

Co-op Work Term Report Guidelines

Faculty of Communication and Culture

Revised August 2009

Checklist for Students

Before submitting your report, go through this checklist carefully. Include it after the title page of the report. If any of these steps are omitted or are not fulfilled as required, the report will be returned to you for revision.

Writing the report:

- Does your executive summary supply, not just a verbal table of contents, but an informative synopsis that would make sense on its own? (3.3.4)
- Does the description section follow from detailed research (3.3.6) and an informational interview (for the second and third reports) (4.2)?
- Is the information extracted from the informational interview and incorporated into the discussion, rather than being dumped in as a raw transcript (4.2)?
- Did you put some real thought into your journal each week rather than just keeping a bare record of facts (3.3.12)?
- Does the analysis follow from careful rereading of your own journal in the light of the suggested reflective questions (3.3.7)?
- Have you gone beyond “I applied concept X that I learned in Course Y” in the Connections to Course Work section (3.3.8)? Have you asked yourself about larger lessons that you can connect from course work to the work term, and the reverse? Have you asked yourself what you now know about what you need to learn from your course work?
- Are you really proud of the effort and thought that went into this report? If not, please do one more draft.

Submitting the report:

- Did you submit your Description section and your portfolio of work produced to your supervisor for approval?
- Did you include a supervisor’s acknowledgement page (Appendix C)?
- Have you included all required consent and acknowledgement forms?
- Have you formatted the report itself as a single document, with all the appendices as separate documents (2.3)?
- Does each filename include your surname plus a short form of the content?
- Are all the files attached to a single e-mail message?
- Did you send the e-mail to the **Co-op Office** via sscoop@ucalgary.ca?

Contents

1.0 What is a Work Term Report?	4
1.1 Goal.....	4
1.2 Informed Consent.....	4
1.3 Integrative Session.....	4
2.0 Submitting the Work Term Report	4
2.1 Due Dates	4
2.2 Where to send the report.....	5
2.3 Required File Format.....	5
3.0 Work Term Report 1.....	5
3.1 Length	5
3.2 Format.....	5
3.3 Parts of the Report:	5
4.0. Work Term Report 2.....	8
4.1 Length	8
4.2 Content: The informational interview.....	8
5.0 Work Term Report 3.....	9
5.1 Length	9
5.2 Content.....	9
6.0 Fourth Work Term	9
7.0 Response to your Work Term Report	9
7.1 Who will Respond?.....	9
7.2 When Will You Receive a Response?	10
8.0 The Ethics of Work Term Reports.....	10
8.1 General ethics of insider knowledge	10
8.2 Special ethics of the informative interview	10
8.3 Consent Form.....	11
9.0 Continuing Students	11

Faculty of Communication and Culture Work Term Report Guidelines

(August 2009 Revision)

1.0 What is a Work Term Report?

After each work term, you must submit a work term report containing the following items:

- Supervisor's Acknowledgement Page
- A report in professional style conforming to the specific guidelines below.
- An informal weekly journal conforming to the guidelines below
- A copy of both Learning Objective forms and the employer's Performance Evaluation.
- An updated resume (to be approved by your Co-operative Education Coordinator)
- Copies of any major documents you produced, such as a report for your employer, plus samples of any other materials you produced or had a hand in producing
- Consent forms as required

1.1 Goal

The goal of the work term report is to encourage reflection on the work term experience and on connections between the experience and your academic work. In particular, it should address the Learning Objectives and discuss the extent to which they have or have not been met. In addition, it provides an opportunity for you to find out more about the field of work represented by the organization that has employed them.

A formal proposal is unnecessary (in contrast to earlier report styles which required a proposal). However, your Faculty Co-op Supervisor will be happy to give you advice at any step of the way.

The report must include an acknowledgement page from your supervisor (see Appendix C). If necessary, your supervisor may fax or e-mail the acknowledgement.

