

# Poway High School Senior Project

## Conducting an Informational One-On-One Interview

One of the best ways to gather information for your Senior Project (both field work and research paper) is to talk with people working in the profession, academic discipline, or community service field you are exploring. This process is called *informational or research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that **you** conduct. **You** ask the questions.

**Q & A:** This interview's format will be question by question, with a literal response (with quotations). It will have an introduction that sets the scene and clarifies your goals and a conclusion that summarizes your findings and reflects on the success of the encounter. The question and answer portion could also take the form of a narrative of what was said. This works best when you take notes rather than record the interview. Although you should prepare more questions, at least 6 should appear in your write-up and should evidence 20-30 minutes of conversation.

This is a graded assignment, yet the purpose for the interview goes beyond the write-up. Gaining knowledge for your task, getting comfortable with your mentor, practicing interpersonal skills, and gaining data for your research paper should all be goals for these interactions. Though we highly recommend in-person, one-on-one interviews, some may be conducted by phone when safety or distance is an issue.

### STEPS TO FOLLOW

#### 1. Identify Specific People to Interview

Start with a list of people outside of your family you already know – neighbors, co-workers, supervisors, and your mentor. Professional organizations, organizational directories, and the Yellow Pages are also good sources. You may contact an organization, school, or business directly and ask for the name of a person who would be willing to be interviewed for your project.

#### 2. Arrange the Interview

Once you have identified the people you want to interview, you must contact each individual to set up an appointment. You can make this contact by telephone or email. If you do not get a response within 2 days, you should attempt to contact another expert in that field.

Make sure you clarify your purpose to the person you will be interviewing and conduct yourself professionally, which includes allowing plenty of notice.

#### 3. Prepare for the Interview

Read all you can about the person you are interviewing – and the field that he or she works in – prior to the interview. Decide what specific information you are seeking. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered, asking the most important questions first. Go online to view sample questions.

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### 4. Conduct the Interview

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Be prepared to spend a minimum of 20-30 minutes, and perhaps more. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay “on track,” but allow time for spontaneous discussion or questions not a part of your original list. Sometimes the best discussions have a life of their own. Sticking strictly to your prepared list of questions could deny you that valuable experience. Before leaving, ask the interviewee to suggest the names of others who might be able to provide information for your Senior Project; ask permission to use your interviewee’s name when contacting them. You may also want to let your interviewee know that you will be referencing this information in a documented paper or oral presentation.

- If you hope to use a tape recorder, be sure to ask permission first.
- Plan enough material to keep the interview moving if the interviewee is quiet or gives short answers.
- Be willing to re-focus the conversation if need be.
- Take notes (even if you are taping).
- Feel free to ask your subject to repeat an idea so you can quote it directly. Don’t be afraid to pause to express an idea succinctly.

### 5. Follow Up

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered (notes will be included in your Senior Project portfolio, questions and responses in your write ups, and accurate facts in your research paper). **Within a week, be sure to send a thank you note to each person you interview.** As a courtesy, you may want to send a transcript or write-up to the individual interviewed.

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THE FOLLOWING PAGES LIST QUESTIONS THAT YOU MIGHT ASK AT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW. REVIEW THE LISTS CAREFULLY, AND **USE THESE QUESTIONS** AS A TOOL TO CREATE YOUR OWN QUESTIONS. DECIDE WHICH ARE BEST SUITED TO THE PERSON YOU ARE INTERVIEWING AND THE SPECIFIC INFORMATION YOU ARE SEEKING.

### **If you are interviewing a person about his or her specific job:**

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to be successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying?
5. How did you get this job?
6. What are some of the issues and problems that you must routinely deal with in your job?
7. What are some of the difficulties you have experienced in your job? What motivates you to stay despite these difficulties?
8. Is travel involved in your job? To where? How often?
9. How many hours do you work in a typical week? Do you take work home at night?
10. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? What would you change? Why?
11. Would it be possible for me to job-shadow you?

### **If you are interviewing a person about a field of study or employment:**

12. What opportunities for advancement exist in this field?
13. What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible about this field?
14. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
15. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
16. Is there an increasing or decreasing demand for people in this field?
17. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
18. What types of education and training best prepare a person for this field?
19. What is a typical career path in this field? What is a realistic time frame for promotions and advancement?
20. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
21. From your experience in this field, what personal attributes do you think are essential for success?
22. What are this organization's plans for future growth?
23. What makes this company different from its competitors?
24. What skills does your organization value most? How is success determined?
25. How does your organization prepare for and accommodate change?

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### **If you are interviewing a person who manages projects or supervises community service events:**

26. What steps are essential in planning a successful project or event?
27. When you are assigned a project or event, what are the first steps you take?
28. How do you anticipate problems? What is the best way to prepare for possible problems?
29. What is the most challenging aspect of supervising employees or volunteers?
30. What is the most rewarding aspect of this supervision?
31. How do you establish a reasonable timeline for a project or an event? How do you keep to this timeline?
32. How do you plan a budget for a project or event? What happens if you overspend or run out of money?
33. Describe your most significant and rewarding leadership experience.
34. What is the most important advice you can give a person planning a project or event for the first time?

### **If you are interviewing a creative or performing artist:**

35. What is your artistic medium of choice? Why did you choose this medium?
36. Why did you want to go into this field? Has it always been a passion for you?
37. Whose work inspires you?
38. How do you know when you have created a successful piece?
39. What do you do when you encounter a "creative block"?
40. Describe the environment in which you work, including your duties, responsibilities, and activities of you and others in your performance.
41. Describe your ideal working environment.
42. What are your short-term and long-term artistic goals? What is your plan to achieve them?
43. Do you have a vision for your work?
44. Where do you see your work taking you?
45. How do you want people to respond to your art?
46. Have you displayed your art in a show?
47. Have you performed before a public audience?
48. What is the most challenging aspect of being an artist?
49. What is the most rewarding aspect of being an artist?
50. If you imagine yourself 5,10,15 years from now, where will you be and what will you be doing?

### **Additional Questions:**

51. Ask questions that relate to your formal thesis paper.