



5 Steps
to Choosing
the
Right Career



***An Interactive Workbook
By Annette Richmond, MA***

the **5** *Steps*
Right *to Choosing*
Career

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Introduction



Be True to Yourself

Congratulations! You've just taken the first step to finding a job you'll love. Choosing a career is a big decision. Unfortunately, most of us spend more time planning our vacation than planning our career.

Maybe we decide to study law because lawyers run in the family. Or we take a retail position because some friends already work there. And the store's management training program sounds like fun. Sometimes, we just fall into the family business.

If we find ourselves out of work, we'll probably thumb through the newspaper looking for a job that pays well and sounds interesting. Maybe we'll post our resume on the Internet. And visit an employment agency or recruiter in the hope that they can give us a little direction.

Ten years later we wake up in a job we don't like. But, by now we have job security, an IRA and we're comfortable. We don't even expect to enjoy our job anymore. We've come to believe that work is only the means to an end: Work the job, to pay the bills.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? Don't despair. You have the power to change your situation. And you deserve to be happy.

If this seems like a radical idea consider this: Successful people are passionate about their work. It's the passion for what they do that makes the challenges surmountable and the bad days bearable. But what ignites that passion is different for everyone. Some people get a kick out of organizing things; some are energized by helping others. The secret to being passionate about your work is to discover what excites you and go for it.

Be prepared. Changing your career probably will not be easy. It will definitely take some time and creative thinking on your part. But, just by reading this you've already started moving in the right direction.

Today there are lots of career books on the market. Many promote the theory that taking time for self-assessment and research are essential to finding the right career. They propose that the right career is one that engages your mind, uses your talents and supports your values. This book is one of them.

5 Steps to Choosing the Right Career is designed as an interactive workbook which will guide you through the career selection process. The first four steps involve self-assessment. You will find information and exercises to help you analyze your personality, determine your values, consider your interests and evaluate your skills. This section also discusses the theory behind several career assessments including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI), Strong Interest Inventory® and Holland Self-Directed Search®. Our quick estimators give you the chance to see how the theories relate to career choice.

The fifth step is research. In this section, you will find out how to explore careers online and at the library. You'll learn how to conduct an Informational Interview. And why it's important to do both. We'll finish with some strategies for career change.

Many of the chapters of this book build on another. For that reason, the best way to proceed is to start at the beginning with Personality and finish with Change Strategies. (Like you would in a workshop.) But, if you prefer to jump in and browse around, stopping when something grabs your attention, that's OK too. There is no right or wrong answer, or method. That said, the most important thing to remember is to be honest. When it comes to self-assessment honesty is everything.

Forget about the *should've*, *would've*, *could've*. Within reason (remember, you still have to pay the rent and buy groceries) forget about *ought tos* too. This is not about what your mother, father, husband, wife, child or significant other wants. You are going through this process to discover what you want. So be honest.

Only after you discover which career will make you sing, should you start to think about compromises. You'll have plenty of time to consider what it will take to achieve your goals (going back to school, taking a pay cut, doing volunteer work). And what you are willing to give up to achieve your goals – time with family, next year's vacation, etc.

I've been fortunate enough to hold several positions, which were challenging, fulfilling and fun. I worked in a stimulating environment and met colleagues who remain friends. Like most people, I've also held the other kind. The ones that drain your soul and leave you disgruntled at the end of the day. Little by little, they deplete your resources, and take their toll, on your professional and personal lives.

Don't waste your life waiting for the weekends. Find a job that ignites your passion and go for it. You are standing at a crossroads in your life. Consider carefully before choosing one path or the other. Taking the road that's right for you can make all the difference.

- *Annette Richmond*

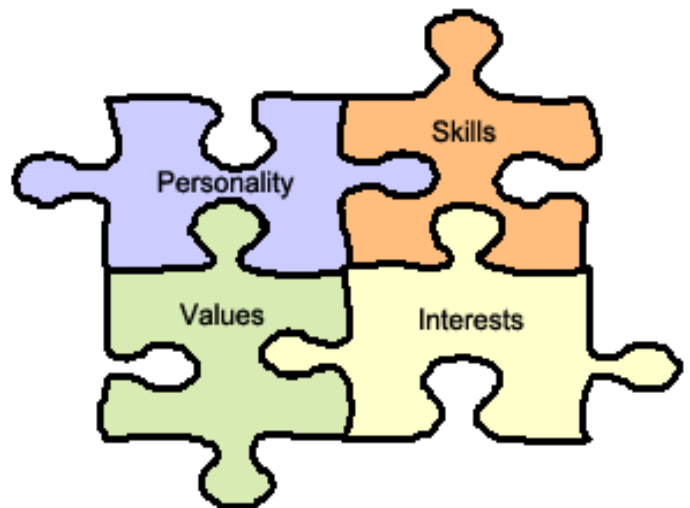
Assessment



Know What You Want, And What You Don't

Knowing yourself is essential to making an educated career choice. The information and exercises in the following chapters are designed to take you through the self-assessment process. By the end of this section you should know where you are now, and where you want to go.

Ideally, your career should support your values, hold your interest, use your strongest skills and appreciate who you are. If you were to think of your career as a puzzle, it might look something like this.



The Career Checklist provides an overview of what will be covered in the next four chapters, Personality, Values, Interests and Skills. At the end of this section you should be able to answer all of these questions. Your responses will help you determine what you're looking for. Just as important, they will let you know what to avoid.

As you go through the self-assessment process, try to be tuned in to what you don't want in your next position as well as what you do. For example, when you're considering which values are important to you, be sure to think about the types of practices that make you uncomfortable. If you value spending time with your family, you may not want to work for a company that expects you to travel frequently or put in extra time on the weekends. If a potential supervisor proudly tells you that she works 12-hour days, be prepared to do the same.

Career Checklist

The following questions will give you a few attitudes and ideas to start thinking about:

- What skills do you want to use on the job? Which innate, transferable and job-related skills are your strongest? Which do you enjoy using?
- What type of people do you want to work with? Strong, assertive individuals? Creative sorts? Quiet, reflective folks?
- What type of atmosphere do you function best in? Are you relaxed and easy-going? Do you prefer fast-paced and goal-oriented?
- How much responsibility are you prepared to accept? Do you want to be responsible for the work of others? Or do you prefer to let others take charge?
- Do you prefer a structured workday or are you fairly adaptable? Do you find it unsettling when your day takes an unexpected turn?
- Are you more comfortable with close supervision? Do you like having the option of prioritizing your own work?
- Do you like to work independently or as part of a team? Do you prefer to problem solve on your own? Or do you enjoy brainstorming and the verbal exchange of ideas?
- What type of environment do you want to work in? Do you like quiet? Do you need to be near a window? Do you need to be surrounded by activity?
- What population do you want to work with? Adults, children, the elderly, those with special needs?
- What hours do you want to work? Are you a 9 to 5er? Do you need a part-time, flexible schedule? What about working on the weekends?
- How much money do you want or need to make? Does your salary validate your worth? Or are monetary rewards less important?
- Are benefits important to you? This includes tuition reimbursement, company training, vacation time, holiday pay and medical benefits.
- In the larger scheme, what is important to you? What values or ideals would you like to further in the work that you do? This may include cleaning up the environment, making money, helping others, gaining prestige, etc. Realize that you may be forced to choose one value over another when they conflict.

Don't worry if you're feeling a bit overwhelmed. At the end of each chapter, you'll revisit the relevant questions. By the end of the section, you'll have answered them all.

This is just the jumping off point. So let's go.

Who Are You?

Okay you're ready to start. While the self-assessment process includes looking at your personality, values, interests and skills, we suggest you begin here with personality.

Fundamentally, personality is who we are. Some people are just naturally organized. Others are not. Some of us communicate best by talking and may find it difficult to work alone. Situations that allow us to go with our natural rhythms or preferences are more comfortable. The more insight you have into your personality, the better equipped you will be to make an educated career choice.

