

Skillfully used, an informational interview is one of the most valuable sources of occupational information and may present opportunities for an intimate and flexible inside view of a job field unmatched by other sources. The informational interview communicates the first hand experiences and impressions of someone in the occupation and is directed by your questions.

How to find people:

Being referred by someone is a lot easier than making a cold call. Ask a friend, family member, or career coach if they know anyone who works in your area of interest. Don't be afraid to take a risk! Here's a list of places to start:

- Current/past employers
- Your doctor/dentist/healthcare provider
- High school teacher and/or college professors
- Heads of a local companies – large or small
- Somebody famous in the region
- Well-known cultural leaders
- A person who has the most unusual job you can think of
- The Web and Yellow Pages of your telephone book
- An ambassador at a local foreign embassy
- A celebrity or radio/TV personality
- *Utah Business* magazine
- Handshake employer contacts
- LinkedIn (connect with USU alumni by going to <https://www.linkedin.com/edu/alumni>)
- USU Career Fairs

Arranging the Interview:

Call the contact person directly and explain your objective of gathering information in a particular career field. Ask for 30 minutes or less and be courteous. You might say:

“Hello, my name is [Joe Shmoe]. I'm a sophomore at Utah State University majoring in Communications. I am in the process of researching and exploring the marketing field. At this point in my research, I am interested in speaking with someone currently employed in the field. Would it be possible to meet with you to ask some questions about the marketing industry? Or, is there someone else that you would recommend I talk to?”

Preparing for the Interview:

Prepare for the informational interview by creating specific questions in advance of the interview.

Consider asking the following types of questions:

1. What is a typical day like in your line of work?
2. How did you get started in this field?
3. What is your specific background and experience?
4. What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible in this field?
5. What skills must someone absolutely have to succeed in this field?
6. What is the typical career path for advancement?
7. What do you like best about your work? Least?
8. How many hours a week do you usually work?
9. Can you describe your working environment?
10. What are the obligations outside of work?
11. What salary can someone expect at entry level?
12. What types of changes are occurring in this field?
13. What is the employment outlook in this field over the next ten years?
14. As you look back on your first few years after college, what would you do differently?
15. What other occupations are closely related to this one?
16. Are there other people you suggest I should talk to?
17. What general advice would you have for someone considering this field of work?

Conducting the Interview:

Your interview can be face-to-face or over the telephone. Be courteous and limit the interview to 30 minutes; start and end the interview on time.

Follow-up Right Away:

Not only do you want to let the professional know you appreciate the time he or she spent with you, but you may also want to use this individual as a valuable contact in your career search. Send a thank-you email/letter within 48 hours of your interview.

There is an extraordinary amount of career information available to you in books, websites, and assessment tools. However, impersonal descriptions can't match the realism of actually watching someone do a job for a short period of time. That's what job shadowing is about and why it is such a unique opportunity to get a firsthand glimpse of a future career.

How to dress for the Job Shadow: Business casual dress is recommended; nice pants and a button down shirt or blouse is usually appropriate.

During the Job Shadow: Begin with a handshake. Smile and introduce yourself, using your first and last name and the name of the University you are attending. Inform your Job Shadowing host that you'll be taking notes for this assignment.

Respect Time: Arrive on time! Factor in traffic and unexpected delays. When you job shadow a person at their place of employment, it is likely that they are putting aside other work to talk to you. Respect their generosity.

Be Prepared: Prior to participating in a job shadowing experience, gather information about the organization. It is critical that you research the facts about what type of industry the organization is, what products or services it offers, the organizational structure, and other pertinent information you can locate. Have a research sheet and questions ready. It's impressive to show that you've taken time to prepare.

Be Professional: Ask your questions precisely -- don't ramble. Bring your questions in a Job Shadow folder. Remember to dress appropriately for a business setting.

Listen: Listen to all of your host's responses before writing a brief summary in your notes. If you don't completely understand, say so and ask for more details.

Don't Be Afraid: Your host understands that it takes time to get notes down properly. A little quiet as you write demonstrates respect for what they have said. Don't worry about the quiet space.

Be Courteous: Because you are in a place of employment, you need to time your questions appropriately and do not interrupt potential business or customer needs.

End Thankfully: Ask your host if there is any additional information they would like to give you before you leave. Everyone you meet is a potential connection to another opportunity. It is very appropriate to send a thank you card/email to your host. You never know when you might return to ask for a job or internship.

Potential Questions to Ask During the Job Shadow:

1. How did you get into this work? Get started in this job?
2. How did you prepare yourself for this job/profession?
3. What degree, major, and classes can I take to prepare myself for this career field?
4. Knowing what you know now, would you accept the same job again? Why or why not?
1. What do you like most/least about your career?
2. What do you find most rewarding about your work?
3. What skills or personal qualities are necessary in this career?
4. What do you do in a typical day?
5. What type of people do you work with?
6. What is the "culture" of your workplace?
7. What are the essential skills (i.e. leadership, communication, etc.) employers will look for in this industry?
8. What are other occupations in this career field?
9. How do you feel when you're at your job? Are there high times, low times?
10. What is your organization trying to accomplish?
11. What, in your opinion, is the job outlook in this career field?
12. Others: