A good way to obtain career-related information involves talking to people who are working in your field of interest. You will have an opportunity to ask important questions, gather up-to-date information, examine work environments, and learn what people do in a variety of fields on a day-to-day basis.

Identifying People to Interview

- Start with a list of people you already know who might have contacts in the field you are researching. Consider friends, relatives, fellow students, faculty, coworkers, neighbors, and the people they know.
- Check out the Career Advisor Network at The Career Center. It is a group of CU Denver alumni and friends who are willing to talk to students and alumni about their occupations.
- Have you had any guest speakers in your classes that might be good for an informational interview?
- Consider contacting interesting people you have read about in the newspaper.
- Professional associations are a great way to get in touch with potential contacts.
- Even the yellow pages has an organized list of businesses who might be willing to talk to you. If you can’t get the name of a contact, you can always call an organization and ask to speak to someone in the specific department you are interested in.

Preparing For the Informational Interview

- Prior to the interview, review your interests, personality characteristics, skills, and values so that you can discuss and assess your compatibility with the occupation and work environment.
- Read about the field before conducting the informational interview so that you can ask better questions.
- Develop your list of questions and organize them in priority order (in case you don’t have time to ask them all). Think carefully about what information this person can best help you with.

Arranging the Informational Interview

You will most likely find that people are happy (even flattered) to spend a few minutes telling you what they do for a living. Informational interviews can be arranged by phone, or if you prefer, by writing a letter and following up by phone. When making an appointment - be flexible. Be available to meet at your contact’s convenience. Be concise, polite, businesslike, and to the point. It helps to write out a script and practice. If you were referred, mention the name of your referral source when introducing yourself.

Sample Telephone Script

Mr. Jackson, my name is ________________. I met you last week in Dr. Smith’s management class when you gave us some very useful information about _________. I will be graduating in ______ with a degree in __________, and I am in the process of exploring opportunities in my field where I can utilize my skills and experience. You are obviously very knowledgeable in this field, and I wondered if I could meet with you for about 15 – 20 minutes to discuss some specific questions I have?
Be prepared for responses such as, “I think our HR Director can probably be of more help”. You might say, “That my be true if I were looking for a job, however I would like to speak with you because I am really seeking information and advice about the (field, company, industry) and ____________ told me you would be someone whose advice I could respect”.

**Conducting the Informational Interview**

Dress neatly, be punctual, and handle yourself in a professional manner. Try to develop a good rapport with your contact. Ask your prepared questions. Be respectful of the time. Do not go over the 15 – 20 minute time limit you set with the interviewer unless you are invited to. Prior to leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others that may be helpful to you.

**Follow-up**

- Always write a thank you note! Mention what you learned and how you are following up on their suggestions.
- Keep a record of your contact (name, title, company, phone, date of informational interview and whom they referred you to).
- Keep in touch periodically, if appropriate. If you decide to pursue the career as a result of your informational interview, you may want to notify your contact and send a cover letter and resume when you implement your job search.

*A couple of words of caution when evaluating the information you received:*

- Remember to differentiate between your interest in the occupation and how you feel about the person you interviewed. For example, don’t confuse liking the person for assuming that you would like the occupation.
- Interview another person in the same occupation to verify that you have received an accurate perception of the field. You may have spoken to someone overly euphoric or burned out. Counter balancing with another opinion is always useful.

**Questions for Informational Interviews**

**What Is The Nature Of The Work Performed?**
1. What are the specific duties and responsibilities?
2. Describe a typical day/week?
3. What are the toughest problems you deal with?
4. What part of this work do you find most rewarding?

**What Are The Qualifications For This Type Of Work?**
1. What kind of training, education, or course work is required?
2. What skills or talents are most essential in this occupation?
3. What personal qualities are important?
4. What essential abilities are necessary to do the job well?
5. What kinds of prior experiences are absolutely essential?
6. How did you prepare yourself for this work?
7. Are particular degrees or licenses required to enter this occupation?

**What Are The Working Conditions?**
1. What type of setting, hours, atmosphere, etc can be expected?
2. What obligations do this type of work place on you outside of the ordinary workweek?
3. How much flexibility do you have in terms of hours of work, dress, vacation, etc?
What Are The Entry-Level Positions?
1. Could you suggest any part-time or summer work experience that would help a person prepare for this occupation?
2. What types of employers hire people in this field? Where are they located?
3. How do I find out about internship or job openings in this field?

What Salary Can Be Expected?
1. What is the average starting salary?
2. What are the salaries for typical experienced workers?
3. How much do salaries vary according to the employer, region, or industry?

What Is The Employment Outlook?
1. What changes do you think are coming in this field?
2. If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel you could do?
3. How would you describe or estimate future prospects?
4. How rapidly is this field growing and changing, and in what ways?
5. What other occupations are closely related to this one?

What Are The Opportunities For Advancement?
1. What additional training or qualifications are necessary for advancement?
2. What are some of the job possibilities for experienced workers in this field?
3. Is turnover high in this field?
4. Do people normally move to another company/organization or do they move up in the company/organization?
5. What steps did you take to get where you are now?

What Personal Satisfaction Do You Get From Work?
1. How did you become interested in this occupation?
2. What is it about this occupation/organization that gives you personal satisfaction? What values of yours are expressed in your work?
3. What basic assumptions and beliefs are shared and supported by people in this field?
4. What are the major frustrations, annoyances, or sources of dissatisfaction in this occupation/organization?
5. What are the best things about this occupation?

What Advice Can You Give Me?
1. What advice do you have for me as I consider a career in this field?
2. What do you wish you had known before you entered this field?
3. If I choose to enter this field, what job hunting strategies do you recommend?
4. Because you know this field better than I do, what other questions should I be asking?
5. What journals do you recommend I read?

Where Can I Get More Information? (ALWAYS ASK THIS)
1. Based on our conversation today, who else should talk to?
2. Can you name a few people who might be willing to talk with me? May I have your permission to use your name when I contact them?
3. What are the professional associations in this field? Which ones do you belong to and why? Are nonmembers permitted to attend a meeting? Is there an active local chapter?