This chapter talks offers several ways to take a closer look at your personality. You will find information on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI), which is widely used as a career exploration tool. The Quick Estimator will give you an idea of how the MBTI works.

Be prepared to spend a little time. Some of the exercises are quick, fun and easy. Others take more time, but provide more in-depth information.

Career Assessments

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is one of the most widely used career exploration tools. It is a highly reliable instrument, designed to help you discover your preferences and tendencies on four dichotomous, or opposite, scales. Developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother Katherine Cook Briggs, the Indicator is designed to provide insight into how we take in data and give it meaning; how we make decisions, judgments and take action; where our source of personal energy comes from; and how we prefer to interact with the external world.

If you decide to use the MBTI in your career-exploration process there are several things you should remember. First, the MBTI is an instrument that sorts for preferences; it does not measure skills or aptitudes. Second, a person's reported Type is not a label. Type is not a static box, but a dynamic

energy system. And perhaps most important, no Type is better than another. We each have strengths and unique gifts, as well as vulnerabilities and areas for personal development.

The Quick Estimator will give you an idea of how the MBTI works. However, it is not designed as a substitute for taking the MBTI and discussing your results with a qualified coach or consultant. While facsimiles are readily available, only a trained professional will be able to administer the MBTI.

Quick Estimator

This exercise is based on Myers-Briggs Type Theory. The estimator is designed to give you an idea of what your reported Type might be. It is not meant to substitute for the MBTI.

How I focus my energy

Extrovert

- After a big party I feel energized
- I have lots of different friends and enjoy group activities
- I prefer to communicate by talking

E _____

Introvert

- After a big party I feel drained
- I have a few close friends and prefer quiet pursuits
- I prefer to communicate by writing

I _____

How I learn and gather information

Sensor

- In school, I preferred subjects that focused on facts
- I like to focus on “what is”
- I prefer to learn in a step-by- step process

S _____

iNtuitive

- I prefer to study subjects which focus on theory
- I like to focus on “what can be”
- I prefer to jump in anywhere and learn as I go

N _____

How I evaluate information and make decisions

Thinker

- I gather the facts
- I look at the cause and effect of a decision

- I make my decisions based on the information

T _____

Feeler

- I think about my own values
- I'm concerned with how the decision will affect others
- I make my decisions based on the situation _____

F _____

How I relate to the outside world

Judger

- I like to plan my activities, even on the weekends
- When I get an assignment, I get right to work
- I feel most comfortable once a decision has been made

J _____

Perceiver

- I prefer to go with the flow
- I think about my projects first, churn things around in my mind
- I like to keep my options open, making decisions is uncomfortable

P _____

Read through the following statements. Place a check mark next to whichever statements seem most like you. Go through each section line by line and make your choice. You can choose from either column, but not from both. At the end of each section, select the letter with the most responses. Your end results will provide an indication of what your MBTI type might be.

My responses indicate that I am most like an ____ _ ____ _.

If the Quick Estimator has peaked your interest, you may decide to continue your exploration with the MBTI. You can this either by taking the assessment with a qualified professional or doing further research. I recommend that you do both.

Today there are many good books on the market. Here are a few recommendations to get you started:

- *Do What You Are, Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type*; Paul d. Tieger & Barbara Barron-Tieger
- *Gifts Differing, Understanding Personality Type*; Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Meyers
- *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types That Determine How We Live, Love and Work*, Otto Kroeger, Janet M. Thuesen
- *Type Talk at Work, How the 16 Personality Types Determine Your Success on the Job*; Otto Kroeger, Janet M. Thuesen

Looking Within

Some people are naturally creative. Others are not. Some of us easily adapt to any situation. Others need structure in their day. The only thing we all have in common is that we're most comfortable in situations where we can be who we are.

Another way to look at personality is to evaluate your traits or characteristics. Start by making a list of the twenty traits that best describe you. The following checklist was designed as a starting point. Mark all the traits you feel describe you. Mentally add any that are not listed and include them on your written list.

If you have the opportunity, ask someone close to you to make a second list. You may be surprised at what you find there. Many people, particularly women, are not comfortable praising themselves. Don't let being over critical hold you back. Take credit, where credit is due.

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accurate | <input type="checkbox"/> Idealistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analytical | <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive | <input type="checkbox"/> Logical | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Thorough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conscientious | <input type="checkbox"/> Outgoing | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuasive | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diplomatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easy going | <input type="checkbox"/> Precise | <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual | <input type="checkbox"/> Tactful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile |

Once you have a list of twenty traits, think about the characteristics you wrote down. Think about the jobs you most enjoyed and those you didn't. Most likely, the work you loved allowed you to be who you are.

The next step is to whittle your 20 traits down to a Top Ten List. This list should contain your strongest characteristics and those you would like to use in your next position. Hopefully the two will overlap.

After completing the list, choose the five traits or innate abilities that you want to use in your next job. Next to each write an example of how you used this trait in a previous position. And how you would like to use it in your next.

For example, I am Creative. I have written numerous articles and developed story ideas for several different publications. I enjoy using my creative talents and want to use them similarly in my next position.

Don't rush though this exercise. Self-awareness takes time.

For Fun and Enlightenment

This is a variation on a quick, fun exercise, which I found in *Wishcraft* by Barbara Sher. In her book, Sher credits Jack Canfield, Director of the Institute for Wholistic Studies in Amherst, MA with originating this exercise. (Grab a pen and paper before you continue.)

Color Exercise

- Close your eyes and picture a color. Your favorite color. Really see the color, feel its energy.
- Now open your eyes and write a description of the color. Be sure to give it lots of personality. Don't take too much time, just jot down your first few thoughts.
- Examine your description.
- Does anything about the color's description look familiar? It should. You've just described yourself. Or at least a part of yourself.

Many people describe the results of this exercise as "on the money." Others do not. While working as a counselor, I used this exercise with clients. Most found the exercise fun and their results often enlightening.

Working With Others

Having a clear picture of who you are will help you in many ways. Besides helping you figure out what you want to do, it will help you decide where you want to work and the type of people you want to work with.

Companies have personalities too. Only there they call it company culture. Sometimes it's the trickle-down effect from the owner. For example, an owner who places a high value on family time will not likely expect employees to work on the weekends. Other times it's related to the field or industry. Most non-profits have a laid-back atmosphere. Sales offices generally are staffed with aggressive, competitive people.

Let's say you are a sociable person who needs to use her creative talents. When you start a new job, the first thing you want to do is find out how to make things better. No matter how appealing you may find the duties, working at a tiny company where they have been doing things the same way for the last fifty years is probably not for you. Working with people who have an "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude will make you want to pull your hair out.

While the problems in this scenario seem obvious, it's easy to miss potential problems when you're not looking for them. Always consider how your personality will mesh with the company culture and the personalities of those around you.

Questions

Before moving to the next section, consider these questions from the Career Checklist:

- What type of people do you want to work with? Strong, assertive individuals? Creative sorts? Quiet, reflective folks?
- What type of atmosphere do you function best in? Are you relaxed and easy-going? Do you prefer fast-paced and goal-oriented?
- How much responsibility are you prepared to accept? Do you want to be responsible for the work of others? Or do you prefer to let others take charge?
- Do you prefer a structured workday or are you fairly adaptable? Do you find it unsettling when your day takes an unexpected turn?
- Are you more comfortable with close supervision? Do you like having the option of prioritizing your own work?
- Do you like to work independently or as part of a team? Do you prefer to problem solve on your own? Or do you enjoy brainstorming and the verbal exchange of ideas?
- What type of environment do you want to work in? Do you like quiet? Do you need to be near a window? Do you need to be surrounded by activity?
- What population do you want to work with? Adults, children, the elderly, those with special needs?
- What hours do you want to work? Are you a 9 to 5er? Do you need a part-time, flexible schedule? What about working on the weekends?

