

CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Informational interviews are extremely valuable both as a research tool and as a networking technique. It is an opportunity for a candidate to learn more about a practice area, the role of an attorney in that specific organization. Informational interviewing is not an opportunity to ask for a job, but it is a chance to make a strong first impression that may lead to future contacts and opportunities. To get the most out of an informational interview, it is helpful to prepare ahead of time. The following steps will assist candidates as they set-up and conduct informational interviews. In addition, below is a sample list of questions that can be asked during an informational interview.

Step 1: Setting up the Meeting

Informational interviews may be conducted in person or over the phone. In setting up the meeting, both email and phone are appropriate; however, if you are contacting alumni listed in YLS Career Connections use the contact method they list as preferred. The initial outreach should be concise and professional, briefly introducing you and why you are reaching out. Below is an example of an initial outreach to an YLS alumna from Career Connections:

“I am currently a 1L at Yale Law School, and I plan to pursue a career in entertainment law in Los Angeles. I found your profile on YLS Career Connections, and notice that you have had great success in the entertainment industry. I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak with you about your experiences at YLS and your career path. Please let me know if there is a convenient time for us to talk. Thank you in advance for your help.”

Step 2: Conducting the Meeting

Start by introducing yourself and talk a bit about your background

It is important to keep in mind that for the most part you will run this meeting, so start by explaining who you are, who referred you, and why you have requested the meeting. This is an opportunity for you to present your story.

Ask engaging and insightful questions

Your goal is to learn more about the industry, the practice area, and the typical duties of an attorney at the organization. Keep your questions professional, but this is an opportune forum to ask about daily responsibilities, work-life balance, and new trends that may exist in the industry.

Show them your resume

It is appropriate to explain that you have put together a resume and would appreciate his/her feedback as a practice area expert. Do not feel you need to respond to the feedback, instead just listen and say “thank you.” You don't have to act on every piece of feedback as you'll receive plenty of it.

Step 3: Closing the meeting

At the end of the meeting, ask for recommendations as to next steps as you further your exploration in the field. Be sure to thank the individual for his/her time, and ask if you may have his/her business card so you can keep him/her posted on your progress.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

The Organization and the State of the Industry

- What characteristics does a successful attorney have at this organization?
- What are the current trends/changes you have seen in this practice area?
- What developments on the horizon do you see affecting the practice area in the future?
- How is the industry changing and how do you see your organization adapting to those changes?
- What specialized technologies does the organization use?
- What future industry trends do you project will affect your organization?
- How does the organization differ from its competitors?
- What are the organization's goals and objectives for the coming years?
- What are the organization's policies regarding X, Y, Z?

Internal Atmosphere

- How is the organization structured?
- What is management's philosophy?
- What kind of atmosphere do they strive to create?
- What is the corporate culture?
- What kind of group activities does the organization encourage?
- How often do you work in groups vs. on your own?
- How are project teams organized?
- Are there formal training programs in the organization?
- Are there rotational opportunities in the organization?
- What are the typical jobs to which people leaving the firm have entered?
- How is performance measured?
- Is there a regulated exchange of feedback?

Career Fields/Positions

- What are the major responsibilities and skills required of this position?
- What are the key responsibilities of a junior attorney in X practice area?
- What is a typical day like?
- What do you find most satisfying about the job? The least satisfying?
- What types of decisions are made at your level?
- What part of the job do you find most challenging?

Skills and Experience

- What classes, clinics or other activities should I consider to prepare me for this practice area?
- When a junior attorney is hired, what are the qualifications you look for?
- Which of my skills set me apart from others in the field?
- Do you think my experiences thus far make me competitive for this practice area?
- Taking into account my skills, education, and experience, what other practice areas would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?