INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS allow you to gather information about a specific company or industry by talking with professionals.

The object of this face-to-face discussion is to:

- Meet and cultivate contacts with experienced professionals in businesses or industries of interest to you.
- Learn about specific companies, projects in development, job market conditions, and various hiring practices.
- To obtain referral names of other professionals to meet and interview.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:
People hire people. The more professionals you know and the more information you have about companies and industries, the more likely you are to be successful. An informational interview provides an opportunity to learn the ins and outs of a job title of interest to you, get industry insight and to meet new people.

WHY WOULD A BUSY PROFESSIONAL SPEAK WITH YOU?
Most people, by human nature, love to talk about themselves, their work and their career. Many professionals are keen to give back and support the next generation of professionals following in their footsteps. A savvy one is always on the lookout for good people.

FIRST STEPS:
- Research the company or industry of interest to you. Who are the people making things happen? Do an internet search or read trade publications to get ideas.
- Check in with your instructors, department directors, classmates and friends. Let them know who or what you’re interested in; maybe they know the person or someone at the company and can refer you.
- Use LinkedIn to research companies or people.
- Determine who you would like to interview: name and title, company if applicable. For a fine artist this could be a gallery owner or museum curator; for a freelance photographer this could be a magazine photo editor or an actual photographer; if you’re considering a job in a company, find someone working in the job of interest to you.
- Get some form of contact information for this person: an email address, a company telephone number. Look at websites or blogs for contact info.
- If you have the email address of the person you would like to contact and were referred to this person by someone else, here’s an example of how to format your email subject line:
  Subject: referred by Ann Academy - request for an informational interview
- If you have the email address of the person you would like to contact but no referral, here are examples of how to format your email subject line:
Subject: like your work – request for informational interview

Subject: interested in your company – request for informational interview

- If you only have the company phone number, make the call. If you can only reach the operator or receptionist, ask to speak to the person by name. If unavailable, do not leave a message. Call back until you speak with him/her.

- Introduce yourself. State what you are interested in...if it’s a person’s gallery or work, or if it’s a company and their work, projects or products. Be specific. Let him/her know that you would appreciate 15 minutes of his/her time to conduct an informational interview. Be open to time and date and in-person or on the phone.

**RULES OF THE GAME - THIS IS NOT A JOB INTERVIEW**

- Remember that you are gathering facts for the future and cultivating connections for your network. Emphasize the fact that you are not seeking employment. And hold yourself to that.

- Be prompt. Stick to the 15-minute format. If the interviewer chooses to continue, all the better.

- You conduct the interview. Prepare the questions you would like to ask in advance. You will be leading the interview, so rehearse your question and have them written out for easy reference. Take notes on their answers.

- If applicable and if you feel there is a good rapport between you and the person you are interviewing, politely ask him/her at the end to refer you to a colleague who might provide you additional information.

- Develop an opening comment or icebreaker. A story about the person’s work or why you like or use a company’s product would be appropriate.

- The person you interview could very well ask to see your work. You have options here. Yes you could bring your business card, your portfolio and/or a copy of your reel. If, and only if, you are asked for any of these things should you take them out of your bag and present them. Make sure your portfolio is uploaded to your desk top and is easy to access without internet access.

- Your other option is to let the person know you are happy to email him/her with the info they seek. This is also great because you will then receive the person's contact info.

- Dress professionally to the situation.

- Follow up. Write a thank you note. This is NOT optional.

- Always remember an informational interview is not a job interview.
SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Be prepared to ask at least five questions. You may choose from the list below. Remember, your goal is to stimulate conversation, listen and take notes.

- How did you get started in (fill in appropriately)?
- Can you describe a typical day?
- What do you like best about your work?
- What do you like best about your company?
- What advice do you have for someone just entering this industry?
- What specific skills and attitudes does someone need to succeed in this type of work?
- Do you belong to any professional organizations?
- What blogs or publications do you follow or read?
- What future trends do you see?
- Where do you see your work in five years?
- Who do you consider your competition? How do you rate them?
- How did you get your start?
- What was your career path?
- What is your educational background?
- How did you happen to join the company?
- What kind of people do you look for when hiring?
- What are the average entry-level salaries for this industry?
- May I have one of your cards?
- What other professionals do you know that I could speak with? Could you give me their names?

The last question is vital in the process of informational interviewing. Part of the goal of informational interviewing is to obtain at least two (2) referral names of professionals that you may contact. Again, let the flow of the interview and your rapport be the guide, as sometimes it might not feel right to ask.

FOLLOW UP

- In the current business climate we recommend a day-of email thank you note. Email is the best way to follow up with the people that would be most influential in hiring you, or anyone senior to him/her.
- In addition to the thank you email a hand written note is encouraged and appropriate. As an artist, you can make a card that showcases or captures your design sense. You can also buy basic blank note cards at a stationery store.
- Keep the contact info of the person you interviewed. Consider connecting with them on LinkedIn. Keep in touch by the email or phone periodically.
RESEARCH – COMPANIES, PROJECTS, PEOPLE, GALLERIES

- Keep it Simple and **FOCUS** any search: start with the Companies, People, Projects and Galleries that interest you most.

- Narrow your list of targets. Start with your top five. You'll get overwhelmed quickly if you try to research every Game company or Art Gallery in the Western U.S.

- Understand your art and style and match that to the companies and galleries you seek. If you're more goth warrior, skip over the companies doing pastels and kittens. If you're a figurative painter, skip the galleries looking for only for modern and abstract works of art.

- Visit the **AAU library**. The Academy of Art University has a library full of information for each department and finding a career. They also offer access to many online industry publications so you can do research anytime anywhere.

- Hit the streets. Visit the galleries, restaurants, cafes, bars and hair salons in your city, town or neighborhood to scout our potential places to hang your art.

- Read the publications that professionals in your field might read. Think of trade publications or popular culture magazines relevant to your field. Follow blogs of the people influencing the art and design area of interest to you.

- The internet is another tool in your research arsenal. Look at company websites, blog and social media profiles. Look for **Careers or Jobs or About Us** sections to further narrow your search.

- The **AAU Job Board** is an incredible resource to learn who is hiring and looking for artistic talent. It's exclusive to students are alumni of the school. You can search by company or gallery name, artistic talent or skill and access info on key people and contact information.

- **LinkedIn** is an invaluable research tool. You can search for people and people within companies. You can search for companies. You can follow specific companies; learn the players in each company, search job openings, and network with other professionals and alumni.

- **Workbook.com** is another great resource for you to find info about companies in your field. It's especially great when you're looking to discover firms in a specific industry or geography.

- Get clear on who you'd like to connect with. Are you looking for a gallery manager, the owner, the person who selects new works, an HR manager? Make inquiries – by email, phone or in person – to find the right person to connect with.

- Follow the trail. As you conduct your research you'll get bits of info that will expand (or contract) your search. Follow the links, referrals, and connections that lead you in your desired direction.