

Informational interviews and job shadowing are incredibly valuable career planning experiences. You'll gain great insight and make better career decisions by talking with professionals in the occupations and workplaces in which you are interested. And those conversations can also help you overcome barriers, make connections and market yourself in the job search process.

The process of gathering information through a one-on-one meeting with a personal contact is known as informational interviewing. Job shadowing, a related concept, involves observing the daily duties of a professional. While an informational interview usually takes place in a 30-60 minute time frame, a job shadow could last a few hours or up to a week.

GOOD SOURCES OF PEOPLE TO SHADOW AND INTERVIEW:

- Individuals who are in fields that you are considering or are interested in learning more about first-hand
- Individuals who have experienced some of the challenges you believe that you face, or have followed a similar path
- Individuals who are knowledgeable about their organization or industry, or what that organization or industry seeks in its applicants

WAYS TO MAKE CONTACT WITH POTENTIAL PEOPLE:

- Sending an email or letter explaining your need for information and your desire to arrange a time to talk about or observe that individual's work
- A referral from someone you know or have spoken with previously (be sure to mention the mutual contact's name)
- Calling to explain your desire for information and to request a meeting
- Contacting an organization and asking to be put in touch with someone who does the particular kind of work in which you are interested

For many students, it is easiest to begin with the people you know, and to branch out from there.

PREPARING FOR & CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW OR JOB SHADOW

Be sure to follow a process similar to this to get the most out of your time together and to make a good impression with your contact.

1. **Logistics.** Make sure you are clear that you are seeking information only (not a job) and be flexible in arranging a meeting time and location.
2. **Follow through.** In advance of your meeting you may send a copy of your résumé restating your appointment time and sharing your appreciation. Be sure to emphasize that the résumé enclosed is for their information only (again, you're not looking for a job).
3. **Do your homework.** Informational interviews, like real interviews, require advanced preparation. Do some reading in advance on the profession or organization so that you appear prepared, knowledgeable, and professional.
4. **Restate your purpose.** At the beginning of your interview, restate the information you are seeking. Ask prepared questions to get the conversation started, but ask questions that are open-ended for the best information. If job shadowing, ask for time to shadow as well as time to meet one-on-one to discuss your observations.
5. **Be a good listener.** Ask questions, but also listen to the information given in the answers, as this is the main goal.
6. **Be respectful of your contact's time.** Thank the person for their time and willingness to meet. Don't extend your meeting past the agreed upon time, unless invited to do so.
7. **Follow through again.** At the end of the interview or shadow, ask the person if they know of others who might be able to provide you with further information. *Always* write a thank you note within 24 hours of your meeting.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

When thinking about what questions to ask during an interview, try to focus on questions that you could not otherwise obtain from print materials or the Internet, such as:

- the person's path into the profession
- what their typical day is like
- what they like least and best about their job or profession
- where they, personally, see the profession heading
- what kinds of opportunity exist for promotion in the field

The real value of an informational interview or job shadow lies in the personal insight that can be gained from the experience. Remember that this is one view of many. Try conducting multiple interviews or shadows in order to gain a variety of perspectives.

The MU Career Center is here to assist you with career and major exploration, job search preparation, or after college planning. Come by the Career Center or visit our website at <http://career.missouri.edu>, and a Career Specialist would be happy to help you!

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