

# Interviewing for Information

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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 a non-stressful situation.
5. Information on the best way to approach job search for a specific field.
6. Self-confidence, by experiencing meeting with strangers; this is a critical element for successful career decision-making and job hunting. Better to learn this skill now, when there's little at stake, than to wait until you're needing a job.

## So, who do you talk to?

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

## How do I find someone to talk to?

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, 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.

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.

The Career Development Center can help you identify SPU alumni who may be willing to talk to you.

In your company or career research using written or on-line materials, you probably came across names of people involved in the company. Even if they are not the person you want to talk to, they probably know who that person is. Newspaper articles about local companies often give you names and titles. Again, use the downtown Seattle Public Library for newspaper clippings and files on local companies, or company web sites.

The Yellow Pages can also give you a good list of potential organizations. To get the name of the person who you want, you can simply call the company and ask for the name. Then call back and ask for that person.

Contact local Professional Organizations. Most have programs just for this. The CDC has a directory of all professional organizations in the U.S. Many have Seattle chapters.

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## Setting up the interview:

1. Phone Call -- There are several ways to set up an interview. For a local interview, particularly if you have a referral, a phone call is the best way to initiate with a potential interviewee. Explain who you are and state your reason for calling clearly. "I am a student at Seattle Pacific University and I am interest in...Would you be able to spend 15-20 minutes with me?" Assure them that you are not a salesperson and are not applying for a job.
2. Visit the Business -- Another approach is to go to the place of business, explain to the receptionist that you are seeking information, and ask the name of the appropriate person. Do not expect anyone to be able to talk to you at this time, but see if you can schedule an appointment. However, do go prepared in case someone has time to see you.
3. Letter -- In some cases, a brief letter stating your questions may be your only option (for example: you're wondering what it is like to be an actuary in Japan). If you do this, be sure to include a self-addressed stamped return envelope. Email may also work.
4. A Word of Caution -- Some people may honestly be too busy to talk with you.

## Preparing for the Interview:

1. Read about the occupation, industry, and company before you go. (See the "Researching Companies" sheet available in CDC). This should familiarize you with some of the terminology and ideas you will encounter. Complete the information and skills part of Choices (the computerized career guidance program in the CDC).
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. Wondering if IBM made money last year? Look it up. Wondering how the marketing manager is feeling about the possibility of layoffs? Do an interview.

## Conducting the Interview:

Introduce yourself and state your purpose if you haven't already done so with the person you are interviewing. Have your list of questions. Refer to them and take notes if you would like. Time will go by quickly, so listen actively and ask follow-up questions if you are unclear of 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. Within the week, send a brief thank-you letter using business stationery and format.

## Helpful Hints:

- Be certain of the kind of information you need and that the person you are interviewing is the person who can answer your questions.
- Be sure to stick to the agreement you made with the interviewee. Ask how a person effectively begins a career with the company, ask what suggestions they have for a job search, but do not ask for a job or an interview. If they offer, however, you don't have to turn them down.

Always ask if they are aware of other people with whom it might be helpful to meet. Ask if it would be all right to mention their name when you call.

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## CAREER INFORMATION

### Possible Questions If You Are Analyzing A Career:

1. How did you get into this field?
2. What do you like most about your job?
3. What do you like least?
4. What is your typical day like?
5. What are the responsibilities of your job?
6. Are these duties the same for everyone with this job title?
7. In terms of talent and personality, what kind of individual would be best suited for this kind of job?
8. What are the prospects for someone entering your field today?
9. What advice would you give me for locating and obtaining a job in this field?
10. What sources of information would you recommend (magazine, journals, etc.)
11. What kind of programs or activities does your office perform?
12. What kind of salary is median in your occupation?
13. What seems to be recurring problems for people in your field?
14. What kind of education do you need?
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 get started in this field?
22. How did you obtain your first job?
23. What kind of skills do you need to meet the challenges of your position?
24. If you had it to do over, what would you do differently?

### 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 (or 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?

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## COMPANY INFORMATION

### Possible Questions If You Are Seeking Information About a Specific Company:

1. For what position would this company hire someone with my qualifications?
2. What might I expect to be doing over the next three to five years?
3. How much freedom do employees have to determine their own job movement and responsibilities?
4. How does the company facilitate employees staying current in their fields?
5. How are employees encouraged to continue their professional development over an extended period of time?
6. What kind of training is provided for prospective supervisors or managers?
7. Do you have or sponsor any continuing education programs for employees?
8. How would you describe the quality of your company's management? What seem to be the strengths and weaknesses?
9. What are management's basic philosophies in managing the business and employees?
10. What do your company's managers and supervisors have in common?
11. What are the company's values? What does the company stand for?
12. How are the company's values reflected in everyday activities?
13. Why is the work environment what it is (formal/casual, elegant/simple)?
14. What kind of people are most successful or satisfied at your company?
15. Who do you consider your major competitors? How would you evaluate your success in the competition?
16. What is your company's compensation philosophy compared with other companies?
17. How are individual increases determined?
18. How old is your organization and how have you seen it change?
19. How does this organization rank within its field, or industry?
20. What is the general image of the organization in people's minds?
21. How does communication work within the organization?
22. How is information collected, and by what paths does it flow?
23. What methods are used to see that information gets results--to what authority do people respond at this company?

### 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. Who should I contact next?
5. Are company values and goals consistent with mine?
6. Are there other organizations whom I should contact?
7. What are some problem areas which are apparent? Do I want to live with them?