Info gathering as an interview strategy

Research the industry, the company, and the person with whom you are interviewing before the interview. Bring a copy of your resume, but don’t present it unless asked. Be careful to not assume too much familiarity. Mr. or Ms. is more appropriate than calling someone by their first name until they tell you to do so.

Introduce yourself. Handshake and eye contact help get things started on the right foot.

"My name is ____, I am a ______ at Reed College majoring in ____. I am very interested in ______ (the kind of work that generally characterizes your interest i.e. programming, education, finance, etc.)
I have skills and experience with __________. (hard and soft skills). I am pleased to get a chance to speak with you today. (60 seconds)

Show interest in their company. You need to demonstrate that you have some understanding of what they do. Note recent media coverage, a new service or product, etc. Your resume and conversation can be tailored to reflect your knowledge of what they are looking for in a candidate.

"I have reviewed your website and am very interested to know more about your business play. Could you please tell me about ______." (See below for more questions.)

Set the next step into motion.

"I am very interested in being considered for the __________ internship. What is my next step?"
"May I leave you my resume to be considered for this internship?"
"Whom should I contact to follow up our conversation?"
"May I get your business card so I can keep in contact with you about current and future positions?"
"May I leave you with my business card?"

Follow-up is absolutely necessary in order to stand out – this is what separates the people of interest and the people that get the interviews.

Ask about a good time to get back to them to ask about their hiring and decision-making process. If companies are not hiring now, you may want to ask about when they expect this to change and the best way to stay in touch.

Do what you say you will do. Be assertive, reliable, and polite.

More Questions
Your questions will yield more information if they are open-ended enough to engage the person in conversation. Following are possible questions:

Please tell me about your background and how you came to hold your current position? The conversation should lend itself to inquiries about educational background as well as the steps in this person’s career path.

What skills are required in this line of work? This should yield particular contexts in which general transferable skills (which can be products of your liberal arts education) are employed. It also invites the follow up...

What specific or technical skills have you acquired in your work?

What do you like most about your work (or the field)?

Are there any responsibilities in your position that you would rather give away?
What are some of the challenges of your job?...that the organization faces?...that affect the field?

What is the outlook for entry-level professionals in the field? Part of this line of inquiry includes "what is a typical entry-level position in the field (or in this organization)?" and should unveil how someone can get a chance to start.

What are the short and long term goals of your company or department? Here, you endeavor to get a clear and current picture of the organization/company. You should have done enough research ahead of time to know some basics about the products or services and even the general philosophy of the company. This will take your knowledge a step further.

Are there others in this field with whom you would suggest I talk? Follow this with, "May I say you referred me?"
Make sure you get the correct spelling of the name.

I remain very interested in this line of work and will certainly pursue further leads for information and perhaps employment. Do you have any final advice to give me regarding a career in this field? What do you recommend for my next step? This statement begins the closure of the interview. It should be heartfelt; otherwise, do not use it. The question allows the person to comment freely, accept or reject the mantle of mentor, and tie up any loose ends.

Finally, ask for permission to stay in touch to let him or her know how your search for information is going, and to learn of potential developments (e.g., May I keep in contact with you to report my progress?). If you are granted this permission, follow through!

After the Interview
Send a snail mail thank you note or letter immediately. (Think ahead and address the envelope with the person’s name and business address ahead of time). Keep the person informed of your progress through short email updates. By keeping in touch you cultivate new leads as you nurture the relationship for future follow up contacts. Sending someone an article you think might interest them is a genuine technique that demonstrates reciprocity; you’re giving back after they’ve given their time and advice.

Evaluate your style of interviewing as well as the information you received. Summarize the information in writing and date it. Your journal should include specific points that were made in the interview and when or if you will follow up. If you make several contacts during a week, your notes and summaries will be extremely important as you review what you have learned.

Arrange appointments with new referrals.