What Do You Value?

When considering a job, how much time do you spend thinking about your values? If you're like most people not much time at all. True, just about everyone is concerned about money. Some people consider whether a company has opportunities for advancement.

But what about the things that make us feel good about our job? And by extension ourselves? The intangibles, things that are difficult to define and even trickier to measure. These are our values. And they are different for everyone.

Some people feel fulfilled when helping others. Others need the opportunity to work independently. Still others become frustrated when their job doesn't allow them to be creative. The key is identifying your values.

Few people find a job that satisfies them completely. Trying to find the perfect job is like trying to find the perfect mate. You need to know where you are willing to compromise and, maybe more importantly, where you are not.

What's Most Important?

When asked to name their values, many people immediately will say family is one of their most important values. Many people of these same people spend 30 percent to 50 percent or more time traveling for business. And they wonder why they're not happy.

Many people will say that money is not important. Not important at all. But they pine after beautiful designer clothing and are longing for the day when they can buy a boat. Not just a little boat mind you, a floating vacation home. Obviously, money has more value than they want to believe.

As you go through the exercises in this chapter, ignore that little voice reminding you of the *should've*s. List what is valuable to you. Not what you think should be valuable. Not what your spouse or parents or children or whoever thinks should be important to you. There's plenty of time for that later.

Know that it's OK to want recognition for your work and expect a good salary. And you're not a bad mother if you don't want to stay home with the kids. It's not essential to have children at all. On the other hand, if you want to work part-time or be a stay-at-home Mom, that's fine too.

Money often gets a bad rap. Many of us, particularly women, are raised to believe that we need to be socially responsible. And that's a good thing. But being socially responsible can take many forms. It doesn't mean you need to work in a helping profession, unless that's what makes you happy.

Things You Love

One enlightening exercise is to make a list of the ten to 20 things you most like to do. Study the list to see if there is a pattern. Does it surprise you? Take a look at how often you do things you enjoy. Do you spend most of your life doing things you don't enjoy?

While you're at it, examine the way you like to do things. (This will give you additional insight into your personality.) Do you like to spend your time playing softball (being with a group) or curled up with a good book (being alone)? Do you prefer the excitement of downhill skiing or the relaxation of a day hiking in the woods?

Consider your answers to these questions when you are thinking about a new job or career. Imagine how you'll be spending your days on the job. Will you enjoy it?

Start by making a list of the things you most like to do. Try to come up with at least twenty. Include everything, even if it seems silly or unimportant. Here are a few from my list:

- Going to the movies and theatre
- Writing
- Reading books and magazines
- Meeting new people
- Developing new ideas
- Learning new things, taking classes
- Relaxing with my husband
- Eating pizza
- Working in the garden

-
- Playing with my puppy
 - Taking vacations, preferably on our boat

Once you have your list, take some time to evaluate what these activities mean: Are your hobbies expensive? For example, it costs more to go skiing every weekend, than to see a movie. If most of your leisure activities involve spending money, then money may be more important to you than you think.

Are your favorite things a regular part of your life? If they're not maybe you need to rethink your schedule. If exercise is a priority, maybe you should consider working for a company with an in-house gym or health club discounts.

Take a look at each of your favorite activities. Use the following questions as a jumping off point. But be sure to add your own. Remember, you are the most important part of the equation.

- When did you last do this activity? Was it work-related?
- Are your leisure interests free or do they cost money? How much money?
- Do you do this alone or with others? If you're part of a team, are you the leader?
- Is this a fast-paced activity or a way to relax?
- Does this activity involve helping, teaching or leading others?
- Do your favorite pastimes challenge you and/or push you to be creative?
- Was there a goal associated with this pursuit? If so, what?
- Does this involve learning?
- Do you generally prefer to plan your activities, have them planned for you or go at the spur of the moment?
- Do your favorite things nourish your body, mind or spirit?

As for me, right now I don't have time for some of my hobbies. (Need to make more me time.) But, many of the things I love are part of my day-to-day life. Happily several are connected to my job. What about you?

Seeking Fulfillment

Another way to recognize what's important to you is to look at values that other people have identified as significant. Below are 25 values many people have named as important to them. Read through the list. Are any of these things important to you? Which ones?

Look at the list. Check off the statements that are most important to you. (This list is a starting point. Be sure to add anything that's important to you.)

-
- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ❑ Achievement | Having a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day, week, or month. |
| ❑ Helping Others | Working with people one-on-one or in groups. |
| ❑ Creativity | Having the opportunity to create new policies, programs, materials. Using some of my own ideas. |
| ❑ Autonomy | Having control over my activities, working with little supervision. |
| ❑ Financial Gain | The potential to make a lot of money for my efforts. |
| ❑ Advancement | Knowing there is room for growth in my company, field, industry. |
| ❑ Social Responsibility | Feeling that I am contributing, making the world a better place. |
| ❑ Team Work | Working with others towards a common goal. |
| ❑ Security | I need to know that my job will be there in five years. |
| ❑ Recognition | It's important to be recognized for my work, by my colleagues, my boss |
| ❑ Influence Others | Be in a position where I influence the opinions, attitudes and/or beliefs of others. |
| ❑ Social Status | Being considered important in my community. |
| ❑ Knowledge & Learning | My company provides ongoing training programs and tuition reimbursement. |
| ❑ Authority | Having the power to make decisions. |
| ❑ Warm Environment | My coworkers are warm and friendly, we frequently have lunch together, and may socialize outside the office. |
| ❑ Responsibly | Supervising others, being responsible for the work of others |
| ❑ High Activity | Being busy all the time, working in a fast paced environment, frequently under deadlines |
| ❑ Flexible Schedule | Having the option of making my own schedule. |
| ❑ Working Alone | Doing most of my work alone, without a lot of contact with other people |
| ❑ Time Off | Plenty of vacation time, Summer hours, that extra week during the Christmas holidays. |
| ❑ Artistic Endeavors | Using my creative talents, writing, drawing, other artistic pursuits. |
-

-
- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Change & Variety | My duties and activities change frequently. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Adventure | My job often involves risk-taking, physical, financial, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Stability | Having a predictable schedule; I know what I'll be doing next week, next month. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Competition | My job, office, business, field is highly competitive, I enjoy competing with others |

Choose Ten things which are most important to you. Whittle your list to five. Then consider how you might incorporate those into your next position.

Sign of the Times

It's important to note that values often change over time. When you are 25 you may value adventure and independence. Once you have a house and a couple of kids, the opportunity to travel to Europe several times a month may not be as inviting.

Values also are often dependent on your current needs. What's important to a single mom with three children to support may be different than a single woman who needs to support only herself.

On three separate occasions, I have worked full-time while going to school at night. This didn't leave much me time. On two occasions I was able to pursue what I valued because I was single. The third time, I had a supportive mate and it was easier still. However, if I had small children, I might have put off school (or taken fewer classes each semester) to spend more time with my family.

Realize that there are always trade-offs. But when you know what your values are, it's easier to work them into your life. It's also easier to come up with a happy compromise, when you know what you value most today.

Questions

Before moving to the next chapter, consider these questions from the Quick Checklist:

- How much money do you want or need to make? Does your salary validate your worth? Or are rewards less important?
- Are benefits important to you? This includes tuition reimbursement, company training, vacation time, holiday pay and medical benefits.
- In the larger scheme, what is important to you? What values or ideals would you like to further in the work that you do? This may include cleaning up the environ-

ment, making money, helping others, gaining prestige, etc. *Realize that you may be forced to choose one value over another when they conflict.*

- What hours do you want to work? Are you a 9 to 5er? Do you need a part-time, flexible schedule? What about working on the weekends?

