

Talking to people to gain information can be one of the most effective ways to learn what you need to know when choosing a career or beginning a job search. Interviewing for information will introduce you to both the people and work settings which are of interest to you. Often you can learn things you could not learn any other way.

What you will gain:

1. Up-to-date, first hand information about an occupation or company.
2. The ability to discuss how you fit into a career or company with someone who knows.
3. Insight into how people feel about their work and organization.
4. Important contacts by meeting potential employers in an informal, non-stressful situation.
5. Information on the best way to approach a job search for a specific field.
6. Self-confidence from the experience of meeting with strangers. (This is a critical element for successful career decision making and job hunting.)
7. On-going relationships with professionals in your field of interest.

So, who do you talk to?

Think through what you want to know and who might have that information.
Find organizations that employ these people.

How do I find someone to talk to?

1. The best way to find someone to talk to in an organization is through a personal contact. You may think that you do not know anyone, but chances are you probably know someone who knows someone (professors, classmates, friends, former employers, family members, friends' parents, etc.). Brainstorm about people you know who may have contact with someone in your industry or organization of interest. Take the initiative to call them and let them know what information you're seeking. Then, ask if they could make a referral for you.
2. If you don't have a contact – find one. Newspaper articles about local companies often give you names and titles. Visit the company website, conduct company research. Look for contacts in JobLink or LinkedIn. Contact local professional organizations such as the *American Marketing Association*, *Ad Club Seattle*, and *Seattle Society for Human Resources Management*. A great resource for local professional organizations is *The Seattle Networking Guide* at www.iloveseattle.org. There is also a host of information on the CCC website. Check out this link <http://www.spu.edu/depts/cdc/students/exploration/industryresearch.asp>. Take notes as you come across names of people involved in a company. Even if they are not the person you want to talk to, they probably know who that person is. The Center for Career and Calling can also help you identify SPU alumni who may be willing to talk to you.
3. If you need information on an organization, almost any person in the organization can be a good starting place. Often they can refer you to people “up the line.” The same is true for careers. If you are interested in marketing, you should consider talking to someone who has been in the field just a few years and someone who has a longer track record.

Setting up the interview:

1. It is best to call or visit the business in person to set up an informational interview. If you prefer to make contact via email or LinkedIn, be sure to indicate that you will follow up (and state when) so that your request doesn't get overlooked as spam.
2. If you are starting from scratch, call or visit the business and explain to the receptionist that you are seeking information about the job or company and ask who they would recommend you connect with. You may get transferred several times before finding the right person.
3. If you have a referral, indicate who recommended the connection and the reason you are contacting them. Ask if they are the right person for you to meet with or request a referral. Be professional and courteous and follow up by thanking everyone that is willing to share their contacts with you.
4. Explain who you are and state your reason for calling: *"I am a student at Seattle Pacific University and I am exploring careers in _____. I am interested in _____ and was hoping to talk to someone who _____. Would you be willing to meet with me for a brief interview about what you do?"*
5. **Clarify that you are seeking information for career research purposes and not looking for a job or internship.**
6. Set up an appointment to meet in person at a time and place that is convenient for the interviewee. Exchange contact information and request an address or directions if necessary. Follow up with an email to confirm the appointment.

Preparing for the Interview:

1. Read about the occupation, industry, and company before you go. This should familiarize you with some of the terminology and ideas you will encounter.
2. Write out specific questions you want to ask. Think through the things that are important to you. What do you really want to know? **RULE OF THUMB:** Don't ask a question if the answer could be found in printed or on-line material.
3. Be sure to present yourself professionally and dress appropriately.

Conducting the Interview:

Introduce yourself and state your purpose if you haven't already done so with the person you are interviewing. Be prepared to share why you are excited about exploring their industry and learning more from their perspective. A well prepared introduction will help get the meeting flowing. Have your list of questions. Refer to them and take notes. Time will go by quickly, so listen actively and ask follow-up questions if you are unclear about something. Try to honor the time limitations you initially set. After 20 minutes, offer to end the interview. If the person continues, it's their decision.

