

Getting Started

What should I be doing now?

Deciding on a career path can be a little overwhelming at first. When you begin to think about your options, there's a lot to consider. What would you like to do? What are you looking for in a job? If you make a career decision now, will you be stuck in the same job for the rest of your life? Because there are so many things to think about, getting started is often the hardest part. Don't get discouraged! Finding the right job can be challenging, but it can also be rewarding and fun.

1 Know yourself. Before you start thinking about the jobs that are out there, you should back up and think about yourself first. You can't really get a handle on where the "good" jobs are until you have a sense of the sort of job that would be good for *you*. Take some time to assess your skills and abilities, your likes and dislikes. In other words, know yourself. What do you enjoy doing? What sort of a personality do you have? What are your special talents and abilities? It's good to think about the things

that other people tell you you're good at, but you should also consider the things you would do even if no one praised you for doing them. Remember, finding the right job begins with discovering what's right for you, not what others might think is right for you!

Get started by taking an interest assessment test or a self-appraisal questionnaire. There are many different types of these tests and questionnaires out there, but they are all designed

to get you thinking about your skills and abilities. Many are available on the Internet and in career exploration books that you can find at the library or a bookstore. To get you started, complete the self-appraisal questionnaire that's included on the next page. Try to keep an open mind while you're answering the questions. Remember, this is just for you, so be honest. Keep in mind that this self-appraisal questionnaire is only one way to begin exploring your likes and dislikes. You shouldn't stop there.

Self-appraisal questionnaire

- List the school subjects in which you have done well. Did you enjoy these subjects?
- Name three or four activities that you've found enjoyable.
- List any jobs you have held. Which job did you like the best? Why?
- What are you good at? What do you learn easily, without much help from others?
- What sort of work environment do you think you would like? (For example: Would you rather work inside or outside; do you prefer "dressing up" or wearing casual clothes?)
- List 15 words that describe your personality. (For example, are you quiet? talkative? organized? creative?)
- If you could learn any new skill, what would it be? Why?
- List physical conditions that could help/hurt you on the job.
- Name three characteristics of a job that are very important to you.
- List four jobs that you would like (even if you don't know much about them). What is it about each of these jobs that appeals to you?



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Know what you want in a job.

There are almost as many different types of jobs as there are different types of people. Besides figuring out what you

have to offer to an employer, you should also think about what you'd like your work to offer you. What sort of work

setting would you enjoy most? Do you value opportunities for promotion and raises, or are you more interested in finding a personal, nurturing environment? Would you prefer working indoors or outdoors? Do you want a casual or business-like environment?

To get a sense of the things that are important to you in a

job, complete the exercise below. Not only will this help you think about your priorities, but it should also help you realize that there is probably no "perfect" job out there. Every job has advantages and disadvantages—finding the right job is a matter of deciding which disadvantages you are able to live with.

What do I want in a job?

Rank each job characteristic from 1 to 12, with 1 being the **most important** and 12 being the **least important** to you.

___ Good salary and benefits

___ Job security

___ Flexible hours

___ Opportunities to learn new things

___ Sticking to a routine that I like

___ Working for an organization whose values are consistent with mine

___ Opportunities to travel

___ Opportunities to be outside

___ Being able to work in teams with other people

___ Having a job with very little stress

___ Working under deadlines

___ Working in a nurturing, supportive environment

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Ask for help. Remember, there's more than one way to begin a career. Some people decide on a field that interests them, get the training and education they need, and then find a job. Others explore different jobs, or gain experience through volunteer work or internships before settling on one. You should try to collect stories from different people, like friends, family, teachers, or counselors. Make a list of

people you know who might be able to help. To get you started, here are some questions you can ask people on your list:

- How did you decide what you wanted to do?
- If you could have any job, what would it be?
- How did you find the job you currently have? Did you plan for it, or did it just

happen?

- What would you change about your job if you could?
- Based on your own experience, what advice would you give to someone who is planning a career?

Listen carefully! If you ask five different people, you'll probably get five different stories about how they went about finding a career—and how their current job fits into

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Keep an open mind. Just because a self-appraisal or interest assessment test says you are cut out for a certain job doesn't mean that it's the only job for you. No decision you make right now has to be completely final. You'll learn more about yourself—what you like, what you're good at, and what you want from a job—once you find a job and start working. It's okay to change your mind. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the average person who is in high school right now will have about 14 different jobs throughout his or her lifetime! The important thing is just to get started thinking about your future now.

