**Career Exploration**

**How to Explore Your Career Options**

Career exploration is the second stage of the career planning process. During this stage you will gather information about occupations after having completed a self-assessment, which is the first stage of the career planning process. During the self-assessment you took inventory of your values, interests, personality and skills and should have come away with a list of careers that are appropriate for you based on what you found out about yourself.

Now it's time to begin narrowing down that list by learning about the careers on it.

Your goal, after learning about all the careers that might be a good fit for you, is to eventually have one career left that is the BEST fit. Try not to eliminate any career from your list until you learn a bit about it. Even if you think you know about an occupation, you may be surprised by what you find out. The occupation you wanted to eliminate could end up being the one that suits you best.

**Start With the Basics**

At first you will just want to gather some basic information about each career on your list. Let's assume you have a list of ten occupations. You can do some preliminary research that will allow you to narrow down your list before you spend a lot of time doing more in depth digging. This will include looking at a job description, labor market information including job outlook, median salary and educational and training requirements.

On the balance.com find these resources to get you started:

* Career Briefs
* Careers By Field
* Additional Career Information Resources

After learning about all the careers on your list you will find that several of them don't appeal to you. This could be for a variety of reasons. For example, you may decide that you wouldn't enjoy the job duties of a particular occupation or that you can't or don't want to meet the educational and training requirements.

The earnings may be lower than you thought they would be or the job outlook doesn't look promising. After completing your preliminary research you will be left with a list that contains no more than about three careers on it.

**Delve Deeper**

After you narrow down your list of career choices your research will become more involved. You will want to learn what working in the field is really like, at least as much as you can without actually working in it. The best way to do this is to talk to people who do.

1. Utilize your network to compile a list of people who work in your field or fields of interest. If the members of your network don't have first-hand knowledge of the occupation in which you're interested, they may know people who do.
2. Set up informational interviews with anyone who has experience working in the careers you are considering. The more recent the experience, the better.
3. See if any of those people are willing to let you shadow him or her at work for a day or two.

After you complete your in-depth research, you should be able to determine which career is a good match for you.

Try not to get too frustrated if you can't make a decision by this point. You may not have enough information yet. Continue to do more research until you can comfortably choose the best career for you.