Thank the person for his/her time and be sure to ask for their business card. Send an email to thank them for their time and within 24 hours, send a brief thank-you letter. If appropriate, ask to connect with them on LinkedIn.

Helpful Hints:

1. Be certain of the kind of information you are seeking; Industry? Company? Occupation? Career direction?
2. Be sure to stick to the agreement you made with the interviewee, **that this is an informational conversation only**. It is okay to ask how a person effectively begins a career with the company or ask what suggestions they have for a job search, but do not ask for a job or an interview.
3. Ask Interviewee if they'd be willing to connect you with anyone else they know who might be able to offer some advice? (If you've formed a nice connection with your informational interviewee and he or she seems to want to help you, one of the best outcomes of your meeting is to find another person to interview. You can either ask your current interviewee to make an email introduction for you, or ask if it's okay to use your interviewee's name when contacting the person).
4. Before you leave the building, sit down and make detailed notes of what you heard and learned.
5. Remember this is a reciprocal relationship and you as a student have something to offer. Stay in the front of the person's mind through sending "touching base" emails with industry related articles/blog postings of interest and updates about your progress in career exploration/job search.

CAREER INFORMATION

Possible Questions for Analyzing a Career:

1. How did you get into this field?
2. What are the responsibilities of your job?
3. What do you like most about your job?
4. What do you like least?
5. What skills and experiences are most impressive in your field? How would you recommend I get that experience?
6. What is your typical day like?
7. What organizations and online groups do you recommend I belong to, and what events should I attend?
In general, how have you built relationships and networked effectively?
8. What activities, classes or other parts of your college experience best prepared you for your career?
What is the best decision you made as an undergraduate with respect to your professional life?
9. In terms of talent and personality, what kind of individual would be best suited for this kind of job?
10. What sources of information do you recommend (magazine, journals, Twitter feeds, websites, etc.)
11. If you were starting your career today, what would you do differently?
12. What can I do to make myself more marketable?
13. What kind of salary is median in your occupation?
14. What seem to be recurring problems for people in your field?
15. What rewards does your job offer?
16. What are other related career fields?
17. What are some settings in which people in this occupation are found?
18. What kind of training is required? Any license or other qualifications?
19. What is the employment outlook?
20. What would be a typical career path in this field?
21. How did you obtain your first job?
22. Would you be willing to review my résumé and offer your opinion and advice? (You'll only want to ask this question if you feel comfortable and the interview seems to be going well).

Evaluating Your Information

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I understand what the job entails?
2. Does this person use the skills I want to use?
3. What do I need to do to be qualified for this job? Do I want to do that?
4. Would I enjoy working in this capacity?
5. What alternatives were mentioned?
6. What would salaries be?
7. What positive/negative impression do I now have about this area of work?
8. What information do I still need to know to make a good decision?

COMPANY INFORMATION

Possible Questions about a Specific Company:

Department Trends

1. How would you describe the overall mission and goals of your organization?
2. What are the challenges facing the department?
3. What are the core activities, and services of this department?
4. How would you describe your clients? What is important to them?
5. Where do you see growth or change occurring in the organization?

Job Roles Overview

1. What skills and knowledge are most critical in this organization?
2. What personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this department/company?
3. What are some typical entry-level job roles in this department?
4. What job roles would utilize skills in (e.g. marketing, presentation, data analysis, negotiating)?
5. What do you see as the opportunities for growth and development?

Structure/Culture

1. What is a typical day like for an entry-level professional in your organization? (Try to get a balanced perspective by asking for pros and cons).
2. Could you describe the corporate culture of your company? What type of person does best in this type of culture?
3. *What* qualities does your company look for in the people they hire?
4. What is the management style in this organization?
5. I've built a target list of organizations in this field to research. Would you be willing to look at my list and give me suggestions you might have?

Evaluating Your Information

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Would I enjoy working for this company?
2. How can I help this company meet its goals?
3. How do my personal assets meet the needs of this company?
4. Are company values and goals consistent with mine?
5. Are there other organizations whom I should contact?
6. What are some problem areas which are apparent? Do I want to live with them?
7. Who should I contact next?