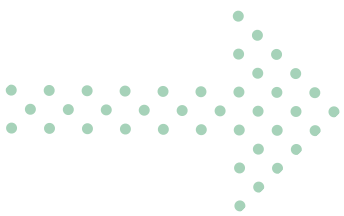


## Chapter 10: Interactive Career Research

After narrowing down your career options through your preliminary research, (we suggest 2-4, but this number is flexible), it is helpful to further explore these choices by talking to and observing people in the roles that interest you. This interactive research will allow you to gain a more thorough, nuanced understanding of each occupation, compared to simply reading about them. It is a critical step in the career decision-making process!

In addition to increasing your knowledge about each of your career options, the main goal of your interactive career research is to assess how each option aligns with your career criteria, which you have listed on your Career Criteria Summary.



Once you have completed your interactive research and have a good working knowledge of each career option, as well as how each option fits your criteria, you will be much closer to making an informed career decision!

An extremely effective way to conduct interactive research about an occupation is to do information interviews. In the next section of this chapter, information interviews will be discussed in detail. Other interactive research strategies, including job shadowing, volunteering, co-ops and internships, and temporary work, will be described at the end of the chapter.

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### Information Interviews

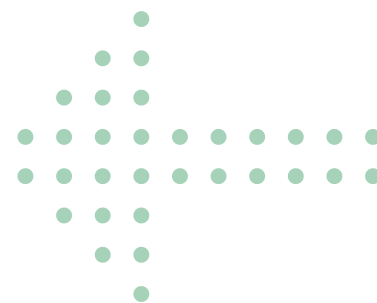
An information interview involves interviewing someone to learn more about their career. Conducting information interviews is a critical part of the career decision making process.

Although online career research is an important and necessary step, speaking with people who have experience working in your top careers of interest will help you make a more informed career decision. This is because you can get answers to the specific, more personalized questions you have.

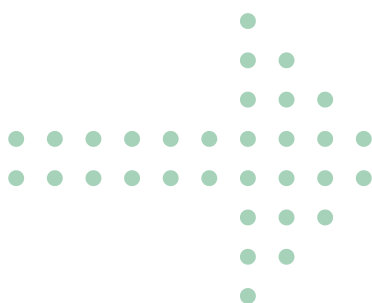
The responses and information shared during an information interview can be tailored to you and your situation, whereas online information is more generalized in nature.

There are a few steps to the information interview process, each of which will take some time and effort to complete:

1. Find/identify individuals you'd like to speak with.
2. Conduct reach-outs and determine whom you'll meet with.
3. Prepare your questions.
4. Conduct your information interviews.
5. Follow up with a thank-you.



As you move through these steps, keep in mind that there are **3** primary purposes for conducting information interviews:



1. Confirming if this type of work is a fit for you.
2. Gaining tips regarding how to prepare for and enter this career
3. Increasing support and building your network.



### NOTE:

Although it's an important aspect of career decision-making, some people get very nervous about having to conduct information interviews. Others find it difficult to identify individuals to interview or are anxious about reaching out to individuals they don't know.

People can lose momentum at this stage of the career counselling process, without clear between-session goals and support from their counsellor. If you notice that you are worrying about your information interviews, let your counsellor know. Each counsellor has supported many clients through this phase of career counselling and will be happy to address any concerns or challenges you have.

## STEP 1: Identifying Individuals to Speak With

We have put together pointers to help you to identify people who will usually agree to meet/speak with you for an information interview. Once you learn how to find and connect with these people, you will be able to use this research strategy at various times throughout your career, as needed.

Not only are information interviews helpful to learn about new careers you're considering, they can also help you learn about specific companies, organizations, teams, and/or roles that interest you.

Below is a list of methods to gain contacts:

### • YOUR NETWORK

When people hear the word “network” their first reaction is often to think, “I don’t have a network!” Pause. Everyone has a network - it is made up of all the people you know and/or have contact with, whether that’s in-person or online.

