



Exploring Careers: How to Get the Inside Scoop

The last time you went out for ice cream, what did you have? Did you stick with your same old favorite? Or did you waffle between several delectable flavors? In the end, did you like what you chose? If not, you'll probably be pickier next time. You might read the entire menu several times over. Maybe you'll ask the server for some tasty recommendations. Perhaps you'll even sample an assortment before ordering a scoop.

All of this exploring can take some time, but it's all good. Best case...you will have discovered your *new* favorite flavor. Worst case — even if you weren't smitten with your frozen treat — you probably weren't *too* disappointed. After all, it's *ice cream*...how bad can it be, right?

So, the stakes simply aren't that high when you go to the ice cream shop. But, the higher the stakes, the more time you should devote to exploring the possibilities. Take, for example, your career. How can you make informed decisions as you consider your options? Before you choose, get the inside scoop!

Know Your Tastes

Wouldn't it be great if you could try every flavor at the ice cream shop? Then you'd know for certain which one you like best. But, as enjoyable as that might seem, it's just not realistic. So, instead, begin by knowing your tastes. For instance, if you love chocolate, you might like rocky road ice cream.

Along the same lines, the first step in career exploration is knowing yourself. Look inside: explore your interests, values, personality, and — most importantly — your aptitudes (natural talents).

Look at the Menu

Now that you know your tastes, should you order a scoop of rocky road? It's hard to say — because you still need to know more about its flavor. Start by reading the menu. Rocky road is chocolate ice cream with nuts and marshmallows. If you like all these ingredients, you'll probably like the ice cream.



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The next step in the career exploration process follows the same path. Identify careers that might be a good match for you, based on what you know about yourself. Then gather information about each one.

- **Read about occupations.** You can access profiles for more than 900 occupations through the U.S. Department of Labor's [My Next Move](#), [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), [O*NET](#), [CareerOneStop](#) and [Career Outlook](#).

Each occupation profile provides information about the:

- nature of the work including: activities and duties; career path; and a description of the work environment,
 - required skills,
 - education / training typically needed to enter the field,
 - level of education most workers in the occupation have attained,
 - salary range,
 - projected job openings over a 10-year period.
- **Watch videos of career overviews.** Along with detailed descriptions of occupations, some career videos often incorporate informational interviews with individuals working in the field. Start with these websites: [My Next Move](#), [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), [CareerOneStop videos](#).
 - Also check YouTube. Search by occupational title or enter “careers” or “informational interviews” (or both). Read the short description of the video first to determine if it comes from a credible source (the most trustworthy being a professional association or college).
 - **Read job postings.** You'll notice that an occupation's specific job tasks and work environment can vary a little, based on each employer's specific needs.

Try a Sample

Remember that rocky road ice cream? Do the ingredients appeal to your palate? If they do, then it's time to taste a sample. And now that you've researched careers of interest, you undoubtedly have a lot to chew on. Compare what you've learned about these



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occupations to what you know about your talents and interests. Based on your analysis, determine which careers you want to “sample”. Here’s how:

- **Do your own informational interviews.** Talk with people who work in the occupation you’re contemplating. Ask family and friends if they know someone who works in your field of interest. Also check for a local chapter of the professional association for that career or industry; contact one of the officers.

It’s helpful to talk to more than one person working in the occupation. For example, if you’re thinking about a career in architecture, speak with a commercial, an industrial and a residential architect. Which type of design fits best with your talents and interests?

- **Join a student organization that promotes career readiness.** Teens can learn about occupational fields through national student organizations that have student chapters in high schools. Here are a few examples: DECA, Future Business Leaders of America, Future Teachers of America and SkillsUSA.

Get the Inside Scoop

If you enjoyed that sample of rocky road ice cream, why not order a scoop? Immerse yourself in the flavor.

Based on what you’ve learned from informational interviews, which occupations do you want to explore even further? You can get the inside scoop through job shadowing, internships and / or volunteer experiences.