

Checking Out Career Options Can Help You Decide



Thinking about Grad

School? Not quite sure what you want to do? Try the informational interview.

Most of us know that graduate school is not the best place to discover what it is that we want to do with our lives, yet many of us will still go on to pursue a Master's Degree simply because we cannot think of a more attractive path to take. While admissions officers at graduate schools across the country are getting ready to crack down on admitting "unfocused students," it is time for these "students of many options" to go out and explore the careers available to them without getting their feet too wet. This is where the *informational interview* comes in.

An informational interview can not only be used to get a better idea of how people like a variety of careers and find out what they had to do to get there, but it can also be used to get your foot in the door of a company that you are interested in working with. Your first goal in an informational interview is to learn whether a potential career or position fits your skills and interests. There is "no

better way to get a taste of the real world than by talking with people working in jobs that interest you," according to Joanna Gordon, a business writer in New York. And often, says Gordon, "deciding a career is wrong for you is as important as finding one that's right."

The key to informational interviews is that you are in charge. Because you initiate the interview, you set the agenda. Begin the meeting by introducing yourself and stating why you requested the interview. Gordon advises that in order to dispel any misunderstandings, you should "restate that you want to learn about the company and industry, not ask for a job." This way, your contact won't feel pressured. Be sure to conduct research before the interview by visiting the company's Web site and preparing questions. Don't worry about whether you're wasting a busy person's time, you will be surprised by how willing many professionals are to spend time with you. As Gordon states, "they were in your shoes once and needed advice on breaking into the working world. Now it's their turn to give back."

Your second objective in an informational interview is to initiate a long-term relationship with your contacts. If you make a good impression, you may be invited to interview for a job if one opens up. This is why it is so important to do your research, and to be professional and enthusiastic. You will also want to be sure that you listen more than you talk.

Remember, according to Dana Alexander, the director of Career and Life Planning at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, graduate school admissions officers are looking for applicants who "demonstrate clear direction, focus and self-understanding." The informational interview can help you get there.



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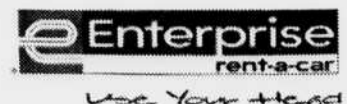
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