1.2 Informed Consent

Before collecting any information for this report, you must ask your supervisor, plus the person you intend to interview (Report 2 and 3) to fill out the consent forms (Appendix A and B). You must attach these forms to your report. Failure to do so will result in your report being rejected.

1.3 Integrative Session

Each work term is also followed by a mandatory Integrative Session which all students and their supervisors gather to share their experiences and learning outcomes. You will be contacted regarding date and time.

2.0 Submitting the Work Term Report

2.1 Due Dates

September - December: First business day of January

January - April: First business day of May
May - August: First business day of September

2.2 Where to send the report

Send your entire report by e-mail to sscoop@ucalgary.ca

The Co-op Office will submit your completed report to your Faculty Co-op Representative for grading purposes. Every student is assigned a Faculty Representative and you will receive an e-mail indicating who your supervisor is at the beginning of the work term.

2.3 Required File Format

Normally you must submit your complete report, including all forms and appendices, in electronic format.

If you are using Word 2007, save as a Word 97-2003 format (using the "save as" command). Docx files generated by Word 2007 do not open properly on a Mac and some other systems.

When you send in your electronic file, **start the filename with your surname** (eg. Your Last Name Work Term Report 1). It's amazing how confusing is to have a dozen files named "Report" coming into your inbox.

Submit all appendices as separate files, but attached to the same e-mail message. Name each as part of the file name (eg Your Last Name Consent Form, Your Last Name Journal.) Please try to submit all parts at once; reports that are submitted piecemeal may not get reassembled properly.

If you have some hard copy forms such as the evaluation or parts of your portfolio, you may submit them in hard copy, but it is easier if you can scan them and attach a pdf.

3.0 Work Term Report 1

3.1 Length

6 - 8 double-spaced pages

3.2 Format

As much as possible, use the conventions of a formal report, with frequent headings, use of bullets and other devices in order to make the main points easy to extract. This is not an academic essay. You are encouraged to add your own subheadings to make the report as clear as possible. Please include page numbers.

Part of the purpose of this exercise is simply to make sure that you know how to construct a formal report, so pay attention to format and consult a report writing manual if you are not sure.

3.3 Parts of the Report:

3.3.1 Title page (not included in page count)

3.3.2 Supervisor's Acknowledgement Page (not included in page count - see Appendix C)

3.3.3 Table of Contents (not included in page count). Be sure to list all appendices. If you have illustrations, include them in a Table of Figures as well.

3.3.4 Executive Summary (not included in page count). This should be no more than one page, and provide an overview of the highlights of your report. It is not just a synopsis of the parts of the report (a "descriptive abstract") but rather a miniature version of the whole report which could be read separately by someone trying to get a quick overview (an "informative summary").

3.3.5 Introduction Explain very briefly what the report is and what it does. The introduction should do no more than answer the reader's implied question, "What is this thing I have in my hands and what will I gain from reading it?"

3.3.6 Description This should be a concise description of your work term (no more than two pages), including

- **Description of Organization** - a description of the organization you worked for, including:
 - a discussion of the overall goals and duties of the organization,
 - its range (local, national or international),
 - its activities,
 - the products produced or value added (especially if it a for-profit organization)
 - its organizational structure (if relevant)
 - its relationship to other organizations in the field (if relevant)
- **Duties** - a description of your duties, including any interesting change in or evolution of duties over the course of the work term

You will probably need to read up on the organization and speak to co-workers and your supervisor in order to fill in the blanks.

This description and your portfolio of work produced are the only sections which must be approved by your employer. You may submit these sections to your employer in advance while you are working on the analysis and other sections.

