Student Guide to Virtual Career Interviews

Want to know what your preferred career is really like? Then you should do a Virtual Career or Informational interview. Virtual career interviews are brief, 30 minute meetings done by telephone or videoconference with people already working in the profession. You get to ask questions from someone with first-hand experience. The purpose of an informational interview is not to get a job, but to find out if your chosen career fits your interests and personality.

Career interviews help you:

- Learn the realities of working in your desired career
- Narrow your career focus and goals
- Get an inside look at an organization
- Develop a network with professionals in your chosen profession

Steps for Virtual Career Interviews

Workforce Development staff can help you find professionals in your chosen career who may be available to meet with you by telephone or videoconference. You should also reach out to your personal network of friends, family, professors, and advisors for contacts. Search LinkedIn and other professional organizations online for names and contacts. Share the names of professionals you find with Workforce staff for their review and help before you contact them. Workforce Development staff are located in the Career Transfer Center (CTC) and can be reached at ctc.frontdesk@estrellamountain.edu.

Step 1: Initiate Contact

Once you have found someone you would like to interview and reviewed them with Workforce staff, contact them. Prepare an email or telephone script in advance so you feel comfortable and appear professional.

- Contact the person by email or phone;
- Mention how you got her or his name;
- Ask whether it’s a good time to talk for a few minutes;
- Emphasize that you are looking for information, not a job;
- Ask for a convenient time to schedule a 30-minute virtual interview/meeting;
- Discuss and decide on how to interview—by telephone or videoconference;
- Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for them and that they won’t be readily available otherwise.

Remember the purpose of an informational interview is to ask for information, not a job. You can always start with an email and follow up by phone.
Step 2: Research and Prepare

Research

- Know the name of the person you are interviewing, their job title, and the correct pronunciation of his/her name. Research them and their company. Read their LinkedIn profiles and search their careers on Google. Review their company website.
- Research your chosen profession. Study industry lingo, learn who the biggest players are, research important trends.
- Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics for complete information on wages, employment, state and national trends in your career: https://www.bls.gov/bls/employment.htm

Prepare Introduction & Questions

Be ready to briefly introduce yourself and express what you need and hope to accomplish in this interview

- Write your introduction and goals in advance
- Practice your introduction with family or friends

Prepare open-ended questions

- How did you obtain this position?
- Can you describe your typical workday?
- What are your current responsibilities?
- What does a typical career path look like for those entering this field?
- What is your understanding of the average entry-level salary range for your position?
- What do you like most about what you do? What would you change if you could?
- What are the biggest challenges facing your industry or company to date?
- Is there specific work or internship experience employers look for in their applicants? Specific skills?
- What educational and work background does your company look for in this position?
- Would you describe some typical entry-level positions within your organization or industry?
- How did you get where you are today?
- What are some future career paths for someone in your position?
- What types of jobs exist where you work and in the industry in general?
- How do you see your industry changing in the next ten years?

Visit https://www.estrellamountain.edu/students/career-services/resources for links to interviewing resources & tips.

Step 3: Schedule the Interview and Technology

Schedule the interview carefully

- Ask for the professional’s general availability to meet online for 30 minutes
- Avoid scheduling interviews on Mondays, busy day for most professionals

Decide on telephone or videoconference meeting

- Contact the professional for their preference and ability for a telephone or videoconference interview
  - If videoconference, tell them you can use Cisco Webex or Google Hangouts and ask their preference
  - Review and follow telephone and videoconference guidelines listed in this document

Choose a time that works for you

- Schedule the interview for when you are sure you can be on time and undistracted. Don’t be late.
- Prepare the technology at least 15 minutes before the interview to make sure works
Location / Preparation / Organization

Choose your location wisely
- Be in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted by a co-worker or family member, barking dog, or other loud noises
- If you are at home, switch off the TV and radio

Provide clear call-in instructions and expectations
- Specify if you are supposed to call them and confirm their phone number
- If they are to call you, be sure they have your correct phone number
- Be sure the call-in and meeting times are clear

Prepare your technology
- Charge your phone to ensure you have a full battery
- Check that you have a strong cell signal
- Have the professional's name and number saved on your phone

