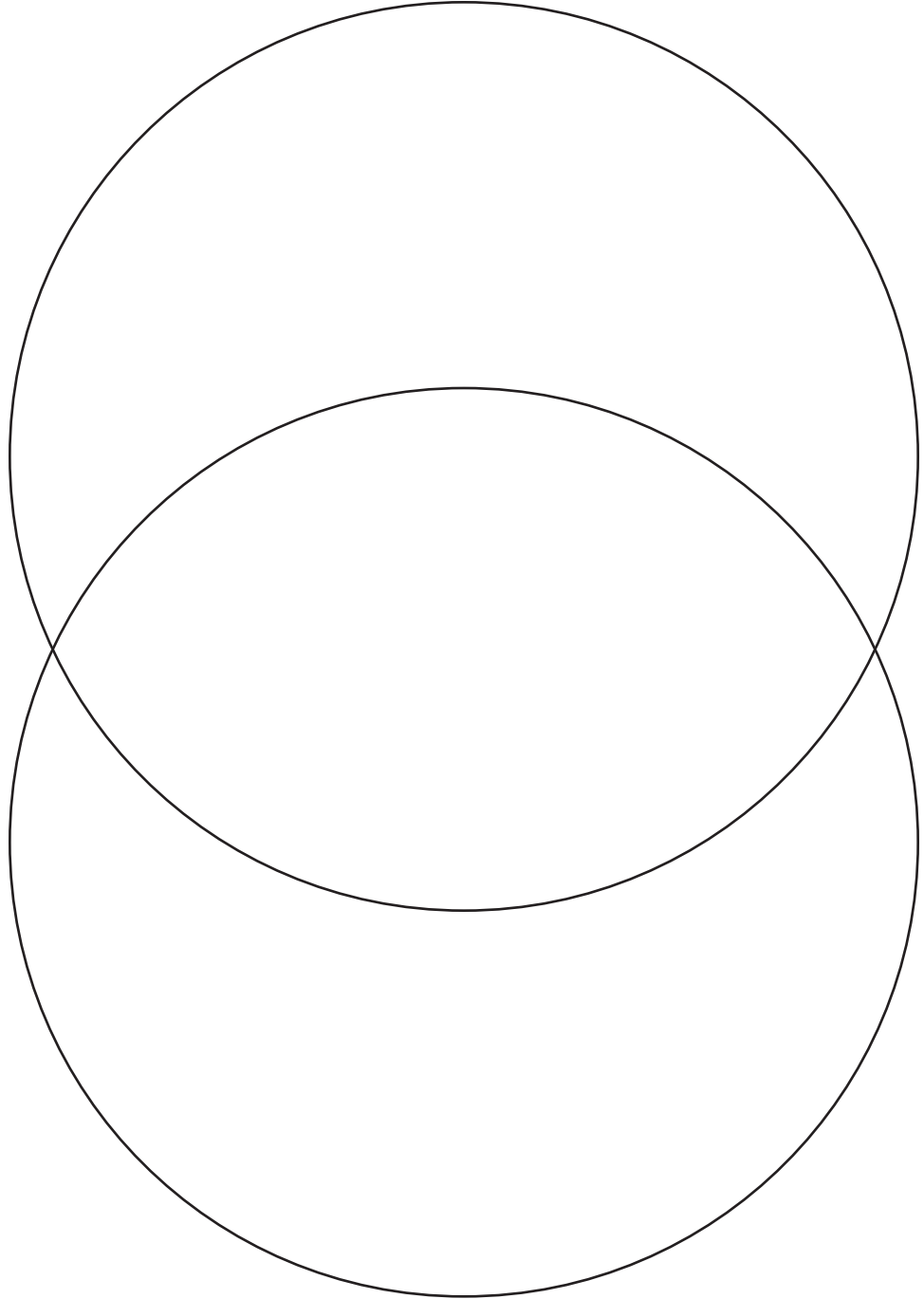
1. What did you learn from visiting the construction site?
2. What did you learn from interviewing Joe Smith?
3. Was Mr. Smith generous with his time? Explain.
4. How should you follow up on this informational interview?
5. Is there any benefit to staying in touch with Mr. Smith? Explain.

Informational Interview vs. Job Interview

Directions: Read each statement on the next page, and write it in the correct place on the diagram below. Some statements apply to Informational Interviews, some apply to Job Interviews, and some apply to both.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

JOB INTERVIEW



Statements

1. Research company prior to interview
2. No expectation of receiving a job offer after interview
3. Follow up with thank you note
4. Main focus is to gain more knowledge about a company and career field
5. You are the interviewer
6. Main focus is promoting yourself for a specific job opening
7. You are the interviewee
8. Dress in business casual clothing
9. Interview may be with an assistant or someone without hiring power
10. Don't use slang or act too casual around the company contact
11. Is a professional meeting
12. Ends with a plan of action

Got Questions?

Directions: Write three questions to ask someone working in a career field that interests you most.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Question Categories

Directions: Write one question for each category.

What the Job is Like	
What I Need to Do to Get a Job in this Field (Education, Background Experience, etc.)	
Working Conditions	
How to Get Ahead in this Career (On-the-Job Behavior)	
Future/Outlook of Career Field	
Salary	
Referral/Networking	