3.3.7 Analysis This should include answers to some or all of the following questions (some may not be relevant, and you can be creative with the order):

- What did you initially hope to gain from the experience?
- Why did you select the Learning Objectives contained in the Learning Objectives document?
- To what extent do you think you achieved those learning outcomes? Why/why not?
- What personal and professional skills did you acquire or sharpen that will be of value to you?
- What opportunities did you have for professional networking? What was the outcome of this?
- Were there specific factors in the workplace setting that either helped or hindered you in achieving your goals? Did anything disappoint you about your experience? Did anything surprise you? (In answering this question, please keep in mind the "Ethics of Insider Knowledge" discussed later in these guidelines.)
- If you had it to do over, what (if anything) would you have done differently in order to achieve those goals?

3.3.8 Connections to Academic Work This need not be extensive but it is the single most important part of your report, so you should put a lot of thought into it. The goal of the entire Co-op system is to help you make these sorts of connections.

- Did your work term experience draw on any skills you have learned in your academic work (either specific skills learned in a particular course or general academic skills)? Explain why or why not. Be as specific as possible on what skills you drew on and where you learned them (whether or not in any particular course?)
- Did your work term experience deepen, change, call into question, or otherwise affect what you have learned so far in an academic setting? Explain why or why not.

Remember that you are not just being asked to list some skills that you learned in this or that course. Consider the larger elements of your academic experience – critical thinking, questioning, personal organization, interpersonal and group skills. If your work term involved writing, what aspects of academic writing were you able to apply? Did you have to unlearn any writing habits that work for academic writing but don't work in the workplace?

Remember too that you should be asking whether your work experience has raised new questions that will affect the way you approach your academic work in future. Is there anything that you now realize that you don't know and want to find out, or to practice and hone?

3.3.9 Conclusion This section should be a brief (approximately one page) summary of what you hope to accomplish on your next work term, what you think you still have to learn, and what sorts of work experience you will look for.

If you have your next work term already lined up, you will be able to answer these questions more specifically, but if not, feel free to speculate on where you would like to go with this next.

3.3.10 Reference List (if relevant) (not included in page count). You may have consulted written sources to inform your description of the organization. List them here.

3.3.11 Appendices (not included in page count) Attach any additional documents that you consider relevant. These should include, at a minimum:

- weekly journal (see below)
- the copy of the Learning Objectives and Performance Evaluation
- an updated resume
- consent forms as appropriate
- copies of any major documents you produced, such as a report for your employer, plus samples of any other materials you produced or had a hand in producing

Note: This last item will represent a work portfolio that will grow as you progress through your work terms.

Each Appendix needs a title (Appendix A, Appendix B, etc), and should be accounted for in the Table of Contents.

3.3.12 The Journal Entries should be made on at least a weekly basis and be a minimum of half a page single spaced. More is better.

You are expected to reflect on what you have learned and how you have learned it, and your successes and challenges that week. It will be important for you to keep a record of your experience as it develops so you can look back after four months and remember what you thought, said and did. Don't just record bare facts. Explore your personal development and how you feel about what you did/learned/accomplish/failed to accomplish each week.

4.0. Work Term Report 2

4.1 Length

8 - 10 pages, excluding title page, executive summary, references and appendices.

4.2 Content: The informational interview

This report should contain all of the same elements as Work Term 1. However, the descriptive section should be lengthened to about four pages and be informed by an **informational interview** with a key member of the organization. This might be your supervisor, but it could be anyone who has been with the organization long enough, and of a sufficient status within it, to be able to provide useful answers.

An information interview is a method of gathering information to help you get more information on career options, as well as a way to build a network. Talking to people who are doing a job in which you are interested, or who are working for an organization you would like to know more about regarding career paths, etc., is an excellent opportunity to further your career goals and aspirations.

Keep the interview to 30 minutes maximum, recognizing the demands on other people's time. If you do not find a member of the organization who readily volunteers to be interviewed, do not press the matter. Instead, do additional secondary research to flesh out this part of the report. **If the interview is missing from your report, include a cover note explaining why.**

The interview might include questions such as the following. Feel free to adapt according to circumstances.