Take time to brainstorm about who is in your network, and who might know other people that fit your needs for information interviews. Make sure you include the following groups:

- Your immediate and extended family
- Your friends and their families
- Your neighbours and people they know
- People in your community (e.g., members of associations or groups to which you belong; people at your health club, place of worship, on social media accounts, etc.)
- Instructors/teachers/coaches
- Acquaintances (e.g., friends of friends, hairstylist, other people who are extensions of your personal or professional network)
- Past and current co-workers
- People you have met through volunteering

Leveraging your network is the easiest way to gain support with your interactive career research. While it is common for people to think that they don’t have the connections they need, after some reflection and asking people they know, they start to realize how much support they do have.

In this activity, you will list the people in your life who may be able to support you with your career research. Keep your mind open! You may list people even though you are unsure of the type of support they can provide you. For example, you might want to ask all your friends, as one of them may know someone in the occupation you are considering.

Take some time to fill out the following networking table to get started:

My Network	
FAMILY	
FRIENDS	
CO-WORKERS	
ACQUAINTANCES	
COMMUNITY	
INSTRUCTORS	

## • SOCIAL MEDIA/NETWORKING APPS

Using social media (such as LinkedIn and Facebook) to search for people to interview is a great strategy as it expands upon your immediate network. You can search directly for individuals working in a specific career or industry, or you can post a request like: “I’m looking for a physiotherapist to speak with about their career. I’m considering that career area for myself. Does anyone know someone who might be willing to speak with me for a half hour?”

Aside from the social media accounts you use for personal reasons, there are apps that have been developed specifically for professional networking.

Consider these resources as an option for finding connections:

- Lunch Club ([lunchclub.com](http://lunchclub.com))
- Fishbowl ([fishbowlapp.com](http://fishbowlapp.com))
- Shapr ([shapr.co/en](http://shapr.co/en))



If there are other apps you come across and find helpful, please let your counsellor know so we can recommend these resources to future clients!

## • EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Programs that offer the degree, diploma, certificate, or other training in your field of interest will often share the names of instructors, recent grads, or alumni who may be willing to speak with you about their experience and career.

Be sure to say that you are considering the program and need advice from others who have found successful employment after completing it, or from the program instructors who also work in the field.

## • BUSINESSES/ ORGANIZATIONS

Another way in which to gain information interview names is by directly contacting businesses or organizations in your areas of interest. Many professionals are happy to share information about their work if it is not too time consuming and can be scheduled at a convenient time and place.

## • ASSOCIATIONS

Many fields have professional associations that may put you in touch with people practicing in that area (e.g., CPA – Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, APEGGA – Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, Geophysicists of Alberta, CPA – Canadian Psychological Association).

Contact the association and say you are interested in speaking with a professional in the field, as you are considering that career. They may be willing to share names or pass along your contact information.

### STEP 2: Conducting Reach Outs

Once you have a solid list of contacts you would like to interview, you will need to reach out to each one to see if they would be open to meeting and speaking with you.



#### REMEMBER:

If the thought of reaching out to individuals about an information interview is nerve-racking, remember: you are not asking anyone for a job. You are simply asking for some time to speak with them about their career.

Consider the reverse – if someone reached out to you to learn about the work you do, what would your reaction be? In most cases, people are happy to help! Sometimes, it's even the case that the other individual feels flattered that you thought of them to speak with.

Review the Dos and Don'ts below to help navigate your reach outs. Following these recommendations, you will be guided to develop and refine your information interview questions.