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Check out these other interest assessment resources.

Louisiana's Virtual One-Stop

<http://lavos.laworks.net/>

The virtual one-stop offers a variety of career resources, including an interest assessment tool that allows you to match your skills to different careers. After you choose which skills apply to you, the site will generate a list of occupations that require those skills. The virtual one-stop also provides information about current job openings in Louisiana.

Holland Interest Inventory

<http://www.self-directed-search.com/>

This is a very popular interest assessment tool based on the idea that people fall into one or more of six personality types: realistic, artistic, enterprising, investigative, social, and conventional.

Taking the test is free, but it costs about \$10 to get your results.

The Career Key

<http://www.ncsu.edu/careerkey>

This free Web site allows you to take an interest assessment test with a large number of questions. The results help you learn about your personality, and help you to understand the type of careers that might be right for you.

ISEEK (Internet System for Education and Employment Knowledge)

<http://www.iseek.org/>

ISEEK provides lots of resources for both students and career changers. ISEEK's interest assessment tool allows you to match your interests, skills, abilities, personality and values to

different careers. All services from ISEEK are free, and this site also provides links to lots of other interest assessment resources on the Web. (This Web site was developed in Minnesota, but it has plenty of great stuff for people in other states, too!)

The Birkman Career Style Summary

<http://www.review.com/career/>

(Click on "Career Quiz")

This Web site offers you a 24-question interest assessment test. It's free, but you do have to register if you want to take the quiz. After taking the quiz, you'll receive a description of your interests and a list of possible careers that match those interests. You can click on each career to get more information.

Interest assessment books

- *I Could Do Anything If Only I Knew What it Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get it*, by Barbara Sher and Barbara Smith.
- *What Color is Your Parachute?* 2003 Edition by Richard Nelson Bolles.
- *Dare to Change Your Job and Your Life* by Carole Kanchier, Ph.D.

Fact Finding

Where can I find information on careers?

Now that you have an idea of the things you like to do, and you've started to think about the type of job you might enjoy, the next step is to start looking for information about specific careers. It's smart to find out as much as you can before you make a decision about which occupation is right for you. But where should you begin? Career information is everywhere; you just have to know where to look.

Career information on the Internet

Career and occupational information is now widely available and fairly easy to find on the Internet. If you have access, this may be a good place to start. Of course, like any source of information, the Internet has some advantages and disadvantages that you should be aware of.



Pros and Cons

of finding career information on the Internet

Pros	Cons
Information is likely to be up-to-date and “cutting edge,” particularly in fields that are growing or changing.	Information may be difficult to find unless you know exactly where to look. Things are constantly changing on the Internet, so your favorite Web site could quickly be moved or re-organized.
A lot of information on the Internet is available free of charge.	Not all information on the Internet is reviewed carefully. It's up to you to make sure that the information you're using is accurate.
The Internet allows you to browse anonymously on different sites; you are free to access whatever information is available.	The Internet gives very little one-on-one guidance for understanding and using the information that's available—it's up to you to read, understand, and absorb the information.

On-line resources

LOIS (Louisiana Occupational Information System)

<http://www.laworks.net/> (Scroll over the “Labor Market Information tab, then click on LOIS/Scorecard.”)

Developed by the Louisiana Department of Labor (LDOL), and housed on the LDOL Web site, LOIS offers tons of information on occupations in Louisiana. Here you’ll find statistics on wages and the employment projections in over 500 occupations. You can also research education and training programs that correspond to most occupations. You can even find information on employers all over the state! This Web site provides information on employment, unemployment, wages, and more—both for the state as a whole and smaller local areas in the state. Use the easy pull-down menus to navigate.

LISA (Louisiana Integrated Skills Assessment)

<http://www.laworks.net/> (Scroll over the “Labor Market Information tab then click Career Tools, then LISA.”)

This Web site offers you a chance for indepth skill assessment based on your likes and dislikes as well as experience. In the opening screen you have two choices to begin your occupation and skill search.

