Making Career Decisions

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

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

Making Decisions

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

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

Self Assessment

Begin your assessment by considering:
(a) your achievements
(b) your skills and abilities
(c) your personal values
(d) your interests
(e) any known disabilities
(f) personal and family circumstances

(a) Your Achievements
Reflect on your achievements - the easiest way to start is with your academic achievements at school or at university.

(b) Your Skills and Abilities
"But I haven't got any skills", you might be saying to yourself. Of course you do! We all do! You might recognise them by other names - talents, gifts or aptitudes. Skills are the essence of what we contribute to the world. Advising, coaching, communicating, analysing, researching, organising, painting, repairing..... recognise them? These are only a few of the hundreds of skills you possess. Here are just some skills to think about:
## Have you these skills?

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NB. It is unlikely any one person will possess all these skills. Even more significantly, it is unlikely any one job requires in equal measure all these skills. Remember you used your abilities and skills to complete those achievements you have already thought about. Work through this list thinking about situations in which you have demonstrated these skills - highlight skills that you would enjoy using on a regular basis as part of your ideal job.
**c) Your Personal Values**
- What are the most important things to you?
- What turns you on... and off?
- What are you committed to?
- What comprises happiness for you?
- What degree of integrity do you need in your life and work?
- How much power and responsibility do you want in the work place?
- How much of yourself do you want to put into your work - are you seeking to live to work or work to live, or a balance between both?

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

**d) Your Interests**
Think about the things you like doing - list 20 things you love to do, and then pick 4 or 5 favourites.

Your first job may not involve many of these but if you haven't taken time out to think along these lines it will probably involve even fewer!

Give some thought to areas which most interest you, i.e. administrative, artistic, computational, literary, mechanical, musical, outdoor, persuasive, scientific and / or social service.

Consider such aspects as working on your own / with other people; giving / taking supervision; dealing with the public; persuading people; working with machinery; working indoors / outdoors etc.

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

**f) Personal and Family Circumstances**
Be realistic. Face up now to the impact of these on your employment in terms of hours, financial commitments, limitations with regard to location or personal commitments etc.
MORE ON SKILLS

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

For example:

**Functional Skills**

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Can be translated to functional skills in:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Structuring your time so as to meet deadlines for projects</td>
<td>Work programming; meeting deadlines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing research projects</td>
<td>Collection and analysis of data</td>
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<td>Presenting tutorial or seminar papers</td>
<td>Oral communication</td>
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<td>Writing essays</td>
<td>Analytical skills - creative or report writing</td>
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<td>Collecting information to write research papers</td>
<td>Locating and using resources</td>
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There are many personal skills or attributes which may be developed during your time at university and which some people consider to be part of an all-round education. These include the ability to work as a member of a team, an ability to get on well with other people, competitiveness and a sense of direction.

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

**Further skills and experiences developed at University**

**Information Management Skills**
- sort and evaluate data
- compile and rank information
- apply information creatively to specific problems or tasks
- synthesise facts, concepts and principles
- organise information effectively

**Design and Planning Skills**
- identify alternative courses of action
- set realistic goals
- follow through with a plan or decision
- manage time effectively
- predict future trends and patterns
- accommodate multiple demands for commitment of time, energy and resources
- make and keep a schedule
- set priorities

**Research and Investigation Skills**
- use a variety of sources for information
- apply a variety of methods to test the validity of data
- identify problems and needs
- design an experiment, plan or model that systematically defines a problem
- identify information sources appropriate to special needs or problems
- formulate questions relevant to clarifying a particular problem, topic or issue

**Communication Skills**
- use various forms and styles of written communication
- speak effectively to individuals and groups
- use audio-visual formats to present ideas
- convey a positive image to others
- develop effective listening skills
**Human Relations and Interpersonal Skills**
- interact effectively with peers, supervisors
- express own feelings appropriately
- understand the feelings of others
- show commitment to others
- teach a skill, concept or principle to others
- analyse behaviour of self and others in group situations
- demonstrate effective social behaviour in a variety of settings and under different circumstances
- work under pressure

**Critical Thinking Skills**
- identify quickly and accurately the critical issues when making a decision or solving a problem
- identify a general principle that explains related experiences or factual data
- define the parameters of a problem
- identify criteria for assessing the value or appropriateness of an action or behaviour
- adapt own behaviour and concepts to changing conventions and norms
- apply appropriate criteria to strategies and action plans
- create innovative solutions to complex problems
- analyse the inter-relationship of events and ideas from several perspectives

**Management and Administration Skills**
- analyse tasks
- identify people and resource materials useful in the solution of a problem or task
- motivate and lead people
- organise people and tasks to achieve specific goals

**Personal/Career Development Skills**
- analyse own life experiences
- transfer the skills developed in one environment (eg. university) to another environment (eg. work)
- match knowledge about own characteristics and abilities to information about job or career opportunities
- develop personal growth goals that are motivating
- identify and describe skills acquired through education and life experience
- identify own strengths and weaknesses
- predict and accept the consequences of own actions

**Generic Skills**
- comprehend written material
- communicate: write effectively, read, listen, make effective speeches and presentations
- identify problem areas and make decisions
- develop alternative approaches to problems
- analyse and evaluate ideas
- use library and research facilities
- supervise and lead
- co-operate with a work team
- persuade others to accept your ideas
- help people with their problems
- organise time effectively
- follow well-defined instructions
- work on projects
- establish goals and follow through
- undertake detailed and accurate work
- relate to a wide variety of people