DOs	DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write a personalized message where you introduce yourself, share that you're considering a career transition, and tell them why you're interested in speaking with them.</li><li>• Ask for a half hour of their time (they will usually provide more but are more likely to say yes to a brief conversation). Asking for less than 30 minutes won't give you enough time.</li><li>• Ask to meet face-to-face if possible. This method helps to build the best connection, compared to phone or email. In today's remote world a virtual meeting with video turned on (e.g. Zoom) is the second best option.</li><li>• Try 3 times to get a response, varying between email, message (e.g., on LinkedIn or Facebook), and phone. Allow 1 week between contacts and give up after 3 attempts.</li><li>• Search for new contacts if you aren't hearing back. Keep going, you can do this!</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Send a generic message to all your contacts or don't specify that you'd like to learn more about their career (e.g., saying you need to speak with them, but without a reason).</li><li>• Suggest times and locations that are best for you. Instead, let them take the lead and work to make it most convenient for them as they are going out of their way for you.</li><li>• Rely on email or Facebook to have these important career conversations.</li><li>• Give up after your first attempt OR try too many times and annoy the person.</li><li>• Get discouraged or take a lack of responses as rejection.</li></ul>

### STEP 3: Preparing Your Information Interview Questions

In this section, you will be guided to develop your information interview questions. While there are a number of general/recommended information interview questions you may find online, it is important to keep what *you* need in a career – your career criteria – front of mind, and tailor your questions to the specific careers/roles that you are considering.

Beyond learning about each career option, the purpose of your information interviews is to assess how well each career would fit *you*. How will each career align with what you learned about yourself and your needs for career fulfillment?

Often, the idea of a career and the reality of a career are two different things. Through conducting information interviews (and other interactive research) you will better understand the reality of each career so you can work toward making an informed career decision.



To develop your information interview questions, you will need to refer back to your Career Criteria Summary. As you review and reflect on each item you have listed (e.g., your **interests, skills, personality, values, and reality factors**), you will develop questions to help you to gauge if your criteria are a good fit with the careers you are considering.

Once you have thought through all of the questions you could ask, you will work to identify the 8 - 10 most important questions that are unique to your individual needs.

#### • INTERESTS

Interests are often the career criteria most clearly described in online career resources. This is because written career descriptions usually list the types of tasks and responsibilities that are common in a given career, which tend to relate to areas of interest.

Even if you think you have a good sense of what you would be required to do in each career on your list, and believe you would enjoy the work, it is still important to ask about your particular interest areas (e.g. the duties, tasks, and responsibilities you would like to do) during your information interviews.



You want to confirm that the responsibilities and tasks you think are part of the career are, in fact, what you would get to do. It is also helpful to find out if there are any common responsibilities that you have overlooked.

For example, if schoolteacher is one of the careers you are considering, your online research may have listed tasks such as: teaching, reviewing curriculum, lesson planning, marking student work, and writing report cards.

However, based on the feedback of the many teachers we have worked with at Canada Career Counselling, and from clients who have conducted information interviews with teachers, other responsibilities that often aren't listed online include:

- behaviour management
- informal counselling
- yard duty/supervision
- calls with parents
- meetings with administration and other teachers
- committee work
- documentation of various information
- range of student assessments

To make sure you have a realistic perspective about a career's responsibilities, you could consider asking questions such as:

- 1.** Could you tell me about the different tasks you are responsible for day-to-day in your career?
- 2.** What does a day/week in your career look like?
- 3.** I have read that teaching, reviewing curriculum, lesson planning, and marking student work are the main tasks of a schoolteacher. Is there anything else you would add to that list? Am I missing any other common responsibilities?

Drawing from the **interests** section of your Career Criteria Summary, as well as the careers on your list, what questions do you think would be useful to ask during your information interviews?

List your questions below:

1.

2.

3.

• **SKILLS AND STRENGTHS**

As we noted earlier in this career counselling process, it is wise to choose a career that leverages your top skills rather than one that focuses on developing your weaknesses.

Like interests, the skills and strengths that are required for a given career are often shared in online career descriptions.

That being said, we recommend double checking this information during your information interviews. You could consider verifying the information you have read online with your interviewee, or sharing your top skills and asking your interviewee about how your skill areas might align with their career.