Want to Take the Quick Trip - If you are a first-time user or don't have much time to spend right now (30 minutes or less), we suggest that you take the Quick Trip. With the Quick Trip you have two options that will quickly provide you with a list of occupations that matches your work values and/or is similar to your current or most recent job. If you select the Search by Work Values button, you will be able to perform an on-line self-assessment of your Work Values, then see a list of occupations that match those work values. If you select the Look for Similar, you will be able to look for occupations that have characteristics similar to your current (or most recent) occupation....

Want to Take the Full Flight - If you have used the Louisiana Integrated Skills Assessment before or have more than 30 minutes to spend, you may want to take the Full Flight. With the Full Flight, you will have access to the Main Menu and be able to explore many more aspects of an occupation, such as level of education required; knowledge, skills, and abilities needed; and wage information. You will still be able to take the on-line Assessment and Best Match, and receive all the information provided in the Quick Trip.

Louisiana’s Virtual One-Stop

<http://lavos.laworks.net/>

This Web site is a one-stop shop for information on Louisiana careers. It complements Career Compass by offering more on-line resources for finding the right job in Louisiana. The virtual one-stop features skills assessment tools, helps you match your skills to occupations, and provides information on current job openings in the state. Not only does this site help you hunt for jobs that match your skills, but it also provides resources to help you get the job you want—including job hunting tips and a résumé builder.

Occupational Outlook Handbook

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>

The Occupational Outlook Handbook is a great source of information for any career explorer. This publication is available on-line, and can also be found at bookstores, libraries, or workforce development centers. It

contains a wealth of information on over 500 occupations nationally. For each occupation, you'll be able to learn about the nature of the work, the educational and skill requirements, pay and advancement opportunities, and long-term job outlook.

America's Career OneStop

Whether you're digging for information on many different occupations, looking to discover which jobs best match your skills, or hunting for a specific job, America's Career OneStop can be a great resource for you. Created and maintained by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, America's Career OneStop is a set of Web sites, each offering a different service. All services are free of charge.

America's Job Bank (<http://www.ajb.org/>) allows job seekers to search for job openings in any occupation in any area of the country. You can search for a job by broad occupational groupings, or by keywords, and you can view jobs by educational and license requirements. It's also possible to post your résumé on-line, so that employers can seek you out.

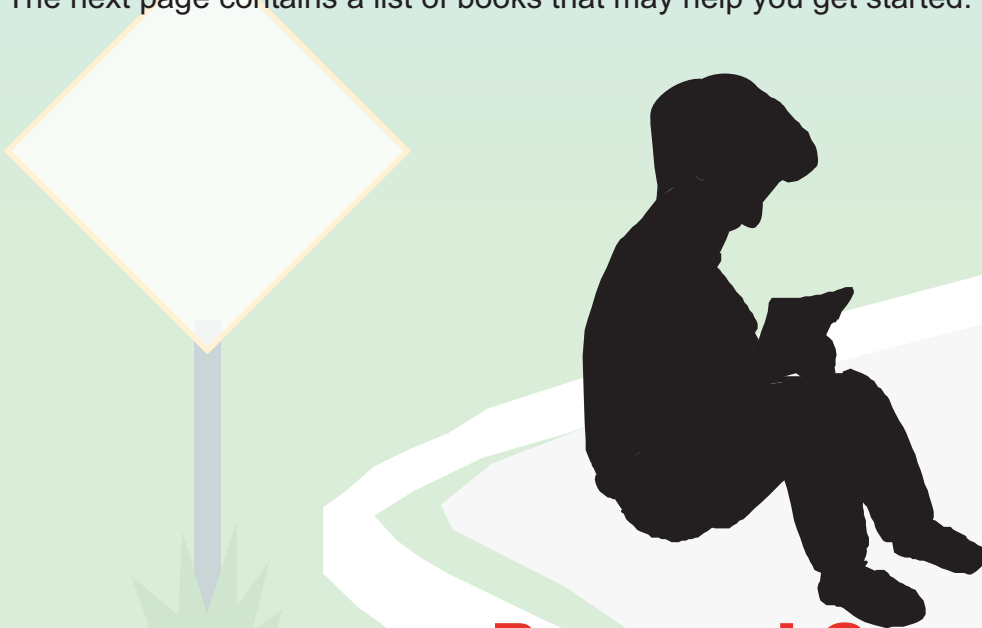
America's Career InfoNet (<http://www.acinet.org/>) is especially helpful for people who are seeking out information on lots of different occupations. This site contains information on employment trends, wages, skill and educational requirements, and other information on over 500 occupations. You can find out which occupations are the largest, the smallest, the fastest-growing, or highest-paying in your area.