Are You Interested?

It's surprising how many of us don't consider our interests when we're looking for a job. Often, we stumble into a job and stay there for years, even though we don't particularly like it. Sometimes we move aimlessly from job to job, continually searching for the one that feels right.

Those actively pursuing a chosen career often become discouraged because they come to believe their dream job to be unattainable. In both situations, the solution often is to do some creative thinking.

Assessment tools such as the Holland Self-Directed Search® (SDS) and Strong Interest-Inventory® can provide you with valuable insight. Based upon your answers each of these tools can generate a report, which includes a list of possible job options.

While career assessments provide a great jumping off point, the results should be used only as a guide. You can also carry out this process on your own. While it takes more time, many people get good results using self-assessment exercises.

Self-Directed Search

Developed by John Holland, the Self-Directed Search is one of the most widely used career exploration tools. It is based on Holland's premise that our career choice is more than a set of duties and skills; it is an expression of our personality type. Holland theorized that our jobs also represent a certain status, lifestyle and position in the community.

How it Works

Holland theorized that people fall into one of six types of "orientation to life," they are: Realistic (likes to work with their hands), Investigative (prefers thinking and problem solving), Artistic (enjoys creative pursuits), Social (likes to help with people), Enterprising (enjoys persuading people) and Conventional (prefers a structured environment).

Holland used the same criteria to categorize and label occupations. For example the largest percentage of people working in a Social occupation (Teacher) would have a Social personality (like to help people).

The Six Types

Realistic - Generally prefers to work with things more than with people, has mechanical and athletic abilities, and is good with their hands. Places value on being rewarded and/or paid for their accomplishments. Seen as sensible, reliable, practical, modest, persistent and sincere.

Investigative - Generally prefers to work with ideas more than with people or things, has math and/or science abilities. Values knowledge and learning for the sake of learning. Described as intelligent, introverted, logical, curious, independent, quiet and modest.

Artistic - Generally, likes to work with ideas rather than things; has artistic skills and a good imagination, likes to create original work. Values the opportunity to use creative ideas and/or expressions. Seen as open, independent, creative, emotional, impulsive and unusual.

Social - Generally, prefers to work with people in a helping capacity, is interested in the relationships between people. Values working for the welfare of others. Described as warm, friendly, outgoing, helpful, understanding, responsible, kind, giving and patient..

Enterprising - Generally, likes to influence and persuade people, has leadership and public speaking abilities. Values achieving wealth and social status. Seen as energetic, sociable, adventurous, ambitious, optimistic and self-confident.

Conventional - Generally, likes to work with papers and numbers, has clerical and math abilities. Values making money and having community or business status. Described as practical, careful, frugal, persistent, efficient and organized.

Here are some of the careers associated with the Holland Types:

Realistic - engineer, farmer, pilot, chef, emergency medical technician

Investigative - physician, scientist, economist, engineer, medical laboratory assistant

Artistic - writer, fashion designer, composer, photographer, performing artist

Social - nurse, teacher, psychologist, recruiter, bartender

Enterprising - lawyer, sports director, manager, sales representative,

Conventional - accountant, computer operator, mail carrier, court reporter, assembler

While the Holland should only be used as a guide, it can provide important insights into your personality. It's also an inexpensive way to generate ideas.

Strong Interest Inventory

The Strong Interest Inventory is another career exploration tool. The Strong is based on the idea that people's work is directly related to their interests: That people in the same job often have the same hobbies, like the same movies and read the same types of books.

Based on this idea, the Strong measures your interests against the interests of people who are happily employed in various occupations. Put simply, the Strong is based on the assumption that if your interests match those of accountants you would enjoy working as an accountant. Using a classification system similar to that of the Holland Self-Directed Search, the Strong places people and jobs into six categories: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional.

My Favorite Things

Another way to evaluate your interests is to look at your favorite things. What subjects do you enjoy learning and talking about? What activities do you look forward to? Make a list of the subjects that interest you and the activities that you love. Write down everything. Don't limit yourself to what you think are realistic career options. Assess this list carefully. Cut and eliminate until you have narrowed the list to ten items, or less.

Use this list to generate career ideas. Use your imagination. Ask people who know you for their suggestions. How do they think your interests might translate to a job? Now is the time to consider what it would take to reach your desired profession. Ask yourself if you're goals are realistic and if you're willing to go the distance.

Carefully, consider what you need to do to work your dream job. You may love to play tennis. But would you want to play eight-hours a day, six-days a week. You might decide you'd be happier working at a magazine that covers sports, or even tennis, and playing tennis on the weekends.

Maybe your dream job is unrealistic: a famous pianist, giving concerts at Carnegie Hall. That doesn't mean you must rule out a career in music. Do some research to discover other options in the music business. Talk to people who work in the field. Use them for inspiration and ideas.

Ideas, People or Things?

Generally, people prefer to work either with ideas, people or things. Which works well, because most jobs focus either on ideas, people or things. Everyone, however, enjoys activities in each area. The task is discovering our preferred focus. Consider the following descriptions to help determine yours.

Ideas - are you a curious, complicated, independent person more interested in exploring new ideas and using your creativity? People who prefer to focus on ideas may thrive on the analytic challenges of fields such as science or medicine, or artistic pursuits such as writing or interior design. While different in many respects, all of these careers require curiosity and creativity.

People - are you a sociable, friendly person who likes to communicate and guide others? Those who prefer to focus on people often find satisfaction in helping occupations such as counseling or teaching, or in persuasive professions such as politics or sales. All offer the opportunity to influence and guide others. All require spending your day working with people.

Things - are you an orderly, practical, persistent person who enjoys working with your hands and likes clearly defined tasks? People who prefer to focus on things may be content working in a hands-on environment like mechanics or farming, or using their math abilities as a bookkeeper, financial analyst or banker. These careers share a focus on things. There is, generally, not much interaction with others.

Don't be concerned if you fit into more than one category. Many jobs are suited to those with a less clearly defined preference. For example, chefs are creative people who have a very hands-on job. So are landscape architects. A police artist uses their artistic talent within clearly defined boundaries. Bank tellers need to be careful and conscientious. But they also need to deal with people. And the list goes on.

So how do you know what's the right job for you? Take your time. Do some serious self-assessment. Consider using one of the career exploration tools described here. Always remain open to new, even unusual, ideas. Ask advice from others. But in the end, you must decide for yourself.

Today there are hundreds of different jobs. The Occupational Outlook Handbook provides descriptions of 250. Use their searchable database to conduct research and generate ideas. This will be covered more thoroughly in the Research section.

What's Your Skillset?

Most of us have spent time thinking about our skills. Skills are what we list on our resumes and talk about during a job interview. Unfortunately, most of us don't give ourselves enough credit.

Recognizing your skills is an essential part of every job search. Being able to effectively communicate these skills to a potential employer is equally important. Yet, many people have difficulty with both. Countless job-seekers, particularly women, often underestimate their skills. This leads to undervaluing themselves in the job market. Failing to sell themselves in a job interview. And probably working for less money than they deserve.

So let's start at the beginning. What is a skill? A skill is anything you can do. Most career resources divide skills into three different types. Various sources use different names, here we will call them: Innate, Transferable and Job-Specific.

Innate Skills

Innate skills are the characteristics we often think of as personality traits. They are the skills we use in every area of our life. This is how many of our closest friends would describe us. Innate skills include being punctual, conscientious, organized, honest, friendly, etc.

Generally, these skills are part of who we are. While anyone can learn to be punctual, for those who hit the snooze alarm three times before getting up it's not so easy. It's equally difficult to fake genuine enthusiasm.

While many job seekers discount these skills, employers consider them very important. Our innate abilities often influence how well we get along with our coworkers. And if we will fit in to the company culture.

