

# Occupational Research

## Occupational and labour market research

Once you understand your skills, interests, values, personality preferences, and other influencing factors, have examined your experiences for patterns and themes that further define who you are, and have created a vision of your ideal future, the next step in planning your career is to gather quality information regarding occupations and the labour market.

Begin by increasing your connections. This will put you in a stronger position to hear about new and existing careers as well as helpful trends and opportunities. Seek new experiences. You can also conduct thorough research using web and/or print resources. Once you have narrowed your options to a manageable number (i.e., a maximum of three) and are satisfied that you have gathered sufficient information to help with your decision, speak with people working in these occupations (i.e., information interviews). To deepen your understanding of the occupation, consider arranging a job shadowing experience. When you believe you have reached a tentative decision, the final step is to seek out paid or unpaid work as a final test of your suitability to the chosen occupation. This section will guide you through this process.

If you do not have ideas for potential occupations to research, try one or more of the following:

- Use self-assessment tools, such as those provided in the Self-assessment section, that generate lists of occupations for you to consider (e.g., Strong Interest Inventory (SII), Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Career Cruising, Choices Planner, and TypeFocus)
- Review print (in Centre for Career Action) and online resources on the [Centre for Career Action](#) website. See, for example, those that relate various occupations to university or college majors (i.e., "What can I do with a major in ...?") or to personality traits (e.g., jobs for adventurous types). You might also read compilations of occupations listed alphabetically or by field (e.g., health, environment, etc.)
- Go to the [Career Planning and Job Search](#) page on the [Centre for Career Action](#) website and choose one or two job posting sites (under *Postings by Field*, or any of the other categories listed) to explore. Scan the postings for each site and identify those jobs that look interesting, regardless of whether you consider yourself qualified. Review the jobs you identified and look for patterns that caught your eye.
- Brainstorm with supportive family members and friends: those who know you well can often provide you with insights and suggestions
- Visualize your dream job. If you have completed the Create a vision statement in Self-assessment, revisit your vision and see if you can derive more clues as to the nature of the work it suggests. If you have not completed this activity, try it now.

## Confirm your findings

Once you have completed online and/or print research and have narrowed your options to a manageable number (i.e., a maximum of three), it is important to verify what you have learned and to obtain more detailed information about a particular occupation you are seriously considering: is it really what you think it is?

## *Informational interviews*

One way to confirm your research findings is to conduct an information interview with someone who holds that kind of position. Think of it as engaging people who can mentor you, and initiating in-depth conversations to discover additional information. It is highly recommended that you conduct three to five meetings with people in a variety of settings in order to gain a more accurate and comprehensive perspective on the occupation.

You may be concerned that individuals will not be receptive to meeting with you. Don't be! Most people are willing to provide information about their work to interested individuals; they may also be flattered that you singled them out as a reliable source of information.

Information interviews are beneficial because they allow you to:

- Confirm print/web research
- Access the most up-to-date career information
- Ask questions to determine the fit for your skills, interests, values, and personal attributes
- Clarify your career goal
- Become aware of the needs of employers and realities of employment (e.g., work environment)
- Build confidence for your job interviews
- Expand your professional network

### **Preparation**

It is very important to prepare for an information interview well in advance. Completing the [Self-assessment](#) section is an excellent first step. The better you know yourself, the more professional you will be and the more likely you will be to pursue a career that is both enjoyable and rewarding.

You may choose to use the [Information interview worksheet \(PDF\)](#) to record the information you gather from this learning process.