America's Service Locator (<http://www.servicelocator.org/>) helps people at all stages of their job search, whether they're just beginning to search for a career or looking to change jobs. This site helps you find specific services in your area, including job search and placement services, unemployment services, relocation services, and more.

For more information on any of these services, you can visit the Web sites listed above, or call the Toll-Free Helpline at 1-877-US2-JOBS (872-5627). (For TTY, call 1-877-889-5627.)

Career information in books

If you don't have access to the Internet, or even if you do, you may also want to consider finding books on the careers that interest you. Like the Internet, books can be a great source of specific information. The next page contains a list of books that may help you get started.



Pros and Cons of finding career information in books

Pros	Cons
Books are usually carefully researched, so you can be pretty sure that the information you're reading is accurate.	Books can become out-of-date very quickly. This is especially true of books about careers in fields that are growing or changing quickly, such as the Information Technology (IT) industry.
New books often contain additional resources, like worksheets or supplements, that are helpful, convenient, and easy to use.	New books cost money. Of course, you can find books at the library, but beware of using old, out-of-date books to find career information. Remember, the world of work is constantly changing!
Books are written with a specific audience—you—in mind. They're usually clearly organized, easy to follow and understand.	It's unlikely that any single book will answer all of your questions. While you may find one book that you particularly like, it's always good to draw on several sources of career information.

Books on careers

Occupational Outlook Handbook 2002-03 Edition, U.S. Department of Labor, 2001.

Enhanced Occupational Outlook Handbook, by J. Michael Farr et. al., 2000.

The American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries, 2000 - 2001 Edition, by John W. Wright, 2000.

America's Top Jobs for College Graduates: Detailed Information on 127 Major Jobs for People with Four-Year and Higher Degrees, by Michael J. Farr, 2002.

One Hundred Best Careers for the 21st Century, by Shelly Field, 2000.

Career Guide to America's Top Industries: Essential Data on Job Opportunities in 42 Industries, U.S. Department of Labor, 2002.

The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People, by Carol Eikleberry and Richard Nelson Bolles, 1999.

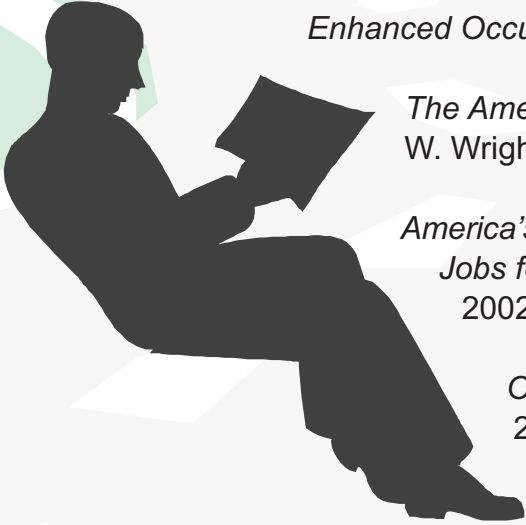
Your Bright Future in Information Technology, by Gene Corwin and Henry Lifton, 2002.

Becoming a Graphic Designer: A Guide to Careers in Design (2nd Ed.), by Steven Heller and Teresa Fernandes, 2002.

Career Opportunities in Theater and the Performing Arts, by Shelly Field, 1999.

Career Opportunities in Television, Cable, Video, and Multimedia (4th Ed), by Maxine K. Reed, et. al., 1999.

Making A Living While Making A Difference: The Expanded Guide to Creating Careers with a Conscience, by Melissa Everett, 1999.



Learning about careers from other people

Now that you've done a little homework, start talking to people. Make a list of people who can give you advice about the career(s) you're considering. Start with people like professors, teachers, school counselors, friends, relatives, and employers. They may be able to recommend other people for you to talk to for advice.

