

Quick! What Are You Going to Do for the Rest of Your Life?

If you're not sure, that's okay. Here are a couple of important ideas to keep in mind as you think about your future career. First, you and the world in which you live will be constantly changing throughout your life. You will be a different person twenty years from now with different needs, interests, and priorities. Career options will be changing too. Just think: during the last twenty years, thousands of jobs in the defense industry were lost in California. During the same period, thousands of jobs in medicine, technology, education, and business were created. The next twenty years will bring many changes as well. In fact, you will probably change jobs and careers a number of times throughout your lifetime.

Second, keep in mind that career preparation begins now! What you do today impacts your options tomorrow. That means every English assignment, math problem, and science project is opening up more opportunities for you. Working hard in your courses is essential, because if you are not academically prepared to go in a number of different directions, you will be locked into just a few options. In addition to focusing on academics, now is also the time to explore and learn all you can about career options. Exploring career choices can help you learn about yourself and set goals. And it can be a lot of fun! Take a look at some of the ways you can learn about the numerous career opportunities that are available in California and across the country.

Ways to Explore Careers

Career Inventories

Taking a career inventory can be a good way to begin exploring careers. Inventories often ask you questions about your interests, preferences, and values. They may also ask about your abilities and talents or even attempt to measure some of your skills.

One downfall of career inventories is high expectation. Many people take them expecting to get one specific answer such as "You should be an architect." Instead, most inventories are designed to help you learn about yourself, think about the variations between careers, and narrow the field of options. Career inventories may not narrow the list of options at all. Through one of them, you may discover whole new fields with many more opportunities than you ever knew existed.

There are a number of career inventories available both on paper and online. The "Career" section of CaliforniaColleges.edu offers a career inventory that can help you begin exploration. After you create your free account at CaliforniaColleges.edu, go to the "Career" section to search for careers and related information, such as salary range and education requirements for specific jobs. You will find career tools there as well to help you identify careers that are right for you. Your school counselor may suggest other career inventories that could be helpful.

Informational Interviews

You may be interested in several careers. One of the challenges of exploring careers is that the descriptions you read on the Internet or the impression you have in your mind might not match what that career is like in real life. Consider scheduling some interviews with people who have jobs that you find interesting.

You will need to call in advance to schedule appointments. Explain to the people you contact that you are interested in asking some questions about their profession, and ask for 20-30 minutes of their time. Be a few minutes early for your appointments, and have your questions ready on a sheet of paper. Here are some questions you might want to consider asking:

- How did you prepare for this job? (education, experience)
- How would you advise someone entering this field to prepare? (education, experience)
- What do you like most and least about your job?
- What type of person would do well in this career field? (personality traits, skills, preferences)
- What salary levels are common for this type of job? (starting salary, average salary)
- What is a typical day like for you? (schedule, working with people, projects)

Job Shadowing

Another helpful way to see what certain jobs are really like is to job shadow someone. As the term implies, you simply find a person who would be willing to let you follow along while he or she works—typically for a half-day or a day. Maybe you're considering becoming an electrical engineer. Start by talking to your teachers, school counselors, and family members to see if they know of any engineers you could contact. You could also check on the Internet or in your local phone directory for professional associations of engineers or listings of local electrical engineers.

You will want to get the advice of the person you are shadowing about what day would be a good sample for you. For instance, you may not want to job shadow on a day when your professional is in meetings for seven hours if that is not typical. On the day you job shadow, make sure you are on time, dress appropriately, take a pen and notebook for taking notes, and have a list of questions you would like to ask. It might be a good idea to combine your job shadowing with an informational interview as mentioned above.

At the end of the day, share your experience with a family member, teacher, or school counselor. Did you find any surprises? Could you see yourself in this career? As a professional courtesy, be sure to write a thank-you note to the person you shadowed.

Cooperative Education

In many schools there are programs that allow students to attend classes for part of the day, then work during the remaining part. This arrangement is called cooperative education because the school and business cooperate to create the learning environment. Check with your counselor to see if your school offers a cooperative education program. If you decide to participate in cooperative education during high school, make sure that the experience is truly relevant to what you want to do and that you are not omitting any academic courses you need for college.