Based on the **skills and strengths** you listed on your Career Criteria Summary, and the careers you are considering, list the questions you think could be helpful to ask:

1.

2.

3.



**NOTE:**

While focusing on your strengths and their fit with each career is a priority, it is also common to be concerned about skills you consider to be areas of weakness and whether a career will require extensive skills you do not possess.

For example, if you feel writing is not a strong skill for you, you might consider asking how much writing is required as part of the career. If the career is a good fit overall, but it would be useful to build up your skills in a particular area, you could ask the person you are interviewing about training they recommend to improve these skills or meet with one of our Career Advisors to explore relevant professional development opportunities.

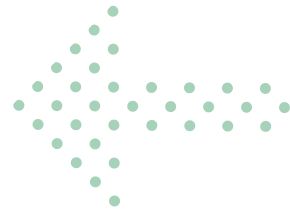
## • PERSONALITY

Exploring your personality in Chapter 6 highlighted that what you find satisfying and unsatisfying is influenced by your personality. When people work in a career that does not align with their personality, they often feel frustrated, uncomfortable, and exhausted.

Unlike interests and skills, personality is not commonly considered in online career information resources; career profiles do not typically list information about what might be satisfying if you have particular personality characteristics.

You may have found it challenging during your preliminary research to figure out if the careers you are considering truly align with your personality. Therefore, it is especially important to ask questions in your information interviews about how well your personality might align with the careers you are exploring.

For each item pertaining to “What I Need In A Career For It To Be Satisfying” on your Career Criteria Summary, you will need to consider what questions you might ask to determine if you would truly be satisfied in the careers you are considering.



For example, for the ENTP personality type, one of the career satisfaction items highlights: *“The opportunity to work on a variety of creative challenges that let me try new and different approaches.”*

Based on this factor, useful questions could include:

1. I’m someone who likes to work on a variety of creative challenges rather than on one repetitive task or tasks that require the same type of solution. Do you get to work on a variety of creative challenges in your work? Would you say this is common across people working in your field?
2. Do you have opportunities to be creative and try different approaches in your work?

Below, list the needs you may want to consider in order to determine if you would truly be satisfied in the careers you are considering. Develop a question for each that could be useful to ask:

1.	<b>Need:</b>	
	<b>Question:</b>	
2.	<b>Need:</b>	
	<b>Question:</b>	
3.	<b>Need:</b>	
	<b>Question:</b>	
4.	<b>Need:</b>	
	<b>Question:</b>	
5.	<b>Need:</b>	
	<b>Question:</b>	

## • VALUES

It is important to ensure the occupations you are considering will fit with your career values and will help you to fulfill your life values. Like you have done in the previous sections of this chapter, you will create a question for each of your top career values and may also create questions about your life values.

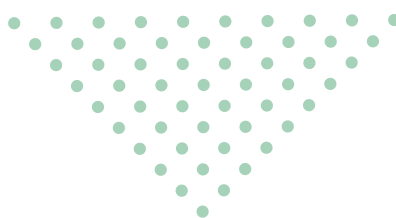
To ensure the answers you receive provide helpful information, you may consider framing your questions in one of the following ways:

- explaining what each value means to you, or
- providing context/an example from your current career



For example, if one of your top values is work-life balance, rather than simply asking, “do you get work-life balance in your career?” you could frame your question in one of the following ways:

1. Having work-life balance is one of my top career values. For me, this means I would not work more than 40 - 45 hours a week and that I would have my evenings and weekends free for other priorities. It also means that I would be able to disconnect from work and focus on other parts of my life when I’m not at work. Would you say this is a realistic expectation to have in this career?
2. In my current role, I regularly work during evenings and sometimes need to work on weekends. Even when I’m not working, it is challenging to disconnect, and I find myself thinking about work all the time. If I were to transition into your career, do you think I would be able to improve my work-life balance? How so?



Look at the top **career values** you listed in Chapter 7 and develop a question for each to confirm whether the occupations you are considering will fulfill each value.