Most people do not lose their jobs because of their inability to do the work. "The most frequently noted problems were; lying and dishonesty (14%), absenteeism and tardiness (12%), arrogance and overconfidence (12%), and lack of dedication (6%," according to a survey of personnel directors conducted by Robert Half & Associates, cited in *The Very Quick Job Search* by J. Michael Farr.

Transferable Skills

Transferable skills are those that are readily transferred from one job to another. These are the skills that make changing careers easier. They may make getting ahead easier as well.

Many of these skills, like effective communication, come more naturally to some, than to others. But, most of these abilities are learned and developed over time. Some examples are: written and verbal communication, managing people, negotiating, solving problems, and meeting deadlines.

Recognizing, and promoting, these skills can enhance your marketability for several reasons. While each company conducts business its own way, being able to motivate employees translates to any setting.

As mentioned, these skills can be particularly valuable to those transitioning to a new career. Good communication skills, for example, are valued in every industry.

Job-Specific Skills

Job-specific skills generally are those considered specific to an occupation. When asked to name their skills, these often are the abilities people think of first. They include things like computer programming, flying a plane, using industry-specific software applications, operating a video camera and typing a certain number of words per minute.

While these skills are valuable, many do not transfer to other positions or industries. An administrative assistant interviewing for a management position, for example, will want to focus on her Innate and Transferable skills. The interviewer will be more interested in hearing about her communication and problem-solving skills than her typing abilities.

Putting it all Together

It's essential to take stock of your skills before beginning a job search. You will need this information to prepare your marketing materials, a cover letter and resume. This knowledge also will be important during the interview process. Before your interview, choose three to five of your strongest skills. Be prepared with examples of when and how you used each skill on-the-job. For example, don't just say you are a team player, talk about working with others to complete a project.

For most of us, preparing for a job-search is intimidating. If we're contemplating a similar position in the same industry, it's bound to be difficult. If we're changing careers, it's worse. However, taking the time to accurately assess your skills is the first step to success.

Start taking stock of your skills by making a list of everything you know how to do. Use the following worksheets to help generate ideas. Read through the lists, putting checkmarks next to the skills you have. Add any skills you have, which are not listed here.

The worksheets are categorized as Innate, Transferable and Job-Specific skills. Many skills fall into more than one category. Organizing, for example, can be considered an Innate and Transferable skill. You decide.

Innate Skills

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|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accept criticism | <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive | <input type="checkbox"/> Competent | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conscientious | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diplomatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Easy-going | <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Patient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solver | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual | <input type="checkbox"/> Quick learner | <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely absent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take direction | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacious | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile | <input type="checkbox"/> Intuitive |

Transferable Skills

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accept responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze data | <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate speaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing others | <input type="checkbox"/> Compile information | <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer/client service | <input type="checkbox"/> Delegate duties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Get results |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good listener | <input type="checkbox"/> Instruct others | <input type="checkbox"/> Interview/hire people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Logical thinker | <input type="checkbox"/> Manage a budget | <input type="checkbox"/> Manage projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mediate | <input type="checkbox"/> Meet deadlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motivate others | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiate agreements | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing data |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plan events | <input type="checkbox"/> Public speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Research information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Run meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Sell ideas/products | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong, clear writer |

Job-Specific Skills

Job-specific skills generally are those considered specific to an occupation. When asked to name their skills, these often are the abilities people think of first. They include things like

computer programming, flying a plane, using industry-specific software applications, operating a video camera and typing a certain number of words per minute. Create your list based on your past experience and any skills specific to the job you are seeking. For example, using graphic-design software or operating an X-ray machine.

Now you're ready to create a master list that includes your Innate, Transferable and Job-Specific Skills. Decide which are your strongest abilities. Select those you enjoy using. Hopefully these two groups will overlap.

Now, create your Top Ten List. These are the skills you should keep in mind when choosing a career. They are also the ones you should highlight on your resume. Select three to five of these skills to emphasize during any job interviews. Have a concrete example of each prepared.

Questions

- Before moving to the next section, consider these questions from the Quick Checklist:
- What are your strongest Innate, Transferable and Job-Related skills?
- Which skills do you most enjoy using? Which do you want to use in your next job?
- How have you successfully used these skills in previous positions?
- Which of your abilities will help you make a career transition?

Defining Your Ideal Job

Congratulations! You've almost completed the assessment process. Now you're ready to define your ideal job. Don't worry about compromising, yet. You'll have plenty of time for that later.

Most of these questions are based on the ideas in the previous four chapters: personality, values, interests and skills. However, it's time to also start considering things like money, benefits and business travel. Your answers should help you get started.

1. What skills do you want to use on the job? Which innate, transferable and job-related skills are your strongest? Which do you enjoy using? Write down the Top 5 Skills you want to use in your next position. Include examples of how you successfully used each in the past.

2. What type of people do you want to work with? Strong, assertive individuals? Creative sorts? Quiet, reflective folks? Jot down the type of people you would enjoy spending your days with.

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3. What type of atmosphere do you function best in? Are you relaxed and easy-going? Do you prefer fast-paced and goal-oriented environment? Write down the kind of office you see yourself working in.

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4. How much responsibility are you prepared to accept? Do you want to be responsible for the work of others? Or do you prefer to let others take charge? Are you ready to be a supervisor?

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5. Do you prefer a structured workday or are you fairly adaptable? Are you a 9 to 5er? Do you need a part-time, flexible schedule? What about working on the weekends? How much travel are you willing to do?

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6. Do you like to work independently or as part of a team? Do you prefer to problem solve on your own? Or do you enjoy brainstorming and the verbal exchange of ideas? Many jobs offer the opportunity to work alone and with others. But, it's something to consider.

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7. What type of environment do you want to work in? Do you like quiet? Do you need to be near a window? When you think of comfort also consider things like what you'll be wearing, whether you'll have your own office, etc.

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8. How much money do you want to make? How much do you need to make? Even if you live simply, we all have to pay for life's necessities: food, rent, etc. Consider whether your salary validates your worth.

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9. Are benefits important to you? This includes tuition reimbursement, company training, vacation time, holiday pay and medical benefits. Some companies also offer perks like an onsite gym or free health-club membership. Write down what's important to you.
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10. In the larger scheme, what is important to you? What values or ideals would you like to further in the work that you do? This may include cleaning up the environment, making money, helping others, gaining prestige, etc. *Realize that you may be forced to choose one value over another when they conflict.*

Look over your responses. Now is the time to start considering where you are willing to compromise and where you are not. Think about your answers while you're researching potential careers.

Research



Generating Ideas

Ok, you've completed the assessment section. By now you know what you want to avoid. And you probably have a few ideas percolating. Maybe you're interested in pursuing a career in advertising or healthcare or human resources? The problem is that you're not exactly sure what types of jobs are available.

If you've taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, Strong Interest Inventory® or Holland Self-Directed Search® you'll probably have a preliminary list of jobs to investigate. Don't worry if you're doing this on your own, you'll just need a little more imagination.

One way to generate ideas is to look at a list of occupations. According to the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, most people work in one of 250 occupations. You can find detailed descriptions of the top 250 in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which is published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It is available online and in print. (More about this in the next chapter.)

The following worksheet was adapted from the Occupational Outlook online. As you read through the list, put a checkmark next to any positions that sound interesting.