- Tell me more about what this organization does. How is it connected to similar organizations?
- While you have been here, have you seen the organization transform? Has its mandate changed significantly?
- Tell me about how you personally came to be working for this organization? What skills and knowledge do you think helped you get where you are now?
- What long-term opportunities are there for careers with this organization or others like it?
- What would position a student best for working in such an organization?
- What are good entry points into this organization?
- Are there any downsides to working in an organization such as this?

See Appendix D for more details on how to conduct an informational interview.

Don't just quote this information verbatim in your report. Use it to build two or three pages in which you develop your analysis of the organization as a potential career path and as a force for doing whatever is included in its mandate.

The remainder of the report should follow the style of Report 1.

5.0 Work Term Report 3

5.1 Length

8-12 pages, excluding title page, executive summary, references and appendices.

5.2 Content

This report will be similar to the second (including an informative interview with a member of the organization), except that both the description and the analysis will summarize **all** of your three work terms and their value to you. This is your opportunity to reflect on the entire experience of taking a Co-op degree.

You may wish to reduce the descriptive section, since much of this will have been contained in the two previous reports. You should describe what you did in the most recent placement in more detail.

The report should focus on what you learned and how you developed as you moved from, placement to placement. It should also explore more deeply the connections (or perhaps lack of them) between the academic and workplace sides of your experience. What skills and knowledge did you develop in your courses that you were able to deploy, in whatever changed form, in your work? What did you learn on the job that you could not have learned in your courses? What do you wish you had known when you started? Is there anything you wish your courses had taught you that you had to learn the hard way?

Your presentation at the Integrative Session will be based on this report. You will receive a slightly longer time allocation in order to make this detailed summary. If you wish, you may include a portfolio display.

6.0 Fourth Work Term

If you choose to do the optional fourth work term, you need not file a report. However, you will be expected to attend the Integrative Session and speak briefly about your experience.

7.0 Response to your Work Term Report

7.1 Who will Respond?

The Faculty has a Co-op Committee of faculty members chosen for their interest in the Co-op experience. They do not represent every program; however, responding to a work term report does not require specialized knowledge.

The Associate Dean will assign you to a member of the committee who will be your Faculty Co-op Supervisor. Normally, you will stay with the same committee member throughout your Co-op experience. However, your report may be read by another committee member if your assigned member is on leave or if there is any other special reason to do so.

Reports are graded Completed Requirements or Fail. Fail is highly unlikely, but be prepared for your supervisor to send your report back and ask you to rewrite it if it does not meet a reasonable

standard. This standard includes attention to correct, readable and professional writing style as well as thorough engagement with the requirements of the report. Missing pieces or superficial comments will certainly result in a requirement to rewrite.

7.2 When Will You Receive a Response?

You should expect to receive comments on your report within two weeks of submitting it. (If you submit late, don't be surprised if the response is late!) Your Supervisor may request an in-person meeting to discuss these comments.

8.0 The Ethics of Work Term Reports

8.1 General ethics of insider knowledge

Your work placement puts you in a privileged position within the organization. You will be sharing (sometimes) intimate details of your experience with one or more people outside the organization. This puts upon you a high degree of responsibility to be frank and honest without being malicious, to discuss the bad experiences with the good without laying blame, and in particular to discuss your experiences without pointing fingers at particular individuals. You can have a less than satisfactory work term experience from the point of view of your own learning without calling into question anyone's competence or willingness to be helpful. (If you do have such questions, please share them in private with the Career Services Co-op Representative as soon as possible!)

In addition, some organizations have trade secrets that they would prefer not to share on paper outside the organization. There may be cases in which delicate negotiations are needed between you, your Faculty Co-op supervisor, and your workplace supervisor. If necessary, a report can be flagged as being for your Co-op supervisor's eyes only.

The requirement to have your supervisor sign off on your report is intended to insure that you have not overstepped the bounds of this responsibility.