	<b>Value:</b>	
1.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
2.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
3.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
4.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
5.	<b>Question:</b>	

Now, look at the top **life values** you listed in Chapter 7. You might not need to ask specific questions about your life values. However, if it is important to inquire about any of them, list them below and develop corresponding questions:

	<b>Value:</b>	
1.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
2.	<b>Question:</b>	
	<b>Value:</b>	
3.	<b>Question:</b>	



## • REALITY FACTORS

Based on the online research you conducted, you may have already determined it would be realistic for you to pursue and work in the careers on your list.

If you are uncertain if a career on your list would be a realistic choice for you, review the reality factors you listed on your Career Criteria Summary and consider which factors you would like to ask about further.

Based on your reality factors, you may consider asking questions related to:

- Education/training
- Salary
- Location/work conditions
- Demand/opportunities to be hired
- Track record of supporting diversity
- Availability of accommodations (e.g. physical, learning needs)

List any questions you have about your **reality factors** below:

1.

2.

3.

## • GENERAL QUESTIONS

Sometimes, it is useful to ask a few general questions during your information interviews. General questions can apply across almost all careers and are not specific to your career criteria. However, the hope is that the interviewee's responses to such questions will provide you with useful information that is relevant to your decision making.

Below, we have provided a list of general information interview questions. Pull the ones you like from this list and feel free to adjust the wording so it feels right for you.

We also encourage you to review the **Resources** section for websites that list additional information interview questions.

- How did you get into this career?
- What recommendations would you make to someone considering this career?
- Would you recommend this career to someone switching careers? Why/why not?
- Knowing what you know about your career, what advice would you have for someone just starting out?
- What do you wish you knew about your career before you started?
- What are the most common misconceptions you have heard about your career?
- Given what we have talked about today, is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with? Would you be open to connecting us?
- The information you shared is invaluable. Would you be open to me connecting with you on LinkedIn or following up with you in other ways in the future?

## MY INFORMATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Now that you have developed a thorough list of potential questions, it is time to select the questions that are the most important to ask during each interview.

We suggest you identify **8 - 10 questions** you would like to ask during your information interviews. You can list your questions here or create separate documents. Either way, we suggest tailoring your list of questions to each occupation you are researching. Some questions will be the same for all of your information interviews, and you will also have unique questions for specific careers and specific people you are interviewing.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Most people find 8 - 10 questions are more than enough for a very informative information interview. However, you may find it helpful to prepare extra questions to use “just in case” time allows or the answers you are given are provided quickly.

Which additional questions might you want to ask?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**STEPS 4 & 5: Conducting Your Information Interviews and Following Up**

Once you have prepared your information interview questions and reviewed them with your counsellor, it is almost time to conduct your interviews!

You are very close to gaining key information to gauge if your top career options are a fit for you.

In preparation for your interviews, review the following Dos and Don'ts:

DOs	DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research the person, company, and industry before your meeting.</li> <li>• Begin your information interview by introducing yourself and what you hope to learn from the conversation i.e. the purpose of your meeting with them.</li> <li>• Speak less than 1/3 of the time. Make sure to give context to your questions, share relevant information, and ask any necessary follow up questions. The clearer you are, the more useful the information will be.</li> <li>• Use 8 - 10 questions to guide your interview, as determined with your career counsellor (create 10 - 15 questions total in case you need more).</li> <li>• Take notes during your interviews.</li> <li>• Ask for referrals to other professionals you can speak with. "After speaking with me about your career, is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with? Is that someone you could connect me with?"</li> <li>• Send a thank-you note or small token of appreciation (e.g. coffee card) for their time.</li> <li>• Let your information interview contacts know if you have met with someone they referred you to. Also, let them know once you have decided on a particular career direction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show up unprepared.</li> <li>• Allow your interviewee to feel like they need to lead the conversation or direct the interview.</li> <li>• Expect the interviewee to do all the talking or to know what information is relevant to share with you.</li> <li>• Ask too many questions (more than 10-15), as you will feel rushed and overwhelmed, and will not have a chance for more natural dialogue.</li> <li>• Forget important information.</li> <li>• Ask for a job, as the purpose of the interview is to help you gather information. While the company may have opportunities, if you ask for a job during an information interview, it may seem as though you have misled the interviewee about your intentions. Exploring employment opportunities can evolve later.</li> <li>• Not follow up with a thank-you of any sort.</li> <li>• Lose contact with people you have interviewed.</li> <li>• Forget to let the person who referred you know that you did the interview and appreciated the connection.</li> </ul>