Informational interviewing

If you really want to get a sense of what a certain job is all about, try talking to someone who actually works in the occupation. This is called an informational interview. Not only is this a great way to get first-hand information, but it can also help you make contacts in the field you're thinking of pursuing.

What if you don't know anyone in the field you're researching? That's okay—you can use your own personal network to find contacts. Try asking friends, employers, teachers, acquaintances, and career counselors. You can also try to make contacts through professional groups, alumni associations, human resource professionals, or by simply looking through the telephone book. Calling someone you don't know can be a little daunting, but people are often flattered if you show interest in what they do.

If you contact your interviewee by phone, it's a good idea to write out what you plan to say during your interview. Not only will this make you feel more confident, but it guarantees that you will ask all of your questions. Be sure to say right away where you got the person's name. Also say that you only need 20 to 30 minutes of their time. Then, keep your promise!

Informational interview checklist

- Learn something about the person you're interviewing beforehand.
- Learn as much as you can about your interviewee's organization.
- Dress professionally.
- Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early.
- Come prepared with questions.
- Be mindful of the interviewee's time.
- Send a thank-you note.



Sample questions for an informational interview

When you go to an informational interview, treat it as you would any professional interview. Be prepared with lots of questions when you get there. To get you started, here are some questions you can ask someone who works in the career you're investigating:

- How did you decide to get into your field? Did you plan for your current job, or did it just happen?
- What type of education or training did you need to be qualified for the work you do?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- What is your work environment like?
- What do you like best about your chosen field? Least?
- What is a typical entry-level position in this field?
- What opportunities for advancement do people in your field have?
- What is the future of this field in terms of new and expanding opportunities?
- Are there alternative ways to enter this field (i.e., through volunteer work, part-time employment, or internships)?

Of course, you should add your own specific questions, too. However, remember to stay away from personal questions about pay or benefits. Some people might volunteer this information, but it's not a good idea to ask. If you want to learn about the pay for different occupations, you should seek out other sources of information, like the Louisiana Department of Labor or the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

After the interview, be sure to send a thank-you note to your interviewee. Not only is it a polite and professional way to let them know you appreciated their help, but it also serves as a reminder of who you are and how to get in touch with you. On the next page is an example of a thank-you letter for this type of occasion.

Sample thank-you note for an informational interview

June 23, 2002

Ms. Melissa Boyd
Systems Analyst
ABC Company
534 Parker Lane
Baton Rouge, LA 70805

Tom is very specific about how Melissa helped him.

Dear Ms. Boyd,

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me last week to talk about your career. I am grateful for the information and advice you gave me—I now have a much better idea about exactly what systems analysts do. I also definitely plan to take your advice about enrolling in Professor Atkin's Cobol course this fall.

Again, thank you. I really appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Thomas Smith

He signed his name in black ink.

Thomas Smith
4560 West Seashore Road, #4
Baton Rouge, LA 70808
Tsmith@email.com
(225) 555-1234

Landing a job

What should I be doing now?

Once you've explored your interests, researched your career options, and gotten the education or training you need, you're ready to begin your job hunt. For some people, this process is easy. If you're in a field with lots of openings, you might even find that employers will contact you! For the rest of us, though, landing a job takes a bit more time and energy. For most people, the process involves networking, writing a résumé and a cover letter, going on an interview, and negotiating a job offer.

Networking

Many people begin their job search by looking through the want ads. But did you know that only about one in five job openings is advertised? That means it's important to tap into the "hidden" job market—jobs that aren't advertised in the newspaper, on the Internet, or with job placement agencies. Use your social network! Friends, relatives, and teachers can all be great people to start with. If you don't know anyone in your field, there are lots of other ways to find job leads. Look in the telephone book and visit your local Job Center, temporary or permanent employment agencies, or your school job placement offices. Another excellent way to find job leads is to attend a career fair (see the next page for more information on career fairs).