You must have your supervisor sign the **Supervisor's General Consent Form** (Appendix A) as soon as you report for work, and attach it to your report when you submit it.

8.2 Special ethics of the informative interview

Whenever you gather information from another human being, you are conducting what is technically known as "research involving human subjects." At the very least, this means that you need to treat your "human subject" with respect. This includes:

- making sure your informant knows the purpose of the interview
- letting your informant know what will happen to his or her information. Who might read it, and in what form?
- letting your informant know what will happen to any raw data. Will your notes, tapes etc be floating around the universe forever?
- letting your informant know whether he or she can back out of the interview if it enters uncomfortable territory
- letting your informant know whether he or she can choose to be anonymous. In most cases this anonymity will not be feasible, but your informant needs to know that.

The work terms will receive "course-based ethics approval." This means that the complicated ethics review process will be done for you so that a group of more or less similar projects can

proceed without getting approval for each one. Your Faculty Co-op Supervisor is responsible for making sure that you follow the guidelines required by this approval process.

8.3 Consent Form

In order to insure that this process is completely transparent, you must have your informant sign a consent form in advance of the interview. If you are conducting a telephone interview, you may read the form and get verbal consent.

You must attach this form to your work term report. Failure to do so will result in your report being rejected.

A consent form template is attached as Appendix C.

9.0 Continuing Students

These new report guidelines will come into effect for work terms that begin May 1, 2008 and after.

If you have already submitted at least one previous work term under the old (more research-based) guidelines, you may continue under the old format if you are comfortable with it, or switch to the new ones. Be sure to let your Faculty Co-op Supervisor know which you choose so that he or she knows whether to expect a proposal part way through the placement.

If you switch to the new format, you should begin with the format for Work Term Report 2 even if it is your third work term. You will probably not have the continuity of reflective practice that will allow you to address the integrative questions normally required by Work Term Report 3.

All students, new and continuing, will be expected to participate in Integrative Sessions beginning September 2008.

Appendix A



Supervisor's General Consent Form

(To be signed within the first week of the work term)

I understand that the Co-operative Education student that I have agreed to supervise will be required to submit a Work Term Report. This report will require the student to answer questions such as the following:

- What did you initially hope to gain from the experience?
- Why did you select the Learning Outcomes contained in the Learning Outcomes document?
- To what extent do you think you achieved those learning outcomes?
- Did you acquire or sharpen any personal or professional skills that you think will be of value to you?
- Did you have any opportunities for professional networking?
- Were there specific factors in the workplace setting that either helped or hindered you in achieving your goals?
- Did anything disappoint you about your experience? Did anything surprise you?
- If you had it to do over, would you have done anything differently in order to achieve those goals?
- Did your work term experience draw on any skills you have learned in your academic work (either specific skills learned in a particular course or general academic skills)?
- Did your work term experience deepen, change, call into question, or otherwise affect what you have learned so far in an academic setting?

I understand that the student may need to read some general documents pertaining to the organization and possibly ask questions of co-workers in order to answer some of these questions.

I will be asked to approve the description of the organization and the student's work portfolio when the report is submitted, and will have the opportunity at that time to require sections to be modified or deleted if I feel that they are inaccurate. I may also request that the report be kept confidential between the student, me and the Faculty Co-op Supervisor.

Print name

Signature

Date

Appendix B
Consent Form for Informative Interview
(To be signed just before the interview commences.)

This document is a template. The italicized text is instructional. Delete it, including these paragraphs, when writing your consent form.

