

Using Informational Interviews and Shadowing to Find Your Career

The best way to explore a potential career choice is by speaking with and/or following someone who works in that career.

- Do an informational interview. Learn first-hand about your chosen profession by asking questions about tasks, business environment, and educational background.
- Shadow a professional. Follow someone in your career choice as they go through a typical day or week on the job. Ask questions and observe the work.

Finding a Profession(al)

Finding someone to interview or shadow is not difficult. Ask your parents and your friends' parents if they know someone you can interview. Ask your professors for recommendations of professionals in the field. Go to your career center: Many maintain lists of alumni and employers who are willing to help in your career exploration.

Next, call or write a letter requesting an information interview or job shadowing. People who like their jobs tend to enjoy talking about them. You compliment the professional by expressing an interest in the career. In your phone call or letter, explain how you found the person you want to interview and request time for an appointment. Emphasize that you want to find out more about the career—you're not looking for a job. If you're lucky, the professional you contact may have other colleagues you can interview also.

Asking Questions

Takes notes during your time with the professional. Here are some questions you might ask:

3. What is your typical workday like?
4. What do you like most (and least) about your job?
5. What skills/abilities are most important to succeed in this job?
6. What is your educational background?
7. How did you get started in this field?
8. What courses were most helpful to you and which would you recommend?
9. What is the best way to get started in this field?
10. Do you have any additional advice to help me prepare?

Following Up Your Interview

Review your notes. What was your impression? Did you leave the interview feeling as if you can envision a future in this occupation or were you discouraged—you don't feel you learned enough about the occupation or the job description doesn't sound appealing any longer?

Take your thoughts and concerns to the career services staff and get feedback on the next step to take in your career exploration. You may want to do additional informational interviews in this career path or you may want to reexamine your goals and find a different path for your interests.

No matter what you decide, send a thank-you note to anyone you interview or shadow. Whether you decide to forge ahead on that career path or find another one, this professional may be a good person to network with when you begin your job search.