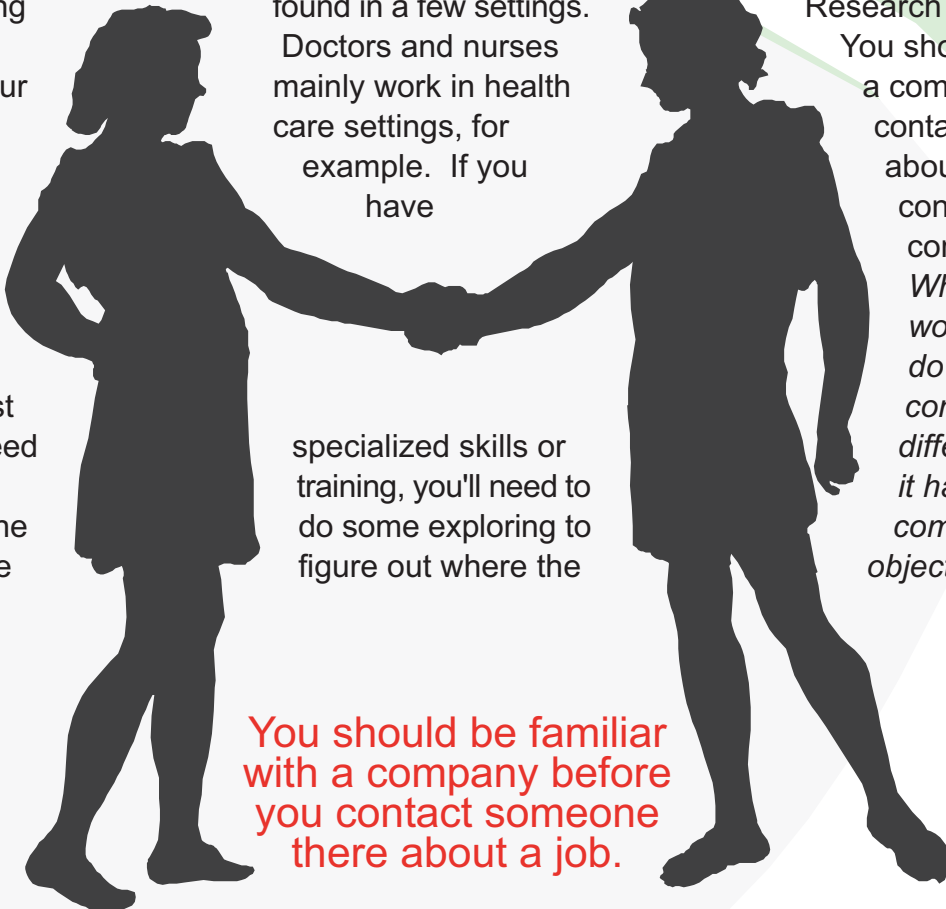
Networking also involves becoming familiar with businesses in your area that hire people with your skills. For some people, the opportunities might be unlimited. Almost all companies need secretaries and managers. On the other hand, some

occupations are only found in a few settings. Doctors and nurses mainly work in health care settings, for example. If you have

specialized skills or training, you'll need to do some exploring to figure out where the

job market is in your area. Research companies carefully. You should be familiar with a company before you contact someone there about a job. When considering different companies, consider: *What specific type of work does this company do? How large is the company? How many different branches does it have? What are this company's values and objectives?*

You should be familiar with a company before you contact someone there about a job.



What about career fairs?

Attending a career fair is a great way to get exposure to many employers and to develop your network of career contacts. It's also an opportunity to learn valuable information about many industries, corporations, and different job positions. Employers participate in career fairs to meet students and recruit employees. They'll give you general information about career options as well as specific information about current openings in their companies.

Here's what to do to prepare:

- Review the list of employers before attending a career fair. Figure out which ones interest you the most, and go there first. It's also a good idea to determine where employers are located beforehand and in what order to visit them.
- Keep your focus broad—include many types of employers.
- Be organized! Bring plenty of copies of your résumé and a folder or portfolio to hold all your materials.
- Have a pen or pencil and paper available to take notes.
- Introduce yourself. Be prepared with a brief introductory sentence for each employer. They may ask you questions about yourself, so be prepared to treat your encounter like an interview. Tell them the type of position and career path you'd like to follow.
- Be aware of time demands on employers; don't monopolize an employer's time.
- Ask specific questions about the organization and career opportunities.
- Offer to follow up after the fair.
- Ask for employers' business cards for follow-up discussions and correspondence.