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

(Insert your name)

Supervisor:

Dr. Doug Brent, Associate Dean (Undergraduate), Faculty of Communication and Culture

Title of Project:

Co-operative Education Work Term Report

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

As a Co-operative Education student, I am expected to complete a Work Term Report that includes details about the organization I have been working for, its scope, and career opportunities in the organization and in other similar organizations. Your interview will inform a section of my report.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

I would like to interview you in person for no more than thirty minutes in order to gain more information about your organization, particularly long-term career opportunities with this and other, similar organizations. I will ask questions such as these:

- Tell me more about what this organization does. How is it connected to similar organizations?
- While you have been here, have you seen the organization transform? Has its mandate changed significantly?
- Tell me about how you personally came to be working for this organization? What skills and knowledge do you think helped you get where you are now?
- What long-term opportunities are there for careers with this organization or others like it? What would best position a student for working in such an organization?
- Are there any down sides to working in an organization such as this?

Some of these questions may be personal or confidential. Please feel free to refuse to answer any such questions. You may withdraw from this process at any time during or immediately after the interview. If you choose to withdraw, all information collected will be destroyed. I will also show you the draft of my report, and you may request that any answers be corrected or deleted.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Normally, I will identify you by name and position. If you prefer not to be identified, you may ask to remain anonymous. However, given your position in the organization, it may be impossible to keep your identity from being obvious. If you are uncomfortable with being identified, please feel free to refuse to participate.

There are several options available to you. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:"

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

The only significant risk could be revealing confidential information about your organization or personal information about yourself. You may ask for any such information to be corrected or deleted when I show you the rough draft.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The raw data resulting from this interview will be seen only by me, and possibly by my Co-op Faculty Supervisor. It will be stored under lock and key at my residences and destroyed after two years. The report that ensues will be seen only by me, my Faculty Co-op Supervisor, and the Associate Dean, who co-ordinates the academic aspect of Co-op placements. Some Work Term Reports will be circulated among students as examples. If my report is chosen for circulation, the Associate Dean or Co-op Co-ordinator will contact you for permission, which you may refuse.

Formal publication is unlikely, but if any part of this report is reproduced in any published form, you will be contacted for permission.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Insert your name

Faculty of Communication and Culture

Telephone, email

Supervisor: Dr. Doug Brent, Associate Dean, Communication and Culture,
220-5458, dabrent@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Bonnie Scherrer, Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix C

Supervisor's Acknowledgement Page

(To be signed after you have presented a copy to your Workplace Supervisor and included after the title page of your report.)

I acknowledge that I have seen the student's description of our organization and his/her duties as well as any copies of documents or samples produced by the student and included in his/her report. I approve this material for submission to the student's Faculty Co-op Supervisor.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

Appendix D

Note: This is generic information on informational interviews. Some will not apply to your situation in conducting an interview for your work term report.

Informational Interviews

Excerpts From: www.quintcareers.com/information_interview

Informational interviewing is just what it sounds like -- interviewing designed to produce information. What kind of information? The information you need to choose or refine a career path, learn how to break in and find out if you have what it takes to succeed. Informational interviewing is an expanded form of chatting with your network contacts. It's the process of spending time with one of your network contacts in a highly focused conversation that provides you with key information you need to launch or boost your career.

An informational interview is not the same as a job interview by any means, but it is probably the most effective form of networking there is. When you are considering entering or changing to a certain career path, it just makes all kinds of sense to talk to people in that field. The best way to learn what you really want in a career is to talk with the people in that career field.

Because of the exploratory nature of informational interviews, they are particularly effective for those, such as university students, who are just embarking on their careers. They are also an excellent tool for career-changers who want to find out what's involved in the career they are considering entering. Even for those who don't wish to change careers but do want to change jobs, informational interviews can be a helpful way of discovering what working for other companies would be like.

