GATHERING INFORMATION
It is very important that you thoroughly investigate your career options. Effectively investigating or researching a particular career field involves gathering as much information as possible. The best sources of viable information related to careers are printed materials, people in the field, and your own firsthand personal experience. In general, your objective will be to uncover unknown areas, to gain insight into what is currently happening in your field, future trends, the jargon and important issues, to obtain advice on where you might fit in, and to broaden your own network of contacts for future reference.

PRINTED MATERIALS
A wide range of books and other printed materials are available addressing such topics as career choice, the job market, and information on specific career fields. This information is generally accessed through school and public libraries, career resource centers, company reports, industrial directories, chambers of commerce, periodicals, magazines, professional journals, newsletters, employee handbooks, professional organizations, and government agencies. Be sure the information you are gathering through these and other sources is accurate, up-to-date, and comprehensive.

ON-LINE CAREER INFO
An increasing amount of information is also available on the Internet. Most companies maintain websites that are a good source of information. Generally, the Internet is a convenient and timely source of a wide range of information on a variety of topics. Using website addresses or key reference words, a user can access numerous locations and related links on the Internet that provide career-oriented information.

PEOPLE IN THE FIELD
Identify key players or prominent figures in your particular field of interest. You may meet these people through career fairs, conventions, professional organizations, or through your college professor. One of the best ways to find out about a career is to talk with someone who is actually working in that field. This is usually done through a method called "informational interviewing".

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
Informational interviewing is the process of talking with people who have jobs that are of interest to you. Your goal is to gather information and helpful advice that you need in order to make a good decision. Informational interviewing is a non-threatening method of gathering vital data, conducting valuable research, and developing a professional network. The information is up-to-date. The information is local. You're able to find out about the specific job setting. People are often candid about telling you the pros & cons of their jobs. And you are simultaneously developing a network of contacts for possible future employment.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
Perhaps the best way to learn what a career is actually like is to personally experience it firsthand. You can "get a taste" or "get your feet wet" or obtain experience or exposure to a particular career field through a variety of relatively risk-free arrangements: Get a part-time job in your field of interest. Do volunteer service work in your field of interest. Explore the possibility of a cooperative education program or an internship in your field of interest. Take a course or class related to your field of interest. Or consider "job shadowing," an arrangement whereby you ask to spend a day or two on the job site with someone in your field of interest. These methods will help you gather information and gain experience simultaneously.