Informational Interviews
Talk to Someone Who Knows

Tarryn Bourhill
Derrick Rancourt

Tarryn.Bourhill@ucalgary.ca
THE PLANS:

THE PLAN YOU TELL YOUR ADVISOR:

- "I'm going to be a professor at a major research university after I graduate."

THE REAL PLAN:

- Look for career alternatives.

THE SECRET PLAN:

- Become a baker/rockstar/writer.
Learning Outcomes

• **Describe** what an informational interview is

• **Justify** why information interviews are important

• **Learn how to** conduct an informational interview

• **Empower** you to go out and talk to someone who knows
What is an informational Interview?

• **Conversation** with someone who works in a position/area that interests you.

• Networking Tool = **Relationship Building Tool**

• Career Exploration Tool

• It is **NOT** a job interview
Why are Informational Interviews Important?

• Information!

• Competency development

• Build a Network

• Access the Hidden Job Market

• Career Mapping Skill- Life skill
Where can informational Interviews be used?

• Undergraduate students - summer research positions/internships

• Graduate students and Post Docs – finding a lab and PI

• Medical Students - Identify Residency Positions

• Finding a position when you graduate
What questions do I ask in the interview?
Personal

• Would you mind giving me more detail on why being a science writer interested you? How did you get started?

• Tell me about a typical day?

• What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying?

• What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
Qualifications

• What level of qualification is required for the position PhD, Masters Post-Doc?

• What skills are crucial to be successful as a science writer?

• Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain necessary experience to become good candidates for this position while they are studying.

• What courses/graduate experiences have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?

• Do you think this is a position that can be filled by an introvert or is it more suited to an extravert?
Landscape

• What can you tell me about the employment outlook in the field?

• How much demand is there for people in this occupation? Is it growing or shrinking?

• How competitive is the field?

• How will a certain technology affect this sector – AI or automation for example
Leads

• Do you know any staffers I could speak to?

• Are there any writers focused on molecular biology based in Canada you could introduce me too?

• I’m not sure this career is really for me, could you recommend another position that would be better suited to my skills and interests?
More questions . . .

• Travel

• Metrics for success in the position

• Career progression

• Organisation structure

• Salary
  • What are the salary ranges for various positions in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
How do I find someone to interview?

• LinkedIn
  • Find Alumni
  • Get an introduction

• Your Network
  • Friends, Family, Peers, Supervisors etc.
  • Lab mates – talk to the post docs!

• Conferences/ Symposia/
  • Lunch with an invited speaker

• Career Days/ Career Meet-Ups
The introduction

Informational Interview
and Derrick

and Derrick Rancourt
JUN 6

Derrick Rancourt • 1:20 PM
[Redacted] My PhD student [Redacted] is interested in interviewing a science writer. Would you mind connecting with her?

[Redacted] • 2:09 PM
Sure. You can email me: [Redacted]

Tarryn Bourhill • 2:10 PM
Great, thank you.
It is OK to go in cold!

Hi Dr. [Name],

I was at the Mind the Gap: Career Planning workshop this past Monday where you were one of the career panel specialists. I found your insights on career planning and professional development to be quite helpful, particularly when you mentioned that introverts really need to start putting themselves out there in terms of networking. I was wondering if it would be possible for me to buy you a cup of coffee or lunch to discuss your career. I would really like to ask more specific questions about what being a medical science liaison entails. Please let me know when and where this meeting would be the most convenient for you if you are willing to meet up.

I hope you have a lovely day.

Sincerely,

Taryn Bourhill
PhD Candidate

Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
Cumming School of Medicine | University of Calgary
HMRB 385, 3330 Hospital Dr. NW Calgary, AB T2N 4N1 | CANADA
T: 403 220 8661
C: 403 492 9840
E: taryn.bourhill@ucalgary.ca
L: www.linkedin.com/in/taryn-bourhill
Interview Etiquette

• Do I take my résumé?

• What do I wear?

• Note taking – let them know!
  • If you record an interview ask permission to do so.

• Are skype/ phone calls allowed?

• Should I interview more than one person in the same career?

• Always Thank your interviewee
Be Kind to Yourself!

Oops, time for my daily five-minute existential crisis.

What am I doing with my life??

What's the point?

What am I going to do when I graduate????

Sigh

Back to work!
Crazy Interview Game

• Pair up

• Everyone can look at their occupation card

• Do not tell anyone what you do for a living

• Everyone is allowed to ask ONLY 10 questions about what their partner does.
Crazy Interview Game

• You may not ask yes/no questions

• By the end of the 10 questions you have to guess the occupation.

• Can you ask the right questions to guess correctly?
Crazy Interview Game

• What was the most difficult thing about this game?

• What did you learn about the questions you asked, were some more effective than others?

• Do you have a better idea of the types of questions you would like to ask during your informational interviews?
• **Describe** what an informational interview is

• **Justify** why information interviews are important

• **Learn How To** conduct an informational interview

• **Empower** you to go out and talk to someone who knows

• Good Luck!
Additional resources

• https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2010/summer/art03.pdf
• http://blogs.nature.com/naturejobs/2015/03/19/the-hidden-job-market/
• https://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/articles/10.1038/nj7625-417a
Thank you

• Feel Free to Connect with me
• LinkedIn – Tarryn Bourhill
• Email: Tarryn.Bourhill@ucalgary.ca
• Website: https://tbourhill.com/