Top Jobs in the Workforce

Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Positions

- Accountants and auditors
 - Administrative managers
 - Advertising, marketing, and public relations managers
 - Budget analysts
 - Computer and information systems managers
 - Construction and building inspectors
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- Construction managers
 - Cost estimators
 - Farmers and farm managers
 - Financial managers
 - Funeral directors
 - General managers and top executives
 - Government chief executives and legislators
 - Health services administrators
 - Hotel managers
 - Human resources, training, and labor relations specialists and managers
 - Insurance underwriters
 - Loan officers
 - Management analysts
 - Property managers
 - Recruiters and employment interviewers, public and private
 - Restaurant managers
 - Retail managers and buyers
 - Safety inspectors and compliance officers
 - School Administrators

Professional and Technical Positions

Air Transportation

- Pilots and flight engineers
- Air traffic controllers

Engineers

- Aerospace engineers
- Chemical engineers
- Civil engineers
- Electrical engineers
- Industrial engineers
- Mechanical engineers
- Nuclear engineers
- Petroleum engineers

Architects and Surveyors

- Architects
- Landscape architects
- Surveyors

Computer, Mathematical, and Operations Research

- Actuaries
- Computer programmers
- Computer systems analysts, engineers, and scientists
- Mathematicians
- Operations research analysts

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- Statisticians

Scientists

- Agricultural scientists
- Biological scientists
- Conservation scientists
- Chemists
- Geologists, geophysicists, and oceanographers
- Physicists and astronomers

Legal Professional

- Lawyers
- Judges
- Paralegals

Social Scientists

- Economists and market research analysts
- Psychologists
- Urban planners
- Sociologists
- Social Workers
- Human service workers
- Recreation workers

Clergy

- Protestant ministers
- Rabbis
- Roman Catholic priests

Educators, Counselors and Librarians

- Elementary and secondary school teachers
- Adult education teachers
- College and university faculty
- Counselors
- Coaches
- Librarians

Medical Practitioners

- Chiropractors
- Dentists
- Optometrists
- Physicians
- Podiatrists
- Veterinarians

Health Care

- Dietitians and nutritionists
- Occupational and physical therapists
- Pharmacists
- Physician assistants

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- Recreational therapists
 - Nurses
 - Respiratory therapists
 - Speech-language pathologists and audiologists
 - Health and medical technicians
 - Laboratory technicians
 - Dental hygienists
 - Emergency medical technicians and paramedics

Communications

- Broadcast journalists and correspondents
- Radio announcers and Disc Jockeys
- Public relations specialists
- Writers and editors

Visual Arts and Design

- Designers
- Photographers
- Visual artists

Performing Arts

- Actors, directors, and producers
- Dancers and choreographers
- Musicians

Sales & Marketing

- Cashiers
- Product promoters and models
- Real estate agents and brokers
- Retail sales and supervisors
- Sales representatives
- Securities and commodities brokers
- Travel agents

Administrative Support

- Administrative support and secretaries
- Bank tellers
- Billing clerks
- Billing clerks and records processing
- Bookkeeping and accounting clerks
- Computer operators
- Court reporters
- Dispatchers
- File clerks
- Hotel desk clerks

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- Information clerks
 - Insurance adjusters and investigators
 - Mail carriers and postal clerks
 - Medical transcriptionists
 - Payroll and timekeeping clerks
 - Receptionists
 - Reservation ticket agents
 - Shipping and receiving clerks
 - Stock clerks
 - Teacher assistants
 - Word processors and data entry clerks

Service Occupations

Cleaning and Grounds Service

- Janitors and institutional cleaning supervisors
- Landscaping and grounds keeping

Food Service

- Chefs and other kitchen workers
- Food and beverage service

Health Care

- Dental assistants
- Medical assistants
- Nursing and psychiatric aides
- Occupational therapy assistants and aides
- Physical and occupational assistants

Personal Care

- Hair stylists and cosmetologists
- Flight attendants
- Home health aides
- Private household workers
- Veterinary assistants

Protective Service

- Correctional officers
- Fire fighters
- Police and detectives
- Private detectives and investigators

Mechanics & Repairers

Equipment Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers

- Computer and office machine repairers
- Electronics repairers
- Telecommunications equipment installers, and repairers

Other Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers

- Aircraft mechanics and service technicians
- Automotive mechanics and body repairers
- Heating and air-conditioning mechanics and installers
- Industrial machinery repairers
- Maintenance mechanics, general utility
- Mobile heavy equipment mechanics
- Motorcycle, boat, and small-engine mechanics
- Musical instrument repairers and tuners

Construction Trade Occupations

- Bricklayers and stonemasons
- Carpenters
- Carpet and floor installers
- Tile setters
- Construction equipment operators
- Electricians
- Insulation workers
- Painters and paperhangers
- Plumbers
- Roofers
- Sheet metal workers

Production Occupations

Assemblers

- Precision assemblers
- Blue-collar worker supervisors

Food Processing

- Butchers and meat, poultry, and fish cutters
- Inspectors, testers, and graders

Metalworking and Plastics Working

- Jewelers
- Machinists
- Metalworking and plastics-working machine operators
- Tool and die makers
- Welders and welding machine operators

Printing

- Bindery workers
- Printing press operators

Textile, Apparel, and Furnishings

- Apparel workers
- Shoe and leather workers and repairers

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- Textile machinery operators
 - Upholsterers

Miscellaneous Production Occupations

- Dental laboratory technicians
- Ophthalmic laboratory technicians
- Photographic process workers

Transportation

- Bus drivers
- Railroad occupations
- Taxi drivers and chauffeurs
- Truck drivers
- Water transportation occupations

Write down the all the occupations you're interested in. Once you've made a list of possible positions, it's time for the next step. Research. The rest of this section will provide you with print and online resources to help you get started. You'll learn how to get the inside scoop with an Informational Interview. And why it's best to take the time to do both.

A Little Investigation

Now's the time do get down to research. First examine your resources. Do you know anyone who works in the field you're interested in? You're not ready to start talking to strangers, but friends and relatives can be great sources of information.

If you have Internet access, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://stats.bls.gov/ocohome.htm>) is a wonderful resource. Published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the website offers a searchable database with several ways to gather information. Here you can find a complete list of the Top 250 occupations with extensive information on each. The descriptions include information on training and advancement, potential earnings and titles of related occupations. There is also a section covering employment trends.

For additional salary information, you can also check out these sites:

- Salary.com Research salary information by field, position and zip code
- SalaryExpert.com Search by position, zip code and state/metro area. Includes "buying power" information based on cost of living.
- WageWeb.com Information is categorized by position, i.e. sales and marketing. Figures are based on national averages.

The local library can also supply a wealth of information. Many have professional journals, which you can use for research. They also should have a variety of books for career exploration. Here is a list of some titles you will probably find at your local branch:

1. *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* - Comprehensive two-part volume includes brief descriptions of over 12,000 occupations. How to use this book:
 - o If you have the occupation's DOT Number use the numbers found on the top corner of the page as your guide
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- o If you do not have a DOT Number look under the Job Categories listed in the Table of Contents in Volume Volume II or I. For example, information on Data Entry Clerks is found under the Clerical and Sales Occupations category.
2. *The Enhanced Guide for Occupational Exploration* - Includes brief descriptions of 2,500 jobs. How to use this book:
 - o Use the Appendixes in the back of the book to search by Alphabetical Order, Industry Groupings and/or Educational Level.
 3. *America's Top Jobs for People Without a Four-Year Degree* - This book includes information on 165 occupations. More in-dept, these two to three page descriptions include the working conditions, job outlook, earnings and additional references. How to use this book:
 - o Look in the Table of Contents for the occupation title. There is additional career-planning information in Section Two and the Appendixes.
 4. *The Occupational Outlook Handbook* - Includes fairly extensive information on 250 occupations. The two to three page descriptions include training and advancement, earning and titles of related occupations. How to use this book:
 - o If you have the occupation's DOT Number you can use the Dictionary of Occupations Titles Coverage list in the back of the book.
 - o If you do not have a DOT Number look for the job title listed under the Occupational Coverage categories found in the Contents. For example, information on Personnel Clerks is found under Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical.

Things to Consider

Once you've determined what you want to do, the next step is deciding where you want to do it. When you're considering where you will work lots of things come into play, the people and the company culture both contribute to the environment.