### **How to set up an information interview**

1. Review your occupational research to determine where people in your chosen occupation work.
2. Consult a variety of sources to identify organizations, obtain names and contact information for potential interviewees. Sources may include the Alumni network on [LinkedIn](#), professors, former employers, friends, family, others in your network, associations, people directories (such as [www.411.ca](#)) and employer directories.
3. Email or message the person you wish to interview well before the date you are hoping the interview will take place. Introduce yourself and explain who you are (e.g., a student, a person thinking of changing occupations). Mention how you found the person's name. Contacting the person initially by email, direct message on Twitter, or message on LinkedIn may help to set the stage for a follow-up phone or Skype call.
4. State the type of work you are interested in researching, why it interests you, and the amount of time you would like to meet and converse: it is generally a good idea to request only 20-30 minutes, as this would not be viewed as a big demand on their time. During the interview, it is up to them if they have the time and wish to extend the meeting.
5. Thank the person for speaking with you and confirm the date, time, and location of the meeting.
6. If the person is unable to meet with you, express your regret and ask for a referral to someone who does similar work. Be sure to ask your contacts for permission to indicate that they were the source of the referral. If you do not receive a referral, ask for recommended publications or associations that would be of interest. State your appreciation for any time and assistance provided.

## Conducting the interview

Decide which areas you would like to explore, and then prepare questions to obtain the information you need. A key way to ensure that you are getting relevant information is to ask questions based on your skills, interests, values, and personality preferences. This will help to ensure that you are not forcing yourself to fit into a job, but that the job and environment are the right fit for you.

You will want to come up with your own questions, but you can also consider these:

1. What do you do in a typical day?
2. What do you like most/least about your job?
3. What gets you motivated to come to work every day?
4. What is your level of freedom to solve problems and take action on the job?
5. What types of decisions are made that affect your job? Do you have any influence over these?
6. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
7. What skills and experience are required for this job?
8. What values and personal needs influenced your decision to work in this field?
9. What knowledge, training, or education is required for this type of work?
10. What types of training do companies typically offer persons entering this field?
11. What entry-level jobs allow employees to learn as much as possible?
12. Are there expectations that you will become involved in other activities outside of the work day (e.g., community involvement, volunteer work)?
13. How did you find your job?
14. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
15. What are the salary ranges for entry-level and advanced positions in the field?
16. How does your work contribute to the organization's overall goals or mission?
17. What is the job outlook for this occupation?
18. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
19. Has the work changed recently due to technology, the marketplace, competition, etc.?
20. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field, now and in the future?
21. Which professional associations, journals, and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
22. Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give someone entering this field?
23. What else do you think I should know about this type of work?
24. Are you aware of opportunities for volunteering or internships, so I can gain further insight into this occupation?
25. Are there any opportunities to job shadow?
26. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research before I make a decision?
27. Who else do you suggest I speak to who might be a valuable source of information? Could I have your permission to use your name?

### **Remember, this is a formal meeting so act accordingly:**

1. Research the occupation and company before the information interview so you have an understanding of what the interviewee is discussing.
2. Be on time and dress appropriately for that industry.
3. Be ready to provide information about yourself: bring a résumé and prepare a self-introduction. You may be asked about your career interests and goals during the meeting.
4. Be concise.
5. Allow the person an opportunity to provide additional information.
6. Record your contacts and make notes during and after your meeting.
7. Use the information interview as an opportunity to learn more about an occupation of interest, not to ask for a job or to set up an employment interview.
8. If you have not already seen the work area, ask for a short tour (if time allows).

9. Offer value. This is potentially a networking opportunity so if you have knowledge, ideas or referrals that could help them with any problem they alluded to in the meeting, share them! Also request to connect on LinkedIn so as to easily share helpful information and updates.
10. Send a thank-you email or letter promptly (within 1-2 days of the meeting). Include points about what you found helpful. Whether you decide to work in the field or not, it is always important that your contact knows that you learned from the experience and that the time they spent with you was beneficial.

## *Job shadowing*

After you have completed your occupational research and information interviews for an occupation, job shadowing will give you a close-up view of the occupation.

To locate someone to job shadow, use the same strategy you used in arranging the information interview but ask for a half- or full-day commitment. When you are job shadowing, ask questions similar to those in the information interview. The bonus is spending time with your contact to observe what the individual does at work. You might even find an opportunity to offer your assistance.

By the end of your job shadow experience, you should have good notes about the components of the job, the work environment, interactions with other people, and your likes and dislikes. If the fit is not as good as you had hoped, ask your contact to recommend other organizations or types of work for you to consider.

