



How To Research A Career

So, you're going to college and you don't know what you want to major in. Do you feel uncomfortable when people ask, "What's your major?" What do you tell them? Not having a major or knowing which career is right for you is not the end of the world. And, you are not alone. National statistics show that one out of three high school students are unsure about which career to pursue. Once they reach college, more than 50 percent of college freshmen change their major at least once during their first year of college. And, many more students, once they leave college enter careers or end up in careers that aren't directly related to their undergraduate majors.

As you enter college, much emphasis is placed upon the importance of selecting the 'right' major and the 'right' career. Parents, relatives, teachers and peers may provide their input regarding what you should do with the rest of your life. It may seem as though you can only select one career that is best suited for you, and it had better be the right one. In reality there probably are several careers that may be good choices for you. And, it's up to you, not your parents, your teachers, or your peers, to explore your options and make your own career decisions. You are the one that will want to be satisfied that you have made the right choice for you. You will want to feel confident that you have selected a career for which you have the skills; one that captures your interest and provides you with opportunities for growth. A career is more than a job. It's more than a paycheck. Remember, once you graduate from college, you will most likely spend the majority of your adult life working. Isn't it better to spend your time working in a position that interests and challenges you; one that you enjoy?

Checklist for Exploring Careers and Majors:

- Review and list your strengths, weaknesses, skills, abilities, and interests
- Meet with your academic adviser to discuss majors or careers that interest you
- Review the majors and minors in your college/university catalog
- Consider taking introductory courses in areas that interest you
- Meet with a career counselor in your college/university Career Services office
- Arrange to take a career assessment and discuss the results with a career counselor
- Attend special career nights and majors fairs on campus
- Join extra-curricular activities that provide experience in your areas of career interest

- Meet with someone who is in a career that interests you
- Seek and read more about careers that interest you -- information is available in both printed form and on the Internet

Ten Important Things to Consider When Choosing a Career:

- 1) Your career success depends as much as the kind of person you are as the major and degree you earn. Your learning outside the classroom through work, through campus, civic, and church activities, travel, and even fun will contribute to your employability and success.
- 2) Experience in the form of part-time work, volunteer work, employment on campus, internships, or co-ops, is as important as your degree to an employer.
- 3) Don't underestimate the value of what you already know and can do. Inventory your transferable skills.
- 4) Learn about and do research/information interviews.
- 5) Network, network, network. College is full of natural networking opportunities.
- 6) When selecting a campus (or work-study) job, look for one in your area of interest, with a good training program. Campus unions, recreation centers, and career centers are great places to learn a lot and meet a lot of people.
- 7) A college graduate without a good attitude, willingness to continue to learn, and ability to work with others will likely be underemployed.
- 8) Develop a "Plan B" just in case you encounter unexpected obstacles to "Plan A" -- or if Plan A doesn't happen in the time frame you expected.
- 9) Give up on the notion of job security. Security is not in a job; it's in your skills, your ability to communicate with employers, and in continuing to learn--formally and informally.
- 10) Visit your Career Center as a freshman, even if you're 100% sure of your career plan. The sooner the staff knows who you are and what you're interested in, the more likely it is they'll be able to help you achieve your career goals.

Don't take chances with choosing a career. Use these tools to dig up the truth about any job that interests you.

If you'd known what the job you're doing now would really be like, would you still have chosen it? For many people, the answer would be a resounding no. Questions on how to break into a completely new career are some of the most popular subjects in our mailbox. As you and the working world you're part of change, what was once the job of your dreams can become hell on earth. But if you're going to move, how can you make sure you get it right this time? And if you're going for a first job, how do you find out what it's all about?

There's no foolproof way to ensure a perfect match, but the more research you do, the more likely you are to end up in the right place. One advantage of having been in a job you dislike is that you know what to avoid. Although it's difficult to tell if something is going to suit you until you actually do it, having a close look at day-to-day realities reduces the risk of making another mistake.

Reality checklist

To make an informed decision, you need a mix of different information from a variety of sources.

- Start with the impartial information, make sure it's up to date
- Read the promotional literature for inspiration, but bear in mind its aim is to portray the profession as attractive
- Listen to the gripes of those who are dissatisfied
- Seek out the stories of those who love it
- Go and see for yourself
- Judge if it's for you

The basics

Start with the easy-to-check facts, such as qualifications required, availability of work, normal duties, salary scales, promotion prospects and usual working hours. This is information that changes frequently, so make sure you are using up-to-date resources.

Tapping into reality

What it is actually like to do the job is harder to research. Choosing a career is a tricky business. Where do you start? Is there just one career that would be the perfect match or are there dozens out there, waiting to be discovered? What if your initial feelings of passion and compatibility don't survive some of the inevitable ups and downs? Should you regard it as a commitment for life or a short-term fling?

The best fit

Settling down with the right career can be as central to your happiness as choosing the right person to share your life with. But, as with any relationship, there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone is different, every situation unique. What works for one person may not work for another. What feels absolutely perfect now will change and develop, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. The information you're working with when making major decisions about career choice is woefully incomplete. The world of work offers no long-term certainties – new jobs appear, established ones disappear. Professions change their focus, some skills become obsolete, while others develop a rarity value. The best you can do is make a series of educated guesses based on your understanding of yourself and how it matches what's out there now.

Investigate yourself

Thinking about personal likes and dislikes is a good starting point. Do you want to spend your working life indoors/at sea/working at heights? Does the idea of giving a presentation fill you with excitement or dread? Would close contact with computers fulfill or frustrate you? Once you start asking and answering such questions you begin to eliminate the poor matches and start to focus on possibilities.

Eventually you will have to use the skills you learn in school! Wouldn't it be great if the career you enter not only makes your education worthwhile but also challenges and excites you? The best way to start thinking about choosing a career path is by asking yourself a few simple questions.

- What are my main interests?
- Do I enjoy working with others or do I work best alone?
- Can I sit at a desk or do I need to be outdoors?
- What do I expect from a career?