

Section VI: Informational Interviewing

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Informational interviewing is asking people specific questions about their careers in pursuit of information, narrowing your career search, and making connections with practitioners who may lead to jobs down the road. Once you have met new people or identified people you would like to meet, you should begin informational interviewing. Informational interviews differ from job interviews in two important ways:

1. You are the interviewer and ask the questions.
2. You are looking for information, not a job.

Informational interviewing allows you to obtain greater insight into the day-to-day aspects of law practice and helps you narrow your career options. It is also a good way to establish relationships with attorneys who can be beneficial to you when you have gone past the informational stage and are ready to begin job hunting. Often, there is a slight overlap between informational interviewing and networking.

The Hidden Job Market

Informational interviewing provides you with an opportunity to access the hidden job market. By meeting new people and asking them questions about their careers, you are putting yourself in a position to hear about job opportunities. It is common for someone you meet to want to help you gain experience. Often they will let you know if their firm or organization is seeking to hire or if they know of someone who is seeking to hire.

Setting Up Informational Interviews

You may call the person, email him or her, or send a letter to request an informational interview. When you contact them, explain who you are, where you got their name, and why you are contacting them. Be sure to thank them for their time.

If you are going to call, try to find out: if they are available to talk, when you can call them again, when you can meet with them, and where they would like to meet. It may be beneficial to meet at their office where information for additional contacts is readily available.

Keep in mind that you may have to contact several people before you find someone available to meet with you. Do not get discouraged if someone does not call you back. It is crucial to contact many people in order to have several quality informational meetings. Be persistent!

Questions to Ask During the Interview

Set the person at ease. Let them know you are not looking for a job from them, but to gather information and advice. Be respectful of their time, have specific questions that you want to ask, and take no more than 20–30 minutes to do so. *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams* by Kimm Walton, a book available in the CSO, has an excellent section on setting up informational interviews.

Sample Questions to Ask

I'm interested in [field of law]. Could you tell me what your day-to-day practice involves?

What do you like best/least about your job/field of law?

What is most challenging about your job/field of law?

Have you always practiced in [area]? How did you get interested in it? What else did you do beforehand?

Tell me about your career path.

How did you get this position?

Are there certain classes I should take in law school?

Are there particular skills or personality traits that you think are needed in your kind of practice that might be different from other kinds of lawyering?

How are my skills and accomplishments transferable to your area of law/type of practice?

Would you suggest improvements to the content or appearance of my résumé?

How should someone with my level of experience approach prospective employers?

What are the most important qualities you look for when making a hiring decision?

If you were in charge of hiring, what would be important to you: GPA, academic performance, personality, work experience, other requirements? Why?

What types of assignments would a law clerk be likely to receive working in this department?

What advice would you give to someone who wants to get into this field?

How do people find out about actual job openings in this area?

How easy is lateral mobility in this area of law?

And most importantly:

Who else would you recommend I speak with to find out more information?

May I tell them you recommended I talk to them?

To Résumé or Not to Résumé

Remember that the goal of an informational interview is information, not a job. If you are setting up an informational interview via letter, do not enclose a résumé. Résumés are for job interviews, not informational interviews. However, once you are face-to-face, it would be appropriate to ask the person to review your résumé and provide feedback. Therefore, you should bring your résumé with you to the informational interview.

After the Informational Interview

There are three important things to do after an informational interview:

1. Send a thank you letter.
2. Follow up on suggestions you received.
3. Keep in touch with your contact, especially to let him or her know if suggestions worked or contacts led to a job.

Sample Informational Interview Request

Your Name and Contact Information

Date

Individual Name
Company Name
Mailing Address

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

The purpose of this letter is to request an informational interview with you. I am a first-year student at The John Marshall Law School considering a career in _____ and your insights about this career choice would be most appreciated.

I am interested in learning about being a [practice area] attorney, what skills are most important for success in this field, and the career path for this type of work. I expect to take no more than 20 minutes of your time and can arrange a meeting at your convenience.

I realize you are very busy, but I would appreciate the opportunity to learn from your experiences. I look forward to having the opportunity to meet with you. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Note: This is a Sample Letter and should **NOT** be copied word for word.

Jay Z. Ruthenberg

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October 1, 2017

Ms. Sarah Hansen
Nagel, Hodge & Green
3660 W. Washington Way
Los Angeles, CA 90660

Dear Ms. Hansen:

I am writing to you after reading a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* about your success in the *Roth v. Jones* case. Congratulations on your victory. Since you are an alumnus of The John Marshall Law School and a member of the Los Angeles legal community, I am hoping you can offer me some information and advice regarding law firms and beginning a litigation career in Los Angeles.

After graduating from John Marshall this May, my plan is to relocate to Los Angeles. I went to USC and fell in love with the area. I am particularly looking forward to beginning my legal career there, and have researched many firms that practice criminal litigation in this area. I would appreciate learning more about your firm and what it is like to practice criminal law in Southern California.

I am interested in pursuing a career in criminal litigation and have the skills necessary to excel in this field. You may not be actively involved on the firm's hiring committee; however, I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you to learn more about your firm and career. I have sent a copy of my resume to Donna Beam, your firm's hiring attorney, and would like information about the Los Angeles legal community and suggestions for potential sources for further information and employment.

I will be in Los Angeles from mid-December through the first week of January and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at that time. I will call or email you in advance of my visit to see if there is a convenient time for us to meet. I look forward to speaking with you .

Sincerely,

Jay Z. Ruthenberg