



Selecting a Trade, Technical or Career School

Trade, technical or career schools generally offer short-term training to help you enter a specific career field. Based on your career and educational goals, a career or trade school may be the right choice for you. Before you decide, however, take the time to research both the career field you want to enter and the school you are considering. Here are some questions to ask:

1. Is the school accredited or licenced?

While accreditation does not ensure quality, it does mean that the school has met the specific standards.

2. How long has the school been in operation? How many students have completed the specific program you are interested in? What jobs did recent graduates enter after completing the program?

Each school should be able to provide this information for you. Make sure that graduates are employed in jobs that relate to the training provided and that the employers are companies that interest you.

3. What type of degree or certificate will you receive at the end of your training? It is the appropriate credential for the kind of job you are seeking?

Check with employers or local licensing agencies to make sure that the credential you receive will prepare you to work in the field. A computer operator certificate, for example, is not the same as a certificate as a network engineer. If you want to become a Registered Nurse, will training as a licensed practical nurse help you reach that goal? Talk with people in the field and with potential employers. Use resources such as the Occupational Outlook Handbook (available in print and online) for additional information.

4 Ask for copies of catalogs or bulletins which include information about admissions criteria, financial aid availability, program content and costs.

Use caution if the admissions representative seems reluctant to provide this information. Make sure you read and understand all of the rules and regulations. What happens, for example, if you have to drop out? Will a percentage of your tuition be refunded? Does the school participate in the Federal financial aid programs? If not, why not?

5. Visit the school and ask to sit in on a class.

Is there enough equipment for each student (and is it current?). Do students seem to be engaged in the class? Are there opportunities for hands-on learning as well as text book information?

6. Ask for names and telephone numbers of recent graduates.

Ask them about the training they received and their experiences with the school. Did the school help them find employment? Would they recommend it?

7. Can you get the same training elsewhere?

Are similar programs available at a local community college? What are the differences in terms of cost and time. If you have selected a career field in which you may decide to go on for additional education, will the credits transfer? Remember that many trade schools use clock hours rather than credits and transfer opportunities may be limited.

8. Before signing anything, take the materials home and reread them.

Some schools hire sales representatives to recruit new students and use high pressure tactics to get you to sign up today. Most reputable schools will give you time to consider your options and make a thoughtful choice. If the contract includes financial information, make sure you understand it completely, and know exactly how much you will have to contribute from your own resources. (Are there hidden costs such as books, lab fees, activity fees, etc.) If there is a payment plan involved, get complete details about payment, interest rates, penalties for non-payment, etc.

9. Does the school help with job placement?

Find out if this service is available before you enroll.

10. Check with the Better Business Bureau to see if there have been complaints about the school.

Although a lack of complaints may not guarantee that the school will meet your needs, a history of complaints should tell you to exercise great caution.

If you are looking for information about trade and technical school programs, the Pacificnet website lists schools by state and occupational field. The web address is <http://www.pacificnet.net/rwm>. Also, if you are interested in the building and construction trades, contact the Apprenticeship Council in your city or state before you enroll in an educational program.