



## Making career decisions

### INTRODUCTION

We are all individuals, and the decisions we make have to suit our individual personalities, needs and satisfactions. Whether you have given a lot of thought to your future career or not, this resource is designed to give you practical assistance in making your career choices. The golden rule is not to feel pressured into making a quick decision. Indeed, if you feel that you are under pressure it can actually be more difficult to sort out ideas in your own mind. Career decision making can be a slow process. Begin by trying a few constructive activities.

Whatever degree you have studied, you have an element of choice in the career that you follow. Initially, try not to say “what job can I do with this degree subject?” Instead try to start off by looking very broadly at a variety of jobs. Eventually, you will need to come back to your degree subject, but at first you need to be able to let your ideas run freely. You may well feel constrained if you limit your research to jobs that relate directly to your degree.

### Making decisions

To make decisions, you need to know enough about the various possibilities. You probably would not choose between six different holidays without knowing something about all of them. The same applies to jobs. One person may love something that you would hate and vice versa, so you need to use any advice or information from others to form your own opinions. Allow yourself some time each week to devote to career activities. Timetable it if you can.

Start your research with “you”. Find out more about who you are and what you have to offer. This exercise does involve some work, but after a number of years of study, you are no doubt familiar with the link between doing the background work/research and results! If you spend time on this you will discover a lot of new things about yourself, or remember things you had forgotten. Writing things down is an important part of the decision making process.

### Self-assessment

Begin your [self-assessment](#) by considering:

Your achievements  
Your interests

Your skills and abilities  
Any known disabilities

Your personal values  
Personal and family circumstances

### Achievements

Reflect on your achievements – the easiest way to start is with your academic achievements at school or at university. In many situations, particularly for new graduates with little or no work experience, it is important to go back to school days. Some employers feel quite strongly that a pattern of achievement at that stage is likely to be repeated in later years.

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Think about what led you to choose your course of study, and the kinds of strengths you have developed along with specific knowledge gained. Try to identify which courses you enjoyed most and resulted in your best achievements. Now, think about your other achievements, e.g. responsibilities accepted in organisations, within your family, vacation work, socially etc. You are more than a degree statistic and have other roles in addition to “student” or “graduate”. Recall those positive comments that friends, classmates or colleagues at work have made.

**Your skills and abilities:**

“But I haven’t got any skills”, you might be saying to yourself. Of course you do! We all do! You might recognise them by other names – talents, gifts or aptitudes. Skills are the essence of what we contribute to the world. Advising, coaching, communicating, analysing, researching, organising, painting, repairing .... recognise them? These are only a few of the hundreds of skills you possess. Here are just some skills to think about. To what extent do you have any of these skills?

- |                 |               |                 |                |                     |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Acting          | Eliminating   | Motivating      | Selling        | Arbitrating         |
| Explaining      | Organising    | Sorting         | Budgeting      | Generating          |
| Persuading      | Supplying     | Hypothesising   | Presenting     | Testing and proving |
| Completing      | Improvising   | Promoting       | Treating       | Consolidating       |
| Inspiring       | Questioning   | Unifying        | Creating       | Interviewing        |
| Recruiting      | Leading       | Devising        | Reporting      | Managing            |
| Dramatising     | Retrieving    | Editing         | Rehabilitating | Lecturing           |
| Directing       | Researching   | Meeting         | Driving        | Modelling           |
| Scheduling      | Advising      | Evaluating      | Operating      | Sketching           |
| Assessing       | Formulating   | Perceiving      | Summarising    | Checking            |
| Predicting      | Teaching      | Communicating   | Implementing   | Designing           |
| Producing       | Translating   | Conceptualising | Initiating     | Publicising         |
| Word processing | Co-ordinating | Integrating     | Reconciling    | Writing             |
| Judging         | Developing    | Repairing       | Maintaining    | Distributing        |
| Restoring       | Mentoring     | Risking         | Controlling    | Instructing         |
| Working         | Mediating     | Drawing         | Adapting       | Enforcing           |

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Negotiating	Setting-up	Arranging	Filing	Overseeing
Speaking	Building	Handling	Planning	Coaching
Identifying	Administering	Establishing	Singing	Assembling
Fixing	Painting	Studying	Calculating	Saving
Synthesising	Collecting	Illustrating	Processing	Transcribing
Computing	Influencing	Providing	Tutoring	Monitoring
Selecting	Analysing	Examining	Ordering	Solving
Auditing	Performing	Supervising	Classifying	Preparing
Team-building	Compiling	Improving	Problem-solving	Training
Composing	Increasing	Proof-reading	Trouble-shooting	Constructing
Installing	Reasoning	Upgrading	Investigating	Detecting
Relating	Listening	Displaying	Resolving	Memorising
Diagnosing	Representing	Referring	Learning	Programming
Travelling	Conducting	Inspecting	Purchasing	Umpiring
Counselling	Interpreting	Recording	Detailing	Gathering

NB It is unlikely any one person will possess all these skills. Even more significantly, it is unlikely any one job requires in equal measure all these skills. Remember you used your abilities and skills to complete those achievements you have already thought about.