Cooperative education is more common in college where students may alternate between semesters of courses and semesters of work. In either high school or college, cooperative education provides an excellent opportunity for you to see how the material you study is actually applied in the workplace, to begin building a résumé and making industry contacts, and sometimes even to get your first job offer.

Wrap your head around college.

Internships

Internships are more commonly chosen by college students than middle or high school students, but they are good to keep in mind for the future. Internships come in a variety of forms, but they are usually linked to your college major. For instance, a rising college senior who is majoring in political science might get a summer internship in Sacramento working in the Capitol. Some internships are paid. Others are not.

Oftentimes, internships are required to graduate from college with a particular major. For instance, aspiring teachers are required to student-teach, which is essentially an internship in a school. Internship programs are great for adding experience to your résumé and for starting a network that can help when you begin job hunting.

Summer Programs

Sure, the pool and TV may be tempting pastimes for the summer, but also consider using some of your time to participate in programs related to a career.

Most programs range from one to five weeks in length, and many provide the opportunity to stay on a college campus. Summer camps allow you to do everything from participating in a hands-on geology dig in the mountains to performing in a state-of-the-art music center. Talk to your school counselor to learn more. Plan ahead, and apply early since many programs have limited enrollment.

Career Tip: *You can develop, store, and update your own personal career planning portfolio in the Career section of CaliforniaColleges.edu.*

Part-Time Jobs

Whether it's a summer job or an after-school job during the year, part-time employment can be a good experience. Part-time jobs allow you to learn responsibility, discover more about your talents, see what employers expect, and, of course, earn money for college. Many students find part-time jobs an incentive to go to college: either they discover a career they think they would enjoy, or they realize that they won't find a satisfying job unless they continue their education.

Remember, if you take a part-time job while you are in high school, your education needs to be your first priority; don't let the lure of money in the short term keep you from building the foundations for long-term success.

Volunteering

Maybe an organization or business is not able to offer you a paid job. Volunteering may help you gain experience that you would otherwise not be able to get. Thinking about becoming an attorney? You could volunteer to be a "gopher" for a law firm, permitting you to have conversations with a number of lawyers and maybe gain exposure to several types of specialties in law. Volunteering would enable you to see the work of attorneys over a longer period of time than just one day of job shadowing.

Volunteering also has other benefits. First, it may allow you to assist charitable organizations and to help people in need. Secondly, even though you still need to be dependable, it often provides for more work than a paid position would.

**Wrap your head around college.**

Career FAQ

Do I have to know my major before I enter college?

No, you don't always have to declare a major before entering college. If the program is a one- or two-year diploma or degree, obviously, you will need to decide quite soon. Those types of programs have few general education courses, so you will start your major courses when you begin the program. Some four-year programs, such as music or education, may have major courses spread throughout the four years; therefore, deciding early is advantageous. If you are interested in a particular field of study, you should verify if a major is impacted at a particular campus before applying.

For many majors, however, you may not need to decide until you complete your first two years of general education course work. And remember, deciding on a major does not mean you are deciding on a career. While a major in accounting points you in a specific direction, other majors like English or psychology can lead in numerous directions.

I want to make a lot of money. What career should I pursue?

Think carefully before you pursue a career only for the financial reward. If you don't enjoy a career or have strong talents in that field, you are not likely to do well in it. And money is little consolation if you hate going to work each day. First, consider your own interests and abilities, then select career paths that have good long-term prospects for both demand and salary.

The career I want is a long shot. Should I go for it?

This is a tough question that only you can answer. First, realistically look at the prospects. For instance, there are about 550,000 high school basketball players in the United States. Out of that number, about 50 make it to an NBA team. The odds of a high school basketball player making it to the pros at all—let alone having a career—are about 10,000 to 1.

Does that mean you can't be that one person? Certainly not! You may indeed have what it takes to play in the NBA, solo with the New York Philharmonic, or act in Hollywood. Pursue your dreams, but keep a strong back-up plan. You might also consider related fields. For instance, sports management or sports medicine might be great options for you if you like athletics. Above all, stay committed to your academics and keep your options open.

CaliforniaColleges.edu

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