## OTHER INTERACTIVE RESEARCH STRATEGIES

While information interviews are a very informative and helpful research strategy, they are not the only interactive research approach. In the final section of this chapter, you will read about other interactive career research strategies you could consider.

### • JOB SHADOW

Job shadowing allows you to follow someone as they go through their regular workday, or a portion of their day. You are able to observe firsthand what the position entails.

Depending on the situation, you could ask the questions you would in an informational interview as you shadow the person in the occupation you would like to pursue.

### • PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

Participation research includes actively participating in the field or role you would like to pursue in order to explore whether the role is a fit. It can serve multiple purposes: 1) it allows you to actively experience a role that interests you, 2) it enables you to learn more about a career field, 3) it is an excellent way to network and create opportunities for yourself, and 4) it can be a way to gain training, improve your skills and become more confident in your abilities and your career choice.

Volunteering, internships, part-time/temporary work, work experiences, or work exchange programs are great examples. Let's go over these in a bit more detail:

- **Volunteering** is unpaid work. Our clients often question whether volunteering is as valuable or valid a type of experience as paid work. The answer is yes! In fact, if you are in a volunteer role it shows an extra level of dedication as you are not being paid.

Often volunteer organizations are willing to train you and provide you with the support you need to grow in a role, in return for your volunteer hours. It is a great way to get started in a field or confirm your occupational choice. *See our **Resources section** for a number of websites that list volunteer opportunities in a variety of fields.*

- **Internships** are paid work experiences that are designed to assist individuals entering a new career field. They are meant for individuals who do not have extensive work experience in the field, and as a result of lower skill and experience levels, people in these roles are paid less than individuals with more experience.

These programs are commonly available for recent post-secondary graduates or career changers. They are commonly run by relevant industry associations, the government, or employers themselves, and can be an excellent way to gain the work experience you need to break into your field of choice.

- **Part-time or Temporary Work:** Trying part-time work in the field that interests you allows you to see firsthand the day-to-day responsibilities of a role and the opportunities within that field.

Temporary work can also be a useful way to explore whether a role is a fit for you without making a commitment to the career. You can even explore multiple careers at the same time utilizing this technique. For example, you could work two weeks in a temporary role as an administrative assistant, and then work in an accounting assistant role if you are deciding between these two occupations. Keep in mind you will likely be in an entry level position to experience your field of interest, but this is good exposure nonetheless.

- **Work Experience, Practicum, or Co-operative Education:** Many education or training programs will provide practical “work experience” in addition to theoretical education.

For example, perhaps you are interested in being a carpenter or a plumber, but you would like to explore both as you are unsure which would be a better fit for you. Often, there are programs run by relevant associations, or within high schools or post-secondary institutions that will allow you to do this.

A practicum is simply a work experience that you will also gain credit for in your educational program. Some post-secondary programs offer co-operative (“co-op”) education programs. In co-op programs participants gain a combination of theory and practical work experience. Every co-op education program is unique, but they will often provide a theoretical foundation in the initial term(s), followed by one or more work term(s). These create opportunities that allow you to research careers, gain educational credits, as well as gain work experience, network, and potentially obtain strong work references.

There are also international work experience opportunities that could allow you to travel as well as gain relevant work experience.