Don't underestimate the importance of getting along with your co-workers. If you're working full-time, it's likely you'll spend more time with your colleagues than your family. And working with people who rub you the wrong way is certain to make you unhappy. Hopefully, you will gravitate naturally to a position where you'll find like-minded people. To help assure this, look for a profession that falls within your comfort zone.

A lot of professions are performed in a variety of settings. Writers, for example, might work for a magazine, a newspaper, a corporation, a publishing company or as a freelancer. All of these positions will offer a different experience. The office of a daily newspaper will probably feel a bit more chaotic than that of a monthly magazine. A writer working in a corporate setting will

probably have a nicer office and a stricter dress code. And a freelancer may get lonely working at home.

If you prefer working in quiet surroundings, without tight deadlines, a job at a newspaper might not be the best fit. You might be happier writing for a magazine or even a corporation. Freelancers often get to set their own schedules, but if you like lots of action sitting at home in front of your computer may feel too isolated.

When you're researching potential careers be sure to consider the environment you'll be working in. Informational interviews are great opportunity to get a *feel* for the job and the industry.

What's the atmosphere like? Close your eyes and feel the energy. Take a look at the employees. Are they hanging about the coffee room in jeans and sneakers? Or do you see women chatting quietly in the lunchroom dressed in skirts and heels?

Each scenario conveys a different company culture. Neither is better or worse than the other. But you need to decide where you will feel most comfortable.

Be sure to find out as much as you can about each career before you start setting up Informational Interviews. This information will help you formulate your interview questions.

Get the Inside Scoop

You already know what you want to do. So why take the time to do some Informational Interviews? Because many jobs will turn out to be much different than you think.

Take, for example, working in publishing as a magazine editor. Sounds rather fun and glamorous to a lot of people. Well it is, and it isn't. This was my first writing job. In this position I got to travel and meet lots of interesting people. I was responsible for writing copy and even feature articles. I also spent a great deal of time reading and filing information, and trying to contact people who are not very receptive. Whenever we had a photo shoot, my job was packing and shipping products back to the manufacturers.

After hearing about my experience, working on a magazine may still sound wonderful. But, it may not. The point is you will never really know the daily activities of any job unless to talk to one, or more, people who actually do the work.

Informational Interviewing may sound a bit scary if talking to strangers makes you nervous. If you're the shy type, try using the P.I.E. method we found in *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Dick Bolles.

The P.I.E. method for the shy breaks interviewing down to three steps (this also will help you prepare for your real job interviews):

- Personal interview - this is ten to 15 minutes and can be done with anyone you don't know. Choose someone who has knowledge of something you're interested in. As friends and family for a referral. Prepare a few questions in advance and
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take someone along for support if you like. (Just make sure it's you, not them, asking the questions.)

- Informational interview - this is ten to fifteen minutes with someone who has the job you're interested in. Again, ask friends and family for a referral. Here, be sure to prepare several questions in advance. Be sure to do your research. Don't waste this opportunity asking for information that's readily available someplace else.
- Employment interview - this is as much time as you can get with someone who is able to hire you. Although not everyone agrees on this point, we don't believe you should use Informational interviews as a guise to meet with someone in a hiring position. Most people will recognize this trick and resent your tactics.

Now you're ready. You've read everything you can about the job and the industry. If you're lucky, you've gotten the names of contacts from family and friends. Maybe you've had to find people on your own.

The first step is contacting the potential interviewees. You can do this my mail, email or phone. Be sure to ask for only 15 minutes of their time. If you have a mutual friend or acquaintance don't forget to mention his or her name.

Once they've agreed to meet with you, the next step is to set up an appointment. While the interview can be done over the phone or in person, a face-to-face meeting is better if you can arrange it. Always be considerate of the person's time. Scheduling the meeting right before lunch or at the end of the day may help keep you on track.

Remember it's important to be prepared. Go to every interview with prepared questions; write them down if you need to. Also bring copies of your resume, paper for notes, and something to write with. While it's a good idea to prepare your own questions, you may want to use the following as a guideline:

1. How long have you been in this position?
2. What drew you to this job?
3. Can you describe your typical day's activities?
4. What training or education is required for this type of work?
5. What do you enjoy the most about your job? What do enjoy the least?
6. What do you find most challenging about this work? Most satisfying?
7. What personal qualities or skills are important to being successful in this job?
8. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
9. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field? How long does it take to advance?

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10. What entry-level positions are best for learning and growing in this industry?
 11. What are the salary ranges for entry-level positions? Mid-level positions?
 12. How did you get your job?
 13. What advice would you give to someone entering this field?
 14. What problems have you faced working in this field? What are the benefits?
 15. Looking back, would you still choose this profession? Why? What would you do differently?
 16. Is this a growing profession? Is there a demand for people with my experience?
 17. Can you recommend professional organizations that can provide me with additional information about jobs in this field?
 18. What do you think of my resume? Do you think my experience is transferable to this field?
 19. How can I prepare to enter this field?
 20. Who do you know that I should talk to next? May I use your name when I call them?

Dressing the Part

While it's important to remember you're not there to interview for a job, always go dressed in professional attire. You never know. The company might be hiring or the person you meet with might be able to refer you to someone else. Here are some general guidelines:

- Depending on the industry men and women should stick with a suit or coordinated separates in neutral colors, preferably black, navy or dark gray.
- Women's skirts should be within two inches above or below the knee. Long skirts should fall around the ankle.
- Make sure your shoes (close-toed, heels for women) are clean and polished. Totes or business cases should be professional looking.
- Keep your jewelry to a minimum, leave the nose ring home (men and women).
- Women should wear a touch of makeup, stay away from blue polish or nail-art
- Pay attention to your overall appearance. This goes for men and women. Good grooming shows employers that you take care of yourself and pay attention to details.

Don't be lulled into carelessness. Even if the person you're interviewing is wearing jeans and sneakers, you should be wearing slacks and a jacket. If a job interview with the boss results from an informational interview, be prepared to return in a suit. Business casual is for after you get the job, not during the hiring process.

When you're conducting these interviews, try to listen to the words and music. The words are what they say. The music is what they mean. During the interview, did the person seem enthusiastic while they were telling you about their job?

This is also a good time to check out the company culture. Did the office feel like Macy's during a one-day sale? Or was it more like the day after? If you visited two companies in the same industry, think about the differences and similarities.

As you've learned by now, each of us is unique. For this reason try to meet with at least three people before making your decision. Everyone has a different perspective. Often people working in similar positions have a different experience.

Getting Started



Change Strategies

Just thinking about changing careers can be overwhelming. Depending on which path you choose, it can be a daunting task. But, when you combine a little creative thinking with some strategic planning, making a change is much more doable.

Many people think of jobs in one-dimensional terms. They define a job by its title, being a writer, a secretary, an accountant, a salesperson, etc. What they don't realize is that every position has two components: the job (responsibilities, duties performed, skills needed) and the field (the industry where the work is done). A marketing VP at an Internet start-up, for instance, has good interpersonal skills, is a strategic thinker and has experience creating marketing campaigns. She also is knowledgeable about the Internet industry as a whole.

Which leads to the three ways to transition into a new career. The most difficult way, but the path many people choose, is to change professions entirely: the job and the field. An administrative assistant at an insurance company, for example, decides she wants to become a magazine writer. This can be done, but it's a tough move. In a potential employer's eyes, a candidate without experience doesn't bring much to the hiring table.

But, there are easier ways. One course is to move to new position in the same industry. In this scenario, an administrative assistant might look for a writing position in the insurance industry (working on a company newsletter or in the marketing department). Although she doesn't have writing experience, she has knowledge of the field. Once she gets some writing experience changing fields will be easier.

Another option is finding the same position in a new field. Here, she makes the move from being an administrative assistant in the insurance field to a similar position at a publishing. Her long-term goal is to move from assistant to writer.

