

# It may not be who you know, but who you talk to

Whether you're considering a career change or finishing high school, the best way to get a feel for the industry you hope to pursue is to speak to someone in it.

There are many ways to research a career – including searching for roles and comparing salaries on SEEK, attending careers expos and browsing company websites – but the picture is not complete without also talking to workers directly.

Helen Green, director of career development organisation Career Confident, says the first step is to take stock of people you know. "Compile a list of all the people you know reasonably well from the various facets of your life, for example, family, friends, neighbours, work, school, sport, community groups, voluntary organisations, and so on," she says. "Chances are that at least one person on your list will know someone in the field in which you are interested."

Green also recommends casting your net wider and contacting people you do not know. "In my experience, most people, if asked, are willing to give others time for this purpose, especially if you show that you are respectful of their time and sharing of insights," she says.

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"It is also no secret that many people enjoy talking about themselves and their work." She says the best way to approach this is to send a short introductory email requesting time for a brief conversation, including details on how you hope to communicate – such as over the phone, Skype or in-person – and how much time you expect to need.

Before meeting, Green advises researching the person to avoid wasting time on unnecessary questions, and practising concisely talking about yourself and your career aspirations. She says it is important to be mindful of the time and stay on topic but also be prepared to share your own insights too, if appropriate.

"Some people won't respond to your request and of those who do, a few might be impolite," Green says. "Don't take this personally. People are often busy and distracted. Remember that they are doing you a favour. Never be pushy or you might be remembered for the wrong reasons."

Ultimately, Green says it is a good idea to talk to at least three different people in the industry or career you are hoping to pursue. "This will broaden your knowledge and perspective as well as provide useful insights into employer groups and sectors and different working styles and structures," she says.

"Avoid basing your assumptions on the views of the first person to whom you speak."

*This article was first published by Melanie Burgess, Deputy Careers Editor at News Corp Australia*