Potential Results of Informational Interviews

You accomplish several things when you go out on informational interviews:

- You obtain a great deal of information about your career field and the skills needed to do that job effectively. You gain a perspective of work that goes beyond the limitations of job titles, allowing you to see not only what skills are required for the job but how you might fit into that work setting. Thus, you have greater flexibility in planning options.
- You have the opportunity to make personal contacts among management-level personnel.
- You gain insight into the hidden job market (employment opportunities that are not advertised).
- You become aware of the needs of the employers and the realities of employment. First-hand and current information allows you to learn what happens on the job beyond the understanding provided through your course work or other outside research. This exposure not only provides personal understanding but it could also result in your becoming a more impressive job candidate.
- Because informational interviewing is comparatively low-stress, you gain confidence in talking with people while learning what you need to know. Informational interviewing provides an opportunity to meet with potential employers before the more stressful (for both parties) job interview.
- Because you are only asking for information, you are in control of the interview; you decide which questions to ask. Later, evaluate the acquired information for personal use.

- This opportunity will expose you to a variety of jobs and personalities of companies making the search for your "niche" that much easier.
- It is an opportunity to learn where you might fit into a particular organization.

Reasons for Conducting Informational Interviews

Following are some good reasons to conduct informational interviews:

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to expand your professional network
- to build confidence for your job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

You gain invaluable interviewing experience and you gain visibility. In short, informational interviewing prepares you for what's in store and allows you the opportunity to network with others in your field of interest.

Never Ask for a Job

Don't mix informational interviewing with job seeking. Employers will grant informational interviews when they firmly trust that you will not hit them up for a job. The minute you begin trying to get a job, the employer will feel misled. If you discover a job that you do want to apply for during the interview, wait until the informational interview is over. The next day, call the employer and tell your contact that the informational interview not only confirmed your interest in the field, but also made you aware of a position that you would like to formally apply for.

Sometimes the interviewee may offer you an internship or job. It's happened on numerous occasions. Many people have conducted informational interviews and have done nothing but ask questions and yet have been offered employment. What do you do if they offer you an internship or job? If it sounds good, take it! Suddenly your life changes in an instant!

The typical job searcher is going around asking for a job instead of asking questions to find out more about the job and the employer. A job searcher needs to know the basics about the employer and what the company is about. The fact that you are seeking only information will help set you apart from the hundreds of others who are walking in asking for jobs and being told no. Approach the employer with the attitude that you are seeking career advice. It is, therefore, usually a good idea to set up an informational interview with a resource person before there is an actual job opening in your area of interest. Most managers and supervisors feel uneasy or uncomfortable talking with a potential candidate when the organization is actively recruiting to fill the position. However, you may find it helpful for future reference to find out the name of the manager or the person who does the hiring. (Be sure the information you get is accurate!)

Prepare Ahead of Time for Your Interview

Ask only those questions that are appropriate and important to you. You will convey your motivation and interest to the employer by acknowledging that the information the interviewee is giving you is important.

Scheduling the Informational Interview

Contact the resource person preferably by telephone or letter. You can also try to have someone who knows the interviewer make the appointment for you. Guidelines for contacting the resource person by letter or phone/in person:

Scheduling the Informational Interview by Letter

An introductory letter, written much like a cover letter without the job pitch, is a great way to get your name out there. Although an introductory letter should be typed, neat printing is acceptable. Your letter should include:

- A brief introduction about yourself;
- Why you are writing to this individual;
- A brief statement of your interests or experiences in the person's field, organization or location;
- Why you would like to converse. Be straightforward; tell him/her you are asking for information and advice.
- The last paragraph of the letter should always include a sentence about how and when you will contact this person again.

Make sure to follow up the letter as you said! Usually this follow-up involves a phone call to set up a phone appointment or an informational interview. Never expect the person to phone you. If you have difficulties contacting the person, ask the receptionist for a convenient time to phone again. Finally, **proofread all correspondence and save copies!**

Letter Requesting an Informational Interview

Here's a sample cover letter requesting an informational interview.

May 15, 2007

Contact Name
Company
Address
City, Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

I am student at the University of Calgary, in the Faculty of Communication and Culture, majoring in Development Studies. Sustainability has been always been a strong interest to me and your organization has an outstanding reputation in that field of practice.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you briefly and discuss the practice of your specialty. I am especially interested in your views regarding sustainable growth and any further insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

I will contact your office the week of October 2 to set up a mutually convenient time for this informational meeting.

