# Student Guide for Conducting Informational Interviews

**Overview**

An **Interview** is a meeting or conversation between two or more people, usually face-to-face, to obtain information or evaluate someone’s qualifications and credentials. Interviews also help the interviewer get an overall impression of the interviewee and his/her soft skills, like communication skills, listening skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills.

An **Informational Interview** is an informal discussion focused on obtaining career advice, gaining educational guidance, building a professional network, or understanding the corporate culture of a potential future workplace. Informational interviews are different from job interviews, because the conversation is not about hiring or a a specific job. Instead, it is a non-threating, learning opportunity.

**Informational Interview Tips**

Though interviews may seem intimidating, being **Prepared, Positive,** and **Practiced** go a long way towards appearing confident and successful. In preparing for your informational interview, keep in mind:

* **Dress Appropriately.** Most company environments have a certain dress code. Your session leader will best be able to advise you on how people working at the company you are visiting usually dress for work. Employees at different levels of the company or in different jobs may have different dress codes. If you do not know the environment, it is always advisable to dress professionally. For example, a collared shirt and slacks/dress pants and closed-toed shoes.
* **Make a Good First Impression.** Make eye contact when you first walk into a room with the person you will be interviewing. Introduce yourself with a handshake. Handshakes should be firm and short. If your hands tend to sweat, keep a tissue in your hand and place it in your pocket right before you go into the room to shake hands.
* **Stay Focus.** Try to maintain frequent eye contact to show that you are listening, focused on the speaker. Occasionally, the person you are interviewing may change topics or talk about things that are off-topic. Remember: you are in charge of this informational interview! It is your responsibility to bring the individual back to the specified topic. You’ll need to remain focused, listen to the answers, but ask new questions as a way to change topic of the conversation. If you find answers confusing or lacking, ask follow-up questions!
* **Be Positive**. Make an effort to smile and be friendly. Be enthusiastic – not sarcastic. Actively participate in the interview and show that you are interested and listening: laugh at jokes, ask follow-up questions, take notes, or give non-verbal cues, like nodding, to encourage the individual to provide additional information.
* **Give thanks.**At the end of the interview, remember to thank the individual for her/his time and shake hands again. Acknowledge that you valued the time spent and advice offered.
* **Practice.** Conduct an informational interview with a friend or family member; ask the questions from Handout 1, take notes, and try using some of the tips suggested above.

**Next Steps**

As homework, you will conduct an informational interview with a Johnson & Johnson employee or other healthcare professional. These individuals volunteered their time and want to help you understand the connection between classroom learning and real world applications. They are eager to meet you and WANT to share their personal stories and experiences to HELP you! They may give you insights on how to pursue higher education or a career. Remember, this may not be something that the Johnson & Johnson employee does every day; he/she might be just as nervous as you are!

Here’s what you need to do:

1. Phone the individual listed on the index card (provided by the session leader) by phone.
2. Schedule a 30-minute meeting that is convenient for you and the individual. Be sure to write down the date, time, and location of the meeting.
3. Send a short email to confirm the appointment. For example:

*Dear Interviewee Name,*

*Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on DATE at TIME in LOCATION. I am looking forward to the informational interview and learning about your educational and career path.*

*Sincerely, BTE Student Name*

1. Send the session leader the date / time of the scheduled informational interview.
2. Bring Handout 1, as as well as pen/pencil and additional paper to take notes, to the interview.
3. Remember the tips listed on this handout!
4. After the interview, send a thank you note or email. For example:

*Dear Interviewee Name,*

*Thank you for meeting with me today. It was wonderful to talk with you and learn about your educational and career path. You helped me understand the connection between classroom learning and a career in the health or science industry. I was particularly interested in INSERT SPECIFC INFORMATION.*

*I am grateful for all of your advice. I know that it will help me in thinking about and planning my future.*

*Sincerely, BTE Student*