Practice Before the Call
- Run a practice interview with a friend and record yourself on your phone
- This will help identify bad speech patterns like speaking too quickly, interrupting, mumbling, covering your mouth or using filler words such as “um” “like” and so forth

Interviewing

Listen carefully
- Verify the name and job title of the professional at the beginning of the call
- Ask for clarification at any point of the call if necessary
- Completely focus your attention on the interviewee

Focus on your language and voice
- Speak clearly, stay upbeat, and use positive language
- Speak loudly enough that you can easily be heard

Smile while on the phone
- You will sound upbeat and engaged when you smile as you talk. Your smiles will be "heard" by the interviewer, making a positive impression.
- Sitting up straight or standing when speaking will improve how well you project your voice

Take notes
- Confirm their email address at the end of the call for your follow-up thank you
- Take notes during and immediately after the call.
- You can write most of the notes after the call. These notes will help you write your thank you message.

Etiquette

Be professional
- Answer and speak in a professional manner and maintain the professional tone throughout the call
- Remember that you represent EMCC, so speak and act professionally at all times
- Do not eat or chew gum during the call
- Do not take other calls or texts
- Avoid all other distractions
- Do not scroll through social media on your phone or message your friends. It will be obvious to the interviewer that you are distracted.
- Be careful not to interrupt too much. Avoid interrupting by pausing for a second once you think they have finished speaking before you start responding.

Example: "Thank you for your time today. I've enjoyed speaking with you, learning more about this profession. I would love to stay in contact with you, may I connect with you on LinkedIn?"
- Ask if email is the best method for staying in touch (so you will be sure that your thank you message gets through)
IDENTIFY VIDEOCONFERENCING TECHNOLOGY
Discuss and decide on the videoconference software you will both use
• Ask for the professional’s preference
• EMCC students have access to Cisco Webex and Google Hangouts
• Use your Maricopa student email address for software login; it is more professional than personal email
• Share telephone numbers with the professional as a back-up plan in case technology on either end fails

TEST YOUR TECHNOLOGY
Test your technology when you agree to a virtual interview to make sure it will work
• Check your Internet connectivity
• Confirm your camera and microphone work
• If the picture is grainy or you’re experiencing an echo, you might need to buy a webcam with a built-in microphone
• Purchase and install before the day of the interview
• Test your equipment and Internet connection the day of the interview
• Be ready and remember your backup plan

LOCATION / PREPARATION / ORGANIZATION
Determine interview location
• Consider using an EMCC Library study room
• Study rooms have laptops, some have webcam software and webcams can be checked out
• Study Room rules and registration
  • https://studyrooms.estrellamountain.edu/
Set the scene
• Find a quiet room with optimal lighting
• Sit in front of a blank wall so you are the focal point
• Clean and tidy your surroundings
• Turn off TV or radios
• Silence your cell phone
• Close any nearby windows to muffle neighborhood traffic

PRACTICE, DON’T MEMORIZE
Schedule a mock interview
• Schedule with Career & Transfer Center staff to practice before your videoconference interview
• Ask a friend or family member to do a mock interview with you
• Good way to test the videoconference technology
• CTC staff or your family/friend can tell you whether you are adequately seen and heard, how the lighting is, how you appear on camera, and if you appear professional, prepared, enthusiastic, and interested

MONITOR YOUR BODY LANGUAGE
You can’t shake the professional’s hand to show gratitude or enthusiasm, but you can monitor your body language
• Sit up straight
• Smile
• Keep the camera at eye level
• Focus on the camera when talking, not on the image of the hiring manager

DRESS THE PART
• Dress like you would for an in-person interview
• Men should consider a button-up shirt and slacks
• Women should consider a dress or skirt and blouse
• Professional clothing will show you’re serious about the meeting

BE PREPARED
• Research the company and the professional ahead of time and have your notes handy for easy reference.
• Print a copy of your resume in case they have questions

FOLLOW UP
Send a thank you email or note
• Send a thank you email to the professional within 24 hours of the interview
• Include something specific they said which shows you value their time and that you were listening
• Ask for names of other professionals to interview
• Builds your network
• Gives different perspectives