Sincerely,

Jeremy D. Muller

Do Some Research Before the Interview

For an informational interview to be truly effective, you can't just go into it blindly.

Thorough company research is an absolute necessity when you go on a regular job interview. You don't have to do quite as much research for an informational interview, but some degree of research will greatly enhance the quality of informational interviews. If you are informed about the company, you'll be able to ask more intelligent and relevant questions. You'll respond thoughtfully to information and any questions the interviewee might put to you. You won't ask questions that could easily have been answered by doing your homework.

Resources include:

- Company Website
- Annual Reports
- Other Company Literature
- Library Reference Material
- University Career Service Office

Preparing for an Informational Interview

The day before the interview, call to confirm your appointment with the contact person. If you have questions regarding the location of the contact's office, this is the time to ask. Plan to arrive 10 minutes early for your interview.

Carry a small notebook and pen. Be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion.

Dressing Appropriately for an Informational Interview

Because 90 percent of all jobs are never advertised, you will uncover job openings that never make it to the newspaper or employment office. Thus, be prepared to make a good impression and to be remembered by the employer.

Dress as you would for a regular job interview.

Be Prepared to Take Notes at an Informational Interview

Pretend you are a reporter. You don't need to write down everything, but there may be names, phone numbers or other information that you may want to remember.

Be enthusiastic and show interest. Employ an informal dialogue during the interview. Be direct and concise with your questions and answers and do not ramble. Have good eye contact and posture. Be positive in your remarks, and reflect a good sense of humor.

Bring Your Resume to an Informational Interview

Bring a copy of your resume along with you. Try to find out about specific characteristics or qualifications that employers seek when hiring. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may ask the person you are interviewing to critique your resume.

Questions to ask at the Informational Interview

You have arrived and are greeted by the individual at the front desk. When the interviewee comes out to meet you, introduce yourself. Thank your contact for his or her willingness to meet with

you, and reemphasize that you are there to learn and gather information about his or her career field. Use an informal dialogue during the interview.

Below are some typical informational interview questions. Remember that you won't have time to ask anywhere nearly all of these questions, so target the ones you feel will be most useful to you personally. Pick a dozen or so that get at what you most want to know.

Feel free to skip some -- even most -- of these questions or to substitute questions of your own -- as long as you don't come off sounding like you're there for a job interview.

- What is your job like?
- What is a typical day like?
- What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
- How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
- What things did you do before you entered this occupation? Which have been most helpful?
- What other jobs can you get with the same background?
- What are the various jobs in this field or organization?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- What do you like most about this company?
- Do you find your job exciting or boring? Why?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- Why do customers choose this company?
- Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
- How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web page, video conferencing, etc.)
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- What is the best way to enter this occupation?
- What are the advancement opportunities?
- What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What were the keys to your career advancement? How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?

- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
- What obligations does your employer place have on you outside of the ordinary work week? What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation? Are there organizations you are expected to join? Are there other things you are expected to do outside work hours?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- What are the educational, requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- How do you think my university's reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How do you think graduation from a private (or public) university is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
- Who is the department head or supervisor for this job? Where do you and your supervisor fit into the organizational structure?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?

- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
- Do you have any special word of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- These are my strongest assets (skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits and values):_____. Where would they fit in this field? Where would they be helpful in this organization? Where might they fit in other fields? Where might they be helpful in other organizations?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- [If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate:] Would you mind taking a look at my resume?

The whole interview could be spent finding answers to the dozen or so questions you decide to ask. But as you practice and move further toward your target, questions will probably pop into your head spontaneously based on what you need to know.

Pay careful attention to what's said by the person you interview. Ask questions when something isn't clear. People are often happy to discuss their positions and willing to provide you with a wealth of information. Try to keep the conversation friendly, brief, and focused on the contact person's job and career field.