BRFSS Interviewers: Tips for Obtaining Good Industry and Occupation Information
NIOSH BRFSS I&O Project

Understand the Difference Between Industry and Occupation

> **Industry:** The kind of activity at someone's place of work (e.g., *hospital, doctor's office, retail sales, foundry, dairy farm, library*)

> **Occupation:** The kind of work someone does (e.g., *registered nurse, janitor, cashier, auto mechanic, barber, civil engineer*)

Understand How Your Text Entries of Verbal Responses Will Be Coded

Industry and occupation (I & O) are coded in a numerical system developed by the Census Bureau. The words you enter in the text field will first be run through software to code them automatically. Records that do not autocode will be manually coded by a human. About 97% of the data overall can be coded, but NIOSH would like to reduce manual coding (now 55%) because it takes a lot of time and is expensive.

General Tips

- The Census codes are specific, so try to enter specific information. For example, if the industry is healthcare, specify the setting (hospital, doctor's office, homecare, hospice, etc.). If sales, specify retail or wholesale. If farming, specify the main animal or crop farmed. The specific information can usually be covered in just a few words.

- If the response is vague ("office worker") or obscure ("sand hog"), ask follow-up questions to get more specific information on the respondent's industry and occupation.

- Do not necessarily enter the words exactly as the respondent said them. Enter just the words that clearly describe the kind of work or duties. For example, if the respondent says, "I work at a Ford dealership in the service department repairing cars," you would enter "auto dealer" for industry and "auto mechanic" for occupation.

- Please do not type phrases like "I am a" or "I work at" in the text response.

- Try not to use abbreviations because they may stop the autocoder or be unfamiliar to the human coder. If abbreviations are used, be sure they are well-known and understandable to any human coder.

- Try to spell correctly. This is hard when you are moving quickly through the survey, but correct spelling assists autocoding.

- If the respondent works more than one job, ask them, "At which job do you work the most hours?"

> **Suggested follow-up questions if the industry response is too vague:**
>
> *What type of business are you self-employed in?*
>
> *What type of [healthcare, farm, school, mine, etc.]?*
>
> *What does the company do?*
>
> *Which government agency?*
>
> *Retail or wholesale sales?*

> **Suggested follow-up questions if the occupation response is too vague:**
>
> *What is your job title?*
>
> *What type of [consultant, engineer, etc.] are you?*

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Examples from 2013 BRFSS Where Text Entries Were Not Specific Enough to be Coded at All or Could Not be Coded to a Detailed Code

Text Entries Were Not Specific Enough		
Industry	**Occupation**	**Suggestions**
trabajo por mi cuenta	trabajo por mi cuenta	Two issues here. First, translate responses in Spanish into English and enter the English text. Second, neither entry ("work on my own") is specific enough. Probe for the type of work done.
education/school	child specific	For industry, specify level of school (pre-school, elementary, high school, trade school, etc.). For occupation, specify job (teacher, teaching assistant, principal, secretary, etc.).
healthcare	RN	For industry, specify healthcare setting (doctor's office, hospital, homecare, hospice, etc.). "RN" is acceptable for occupation because it is a well-known abbreviation.
healthcare	dental	For industry, specify healthcare setting (dentist's office, dental school, hospital, etc.). For occupation, specify job (dentist, dental hygienist, dental assistant, receptionist, etc.).
federal gov	government worker	For industry, specify general type of government agency. Specify the government occupation.
finance	office manager	For industry, specify a type of finance organization.
manufacturing	manufacturing	For industry, specify what product is manufactured. For occupation, specify the occupation.
automation company	engineer	For industry, clarify type of business. Should "automation" be "automotive?" For occupation, specify type of engineer (mechanical, electrical, materials, industrial, etc.).
utility	nuclear power company	"Nuclear power company" is an industry, not an occupation. Occupation is missing; specify the occupation.
sales	services	"Services" is an industry, not an occupation, and the type of services needs to be specified. "Salesperson" is an occupation, but other occupations also occur within service companies that sell their services. Both industry and occupation need to be specified more clearly.
technical field	construction	"Technical field" is not specific enough for industry. "Construction" is an industry where occupations such as carpenter, laborer, & welder occur. Specify the industry and occupation.

Some of these text entries can be coded, but the code would not be specific (e.g., "healthcare" is less specific than "doctor's office"). More specific text entries would allow us to code to a more detailed code, which is desirable for analyses of BRFSS data.

Examples from 2013 BRFSS Where the Text Entries Were Uncodeable

Unfamiliar Abbreviations		Suggestions
Industry	**Occupation**	Try not to enter unfamiliar or unusual abbreviations. If given an unfamiliar abbreviation, ask what it means and enter the full text. All of these examples are from the occupation field, but please avoid unfamiliar abbreviations in industry as well.
wellness center	coda, pta	
truck driver	cdl driver	
[blank]	cx	
retail	psa	
service industry	cta	
transformer company	mant.	Maintenance? "Maint" for maintenance is acceptable.

A Number is Entered Instead of an Industry or an Occupation	Suggestions
1, 7, 77, 9	Do not use these numbers for the I&O responses. "7" or "77" for don't know/not sure or "9" for refused are not acceptable. There should not be any "don't know" responses for I&O. If the respondent says "don't know," probe for the industry and occupation. If they still do not provide an industry or occupation, code "99" for refused.
99	"99" is the correct entry for "refused."

Examples from 2013 BRFSS Where More Than One Job Was Listed

Multiple Jobs are Listed. Only One Job Can Be Coded. Ask Which Job They Worked the Most Hours	
Industry	**Occupation**
architecture/construction	[blank]
automotive/construction	auto glass technician
bank, farm	bank, self employed farmer
call agent+cashier	movie theater+call center
[blank]	delivery/shop worker
grain elevator	bookkeeper/childcare
health care and retail	tj max and private care attendant
hospital	respiratory therapist/emt

Examples from 2013 BRFSS Where a Human Coded Because the Autocoder Could Not

Punctuation/Symbols	Suggestions
@ bank	Do not use punctuation or symbols unless they are part of the industry or the occupation. Punctuation and symbols may stop the autocoder, causing costly human coding
farm work//	
health care.	
\health care	
[pawn shop	

Extra Words and Pronouns	Suggestions
a clinic	Omit "a"
a lab	
a restaurant	
a power co	
for the church	Omit "for the" or "for a"
for the city	
for a college	
I'm a dental assistant for the department of health	Omit "I'm a" and "for the." Occupation is "dental assistant." Industry is "department of health" or better yet: "city [county, state] health department"
I pick up peaches, apricots	Omit "I pick up." Occupation is "farmworker peaches apricots"
I help manage automechanics	Omit "I help." Occupation is manager auto mechanics."
I'm a server	Omit "I'm a." Occupation is "server."

Proper Names	Suggestions – Don't Use Proper Names for Companies but Record What the Company Does
auto industry for GM	Industry: auto manufacturing
Golds Gym	Industry: fitness center
Hardee's	Industry: restaurant
warehouse labor for Fed Ex	Industry: warehouse
Walmart	Industry: department store
University of Nebraska	Industry: university