Within one or two days of your visit, send a thank-you email or letter.

If you set up more than one job shadowing experience, consider investigating different work cultures and environments to get a sense of what you would prefer.

## *Gaining experience*

Getting hands-on experience is the best way to determine if the nature of the work you are considering is a fit with your skills, interests, values, and personality preferences.

The following work experience opportunities offer several benefits besides job experience:

1. Establishing a positive track record and getting referrals for future jobs through the network that you build
2. Assessing your work-related strengths and weaknesses
3. Demonstrating your initiative and skills

The goal of co-operative education is to provide you with the opportunity to gain experience through paid employment that complements your academic program. Alternating work and study terms takes longer than the traditional method of study with a summer break. Co-op positions are full time, usually lasting four months. The advantage for you is in having a formal structure through which you can try out different jobs to see what you like and are good at. With regular performance evaluations by your supervisors, you can acquire an employer's perspective on how well you measure up to other people working in similar roles. By taking positions with increasing levels of responsibility, you will develop your skills and build a solid résumé.

### **Internships**

An internship gives you an opportunity to have a structured experience combining work and learning in a field you are considering for your career. The work may be paid or unpaid. It can be part time during an academic term, a full-time block during the weeks between terms, or full time for an academic term or longer. In some cases, a professor from your faculty will oversee the work in conjunction with your employer so that appropriate academic credit can be given. If the internship will not result in academic

credit, the experience will still be valuable in that it will permit you to explore career possibilities and develop marketable skills.

To locate internship opportunities, look through information in Centre for Career Action and check out the [Internships](#) section on the [Centre for Career Action](#) website. Plan to attend the Volunteer Fair organized by Centre for Career Action in the fall and winter terms. Although the Fair caters largely to volunteer positions, some internship opportunities are also represented.

Another option is to create your own internship. Begin by determining what type of work would build on your academic knowledge and interests, and then contact organizations offering such work. Just as in the regular work search process, by networking and establishing relationships, you will learn how you may be of value to an organization, enabling you to propose a mutually beneficial relationship. After you have sourced a potential internship opportunity, check with faculty members or advisors to see whether you may be able to get credit for the experience.

### **Work-study programs**

An academic environment may offer government-funded positions. These positions allow you to work up to 10 hours a week over the school term and help finance your education. Carefully read the work-study notices. If the information is vague, obtain more details from the person hiring for the position. Work-study can be a good way to apply your knowledge in different settings. In addition to helping you clarify your career goals, work-study provides you with work-related skills. For further information on work-study at the University of Waterloo, contact the Student Awards office.

### **Summer, casual, contract, or regular employment**

Working in different kinds of settings will allow you to experience and observe many aspects of employment. Through experimentation, you will come to know what you like and don't like, what you're good at, and in what areas you need to develop expertise. These paid work experiences are especially helpful if you are in an academic program that is not specifically designed to prepare you for a particular profession. These experiences can provide you with the added benefit of gaining work-related skills that your future employers will be seeking. University of Waterloo students can access job opportunities through [Centre for Career Action](#).

### **Volunteering**

Volunteering allows you to investigate options and gain work experience in a variety of work settings and fields. You need to answer two questions: what would you like to give to the community, and what would you like to get in return? To locate volunteer opportunities, look through the directories in Centre for Career Action and check out the [Volunteering](#) section on the [Centre for Career Action](#) home page. Plan to attend the Volunteer Fair organized by Centre for Career Action in the fall and winter terms. If you are in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, the [Volunteer Action Centre](#) is also a helpful source of volunteer opportunities, representing a variety of fields and experiences. Many cities have similar centres you may wish to investigate.

Consider undertaking a special project as a course assignment. Many organizations are unable to research particular topics because of a lack of time or funding. Therefore, you would be adding value while expanding your knowledge of the workplace by linking an academic exercise to a real-world application.

## ***Resources***

[Information interview worksheet](#) [.docx]