Work through this list thinking about situations in which you have demonstrated these skills – highlight skills that you would enjoy using on a regular basis as part of your ideal job.

### Your personal values:

- What are the most important things to you?
- What turns you on ... and off?
- What are you committed to?
- What comprises happiness for you?
- What degree of integrity do you need in your life and work?
- How much power and responsibility do you want in your work place?
- How much of yourself do you want to put into your work – are you seeking to live to work or work to live, or a balance between both?



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There are no right or wrong answers to these and other questions, but your answers will have implications for your job search. The closer the match between your philosophy of life and your job, the happier and more successful you will be.

### Your interests:

Think about the things you like doing – list 20 things you love to do, and then pick 4 or 5 favourites. Your first job may not involve many of these but if you haven't taken time out to think along these lines it will probably involve even fewer! Give some thought to areas which most interest you, i.e. administrative, artistic, computational, literary, mechanical, musical, outdoor, persuasive, scientific and/or social service. Consider such aspects as working on your own/with other people; giving/taking supervision; dealing with the public; persuading people; working with machinery; working indoors/outdoors etc.

**Disabilities:** Be honest with yourself about known disabilities or physical impairments that may impact upon what you want to do – allergies, colour blindness, back problems etc. It doesn't always mean you can't do a particular job, but you need to be aware of how you would manage any obstacles which could restrict you from doing the work successfully.

**Personal and family circumstances:** Be realistic. Face up now to the impact of these on your employment in terms of hours, financial commitments, limitations with regard to location or personal commitments.

**More on skills:** Employers look for functional skills (marketable skills) in a new graduate and often presume you have acquired these skills during your years of study. A valuable exercise is to list your academic activities you are experiencing/have experienced as a student and then try to translate them into functional skills.

### Functional skills:

Activity:

Can be translated to functional skills in:

Structuring your time so as to meet deadline  
for projects

Work programming

Meeting deadlines

Completing research projects

Collection and analysis of data

Presenting tutorial or seminar papers

Oral communication

Writing essays

Analytical skills – creative or report writing

Collecting information to write research papers

Locating and using resources

There are many personal skills or attributes which may be developed during your time at university and which some people consider to be part of an all-round education. These include the ability to work as a member of a team, an ability to get on well with other people, competitiveness and a sense of direction.



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You can also develop specific vocational skills through campus activities. Such activities may include helping run student media, organising and chairing meetings, persuading people to join in activities and tutoring. Part-time work to support yourself financially, from waiting tables (tact, energy, carrying out requests correctly) to working in a shop (always valuable if you hope to go into marketing or indeed into any work where you have to deal with clients regularly) to data entry (accuracy, an eye for detail) and so on also provides valuable work experience. All activities say something about you and they differentiate you from your peers.

### Further skills and experiences developed at University:

#### A: Information management skills:

Sorting and evaluating data

Applying information creatively to specific problems or tasks

Organising information effectively

Compiling and ranking information

Synthesising facts, concepts and principles

#### B: Design and planning skills:

Identifying alternative courses of action

Following through with a plan or decision

Predicting future trends and patterns

Making and keep a schedule

Setting realistic goals

Managing time effectively

Accommodating multiple demands

Setting priorities

#### C: Research and investigation skills:

Using a variety of sources for information

Identifying problems and needs

Conveying a positive image to others

Applying a variety of methods

Using audio-visual formats to present ideas

Developing effective listening skills

#### D: Communication skills:

Using various forms and styles of written communication

Using audio-visual formats to present ideas

Developing effective listening skills

Speaking effectively

Conveying a positive image to others





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### I: Generic skills:

Comprehending written material

Active listening

Identifying problem areas

Developing alternative approaches to problems

Using library and research facilities

Co-operating with a work team

Helping people with their problems

Following well-defined instructions

Establishing goals and following through

Relating to a wide variety of people

Writing effectively

Making effective speeches/presentations

Decision making

Analysing and evaluating ideas

Supervising and leading

Persuading others to accept your ideas

Organising time effectively

Working on projects

Undertaking detailed and accurate work

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