

The Interview: Everyday Science & Technology Learning

We're trying to learn more about how people learn about science and technology; not just in school but in everyday life. I'd like to ask you a few questions but you don't have to do this and you should feel free to stop at any time during this conversation. It will take about 10-15 minutes and your identity will be kept totally confidential. We're hoping that you will be one of the thousands people nation-wide who contribute to this conversation about public science and technology learning. Your participation is important, not because it will directly benefit you but because by telling us your story we will be able to share it with professional science educators across the country and through that process help contribute to a better national understanding of all the ways Americans learn about their world every day.

We're defining science and technology very broadly so that it includes typical school topics like biology, chemistry and geology but also practical things like how to fix a car, knowing what plants will grow in a particular area or what the causes and treatments are for a particular ailment. That's what we mean by science and technology.

We've discovered that everybody knows a little something about science and technology, even if it doesn't look much like the science you had in school. I'd like you to share with me an area or topic of science or technology in which you consider yourself particularly well informed or knowledgeable or perhaps just something you've had a long-time interest or passion in. In other words, this is an area that a friend or relative might ask you about.

[NOTE: IF PERSON SAYS "None" continue to probe if there are any hobbies or activities such as taking nature walks, gardening or star gazing, being able to problem solve computers or fix the electrical wiring in at home, a health-related issue they've found out about, animal or nature shows they've watched where they came away with some particularly interesting nugget of information, etc.]

1. So, tell me about this area or topic of science or technology in which you feel yourself to be at least reasonably knowledgeable. I'd be really interested to hear how you pursue this interest over a typical month. Is it something you do regularly or just occasionally? Do you do it alone or with others? [NOTE: The goal here is to get the person talking; the more the better.]
2. [If not already answered] So, can you recall how you first became interested in this topic? I'd love to hear about the circumstances, what got you started?
3. Could you tell me a little about the sources you've used to learn about this topic? Were there particular people who helped you or places you've gone? Do you use the Internet, books, magazines, friends, experts? In what ways do you use these resources and how frequently? Are some better than others, if so why?
4. Have the ways that you've learned about this topic/area changed over time? Tell me about it.
5. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about this area/topic? Any particularly important things you've learned; any advice to you'd give to someone else who might also want to learn about this area? [NOTE: Possible probes might be: Is there any really great resource you've discovered? Any great places you like to go to find out more about this topic? Is there anything you like to regularly do to continue learning about this topic?]

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. If it's okay I'd like to just ask you a few general background questions. Since we're asking lots of people these same questions these few background questions are important because they will help us when we try and compare your answers with those of other people's.

6. What do you do for a living? Can you be specific?
7. What is your age?
8. What is your 5-digit zip code?

Thank you so much for sharing your story with me today. If you wish more information about this project you may contact Dr. John Falk at Oregon State University. His email address is: falkj@science.oregonstate.edu