

Informational Interview Example

The following is an informational interview done by a student: Informational Interview #2

Tom J. Wong

Self-employed museum exhibition designer

What things do you do each day?

I interview clients who usually represent a museum e.g. a curator . After the client has stated their particular design problem, I analyze-the problem from a variety of perspectives. The primary objective of museum display is preservation of the object. Design and display are secondary to this. With this in mind, I take into consideration physical requirements, lighting, equipment like computers or videos, construction factors like partitions and walls, display cases, colors and label display.

Along with all of these considerations, I have to factor in a budget as defined by the client. Sometimes, too, I have to consider things like shipping if the show is a traveling one and the display cases are going with the objects.

How were you trained for this career?

I received my undergraduate degree in Fine Arts and then received my masters in Architecture although now the same school M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) is calling the discipline Visual Studies. I continue my education by taking classes at the Massachusetts College of Art and by doing computer workshops at the media lab. at M.I.T.

I did purely architectural work at first and then started to bid on museum design work. I worked at the Boston Museum of Fine art for over 25 years on a contract basis. I also have done work for the Peabody Museum at Harvard and some of the other art museums around Boston. I also design special retail exhibits or shows like the Fuller Cadillac showroom.

What's the salary range for museum exhibition design?

It depends on one's experience and whether someone is hired by an institution or if you work on a contract basis. Someone hired by the museum right out of school might earn \$25,000. If one has had lots of experience and is self-employed, one could earn \$60,000 or more.

What are some of the fringe benefits you enjoy?

Being self employed, there really aren't so called fringe benefits. I pay my own health insurance and fund my own retirement plan. I do, however, have the privilege of setting my own hours and traveling on occasion.

What are the positive aspects of your work?

I enjoy being my own boss. I enjoy solving problems especially spatial ones. I enjoy making the museum an educational experience for the public and keeping it from being "stuffy."

What are the negatives about your career?

It can be stressful in terms of deadlines, sometimes working with difficult people or periods in between jobs. Currently museum budget constraints are a problem.

What is your next career move?

Currently I am working on a bid to do some work for the DeYoung Museum of Asian Art in San Francisco and I am currently working on a Chinese Painting show for the Boston Museum of Fine Art. I hope to continue doing this type of work for years to come. I also enjoy trying to keep up with technology in the visual arts in multi-media software .

Where can I get more information about your career?

I highly recommend that you read books by Huxley, Evelyn Waugh and Barbara Tuchman to get a sense of where museums started and how they have changed in the last century. I will send you some more pamphlets and information.

What advice would you give someone who is trying to choose a career?

Do something that you find exciting. Try to stretch the skills that you already have and combine them with new ones. For instance, if you combine your medical knowledge with art, you could approach a career in medical illustration or museum education or education in general.

Post script:

I am originally from the Boston area. My mom worked for Tom when he first started out in architecture and helped him build his models. She followed him to the M.F.A. and became a bonded exhibition design assistant/installer.

I was surprised that museum exhibition design showed up on my list of possible career interests on the Myers-Briggs analysis. I decided to interview Tom because he really is an interesting person. His daughter Susy is now the M.F.A. exhibition designer.



Informational Interview

(Interview **TWO** people in fields of interest. Do not interview parents, neighbors simply out of convenience. These obviously must be typed)

1. What activities, duties, and work do you do every day?
2. How were you trained for this career?
3. What is the salary range for people in your line of work?
4. What are some of the fringe benefits you enjoy?
5. What are the positive aspects of your work?
6. What are the negative aspects of your work?
7. What are some of the major trends you see in this career field? What predictions can make about this field in the next five to ten years?
8. Is there a lot of competition to get into this field?
9. What are the strongest skills a person must have to do well in this career?
10. What personality traits do the most successful people in this career have?
11. In what other fields can a person with your training go?
12. If you had it to choose all over again, would you still enter this field? Why or why not?
13. What is your next career move?
14. Where can I get more information about your career?
15. What advice can you give someone who is trying to choose a career?

