

Using Information 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 information 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:

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

- Following Up Your In Your College Has a Career Center. Here Are 5 Good Reasons to Use It!

by James Andersen

Josh just graduated from a major university two months ago with a degree in computer science. Josh has a lot going for him. He's young and driven, and he's super-duper smart. He's the kind of guy that, if he can get in front of the right person, he won't have a problem landing in a good spot. So my advice to him was quick, sound, and should do the trick.

I've been working in higher education for more than 10 years, and in that time, I've heard a lot of excuses. Excuses for being late, excuses for missing assignments, excuses for missing a due date for a research paper, excuses for...for...well, for whatever. Just about anything you can think of--there has been an excuse for not doing it. But there is no excuse for not using your college's resources. Your college spends a lot of money on these services and they are there just for you. I visit a lot of campuses and almost all of them have a writing lab, free tutoring, an academic studies center, and a CAREER CENTER. Why don't you use them?

Getting a job right out of college can be tough, but it's not impossible and your college wants to help you. One of my biggest gripes is that many of our students wait until it's too late to visit the career center. A lot of them come walking in six months after graduation still trying to land their break-in job. They can't see what they're doing wrong, and I want to say, *where were you six months ago?*

As college students who are getting ready to graduate—Listen up! You don't have to be like Josh. You don't have to graduate and get lost in the endless black hole of online job boards. Josh has only been out of school for two months and already he's depressed and discouraged. He's wondering why he wasted four years of his life. He's questioning his career path, ready to give up on his dreams and spend the rest of his life stocking shelves on the night shift.

Don't be like Josh.

Here are a few reasons why you should visit your college career center now.

1) You pay for this service. You may not realize it, but your campus fees fund all of these student-support services and many of these services exist because past students have said they wished they would have had them. Your fellow students realized that they needed help and your college listened and took steps to make sure you had all the support you needed to be successful.

You wouldn't pay for car insurance and not call them when someone pulls out in front of you and rearranges your fender? You wouldn't go to the doctor and pay cash when you pay for medical insurance every month, would you? You have to have car insurance, you have to have medical insurance, and you have to pay tuition and campus fees, so get your money's worth.

2) The career center is staffed by experts who have spent years studying the job market and employers, learning what employers want in their job candidates, and determining how to get their attention. The career center staff works hard to stay up on all the newest trends in things like resume writing, interviewing, where to look for jobs, and how to beat the dreaded ATS (applicant tracking systems). Why not tap into all that experience?

I promise that most of you will be on the job hunt more than once during your career(s), so take advantage of the career center staff. You aren't bothering them. They love what they do and their faces light up every time a student walks in the door.

3) They spend a lot of time developing relationships with employers. They are constantly visiting with employers, reaching out to them and telling them about all of the wonderful students your college is graduating every year. They are out there campaigning for you, building relationships for you. And you know what? Employers are listening.

People who hire other people are always on the lookout for good talent and most people get jobs through referrals and contacts. We are out there selling your skills for you and you don't have to pick up the check.

4) Companies recruit students through the career center. Did you know that whenever a new company considers moving into an area, one of their first stops is the local university or community college? Why? Well, they want to see what kind of work force they can expect. They reach out to the colleges because they want to hire their graduates. These jobs are posted in the career center and sent out all over campus and often these employers interview students on the spot, in the center, right there on campus.

Wow! A good employer hiring you just before you graduate and you don't have to travel, you don't have to do anything but be yourself, and be a little bit proactive. Oh, did I mention that the expert staff will coach you and help you prepare before your interview? Kind of a no brainer, right?

5) Need a part-time job to help pay for school and build valuable skills at the same time? Each month, I get dozens of part-time job opportunities sent to my center and they are not fast food jobs. I get opportunities from accounting firms, law offices, engineering firms, inside sales jobs—you name it. How many of you could use a few extra bucks for gas or maybe a nice dinner not in the cafeteria? Here's the cool thing—most of these employers are willing to work around your school schedule and many of these jobs could turn into something special.

Another benefit is that you will be exposed to a whole new world, new and different people, and new ideas. You will be exposed to new and innovative ideas and get some real world experience. You might even find your true calling or fall in love with a whole new industry. You will get to see what real professionals do on a daily basis. You can't get that in a classroom.

There you have it, five good reasons you should visit your college's career center today.

So what advice did I give Josh, our recent graduate? I told him to call his college's career center and make an appointment. He's newly graduated and most colleges offer their services to alumni. In Josh's case, he should have no problems, but he could have saved himself a lot of misery if he would have tapped into this campus resource a few months ago. So, what's your excuse?

James Andersen is Career and Placement Services Coordinator at Coastal Carolina Community College

My...

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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 center staff and get feedback on the next step to take in your career exploration. You may want to do additional information 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.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).