This example is one of my favorites for two reasons. First, because writing is a particularly difficult field to break into even if you have training and education behind you. Second, because I know two people who started writing just this way: one I met in college, the other was a colleague.

Several years ago I was working as a writer/editor at a small publishing company, which owned several magazines. While trading stories one day, I learned that an editor at one of the sister publications had started there as a secretary. But, what she wanted to be was a writer.

First she tried jumping from one profession to another. When that failed, she decided to take a job as administrative assistant to a magazine publisher. Now she had her proverbial foot in the door.

Whenever an editor left, Debbie was one of the first to know. And she was the first to apply for their job. No, they didn't hire her as a writer the first time she asked. But eventually, her hard work paid off. When one of the editors was in a crunch, Debbie got a few assignments. Eventually she was hired full-time. She was a writer.

Making a transition in two-steps takes a bit longer. But it's easier. It may be easier on the pocketbook as well: Generally, the less a candidate has to offer the employer, the less they will be paid.

One Step Move

If you're determined to changing careers in one giant leap be prepared. It will be more difficult. But it's certainly not impossible. And getting any experience in your new field will help.

Donating your time is a great way to gain experience. If you're interested in the non-profit sector, volunteering is also one of the best ways to get hired. You get to work at something you support and learn about the organization. And they get to see what you have to offer. Guess, who's first on their list when a job opens?

Even if you're not looking for a career in non-profit, donating your time can be a great way to increase your skills and gain some credibility. Most organizations need help in several areas. If you're trying to break into a creative field, this can be your opportunity to develop a writing, design or marketing portfolio. Don't be afraid to ask your supervisor to give you a written reference.

Another way to get on-the-job experience and an inside look at a new industry is to work as a temporary. Spending time as a temp gives you the opportunity to try on different positions and companies to see if you like them. (And they like you.) Many employment agencies have long-term positions and skills training available. Agencies often work with large corporations, which will look good on your resume and may lead to permanent employment. Some companies, like

MTV, have their own Temp pool. If you're interested in a particular company call human resources to see what options are available.

If going back to school is part of your plan, look for programs that offer an internship. Generally, an internship is arranged through the school. However, you may be able to create your own situation within certain guidelines. This is a great way to get experience and begin developing business relationships. Before you start, always make sure that your supervisor will provide a written recommendation.

Finally, one of the easiest ways to try something new is with a part-time job. Maybe you're considering going into restaurant management or becoming a writer. Well, don't quit your day job. Try it part-time first. Spend some time working as a waiter or a salad chef.

If you want to be a writer write for the local paper. Or submit your work on the web. You probably won't get paid much in these markets; you may make nothing at all. But what you will get is valuable experience and those necessary writing clips.

Finding a new job is tough. Changing careers is tougher. But with a little creative thinking and strategic planning you can make it happen.

Setting Goals

Ever make a New Year's resolution? If you answered yes, you're not alone. It's one of our favorite pastimes. There's something about a brand new calendar that suggests the opportunity to start all over again.

Whether you want to find a new job, get a promotion or embark on a new career, you'll get more results if you set some concrete goals. Yes, goals.

Think about it. How many times have you promised yourself that you would "eat healthier" or "exercise regularly" or "whatever?" And how many times have you followed-through? If the answer is "not often," I'm guessing that you probably didn't write down specific goals.

That's ok. Every New Year or month or day offers another chance to make a fresh start. The key to turning your resolutions into results is to make a plan. Create one that includes long- and short-term goals, and plenty of opportunities to measure your achievements along the way.

Remember when you were in school? When you started first grade you weren't thinking about getting into junior high school. Sure, you knew that was your long-term goal, but your focus was on a series of short-term goals: passing your first test, getting through the first semester, then moving on to the second grade.

Whatever you want to do, the strategy is the same: set up long-term goals, short-term goals, and concentrate on overcoming one hurdle at a time. For discussion purposes, let's say today is the day you decide to adopt a "healthier lifestyle?" This is a common resolution. Often prompted by a run up the stairs that left you gasping for air or a day spent shopping for bathing suits. But where should you start? Begin by determining what you really want to achieve.

Let's say the long-term goal of your "healthier lifestyle" is to become stronger and loose weight. Exercising regularly is one of your short-term goals. Neither of these is specific enough. Start by clarifying your long-term goal. Instead of being stronger and losing weight, plan to drop 10 pounds and be able to walk a 15-minute mile. These are measurable goals. Rather than saying you will start to exercise, plan to exercise for 20 minutes three times a week, starting on Monday. This is something you can mark on your calendar, a visual reminder of your accomplishments. Begin today by taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Think how great you'll feel because you've taken action.

The same is true for your career. If you want to find another job or start your own business, you'll be more successful if you have a plan. Right now, your long-term goal is to get another job. Your short-term goals may include completing the self-assessment process, finishing your research, reworking your resume, networking and looking for job openings.

To avoid being overwhelmed, break each of these down to relatively small, measurable tasks. For example, if you're still in the process of choosing a career, commit to setting up one informational interview each week. Start by calling a few friends, find out if they know anyone working in a job you're researching.

If you've reached the job-search mode, commit to sending out at least five resumes each week. Get started by working on your resume or making a list of job-search sites today. If your goal is to change careers, schedule some time this week for self-assessment and research. Plan to investigate at least one career that interests you each week.

Changing your life isn't easy. Just contemplating it can sometimes be overwhelming. But, developing a plan for change will make the process easier. You can make it happen by taking it one step at a time. And if you think one step isn't significant, remember: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." (Confucius)

Resources



Resources

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About the Author

Annette Richmond, MA, is principal of Rowayton-based Richmond Consulting Group, which provides guidance, workshops and seminars on a wide range of career management and work-related issues. A dynamic and engaging speaker, consultant, coach, and writer, she is author of numerous publications, e-books and interactive workbooks on career management. She is founder of career-intelligence.com and editor of *The Career Intelligencer*, a rapidly growing electronic newsletter. Her career advice has been widely quoted by the media including *Self*, *Folio Magazine* and *The Wall Street Journal's CareerJournal*. Locally, her comments have appeared in *The Hour*, the *Stamford Advocate*, the *Fairfield County Business Journal* and on WICC radio.

Along with *The Career Intelligencer*, Richmond's web site career-intelligence.com, launched July 2000, offers career advice, tips and resources to tens of thousands of visitors per month. It has been cited as an important career management resource by organizations including the prestigious Riley Guide, Catalyst, the Yale School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *The Washington Post*, *The Detroit News* and *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Citing its "terrific tools and services," The Riley Guide called it a "one-stop shop for career and life management."

Richmond holds a BA from Sacred Heart University and an MA in Applied Psychology from Fairfield University. She is trained and licensed to administer assessments including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI) and the Strong Interest Inventory®, tools that she often uses in her consulting practice.

Prior to starting the Richmond Consulting Group, Richmond gained experience in mass market publishing in the magazine industry, first as a writer and editor of a trade magazine, and later as co-founder and editor of the successful online travel magazine *Destinations*. Applying this experience to her career management consulting practice, she developed the web site career-intelligence.com and *The Career Intelligencer*. With a stated philosophy of "Stretch, Grow, Achieve," career-intelligence.com offers cutting-edge, savvy career guidance, motivation, information and resources, previously available only to corporations and individuals paying sizable consulting fees.

Along with managing career-intelligence.com, Richmond conducts corporate team-building workshops and communication seminars, and offers coaching services to corporate teams and individuals. Recently, she served as an adjunct lecturer in the University of New Haven School of Business, Department of Communication. She also writes a monthly career-management column for *The Hour*, a Connecticut daily newspaper. Her professional affiliations include the American Psychological Association, Association for Psychological Type and Society for Human Resource Management.

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