

Choosing a major

Use this worksheet to narrow your choices!

Major	No	Possibly
Biological Sciences, B.S. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Molecular Cell Biology and Biotechnology Concentration • Ecology Concentration • General Biology Concentration 		
Chemistry, B.S. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biochemistry Option • Chemistry Option • Science Education Option 		
Communication, B.A.		
Computer Science, B.S.		
Criminology and Justice Studies, B.A.		
Economics, B.A.		
History, B.A.		
Human Development, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult and Gerontology Emphasis • Children's Services Emphasis • Counseling Services Emphasis • Health Services Emphasis 		
Kinesiology, B.A.		
Liberal Studies, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Studies Option • Integrated Credential Program Option 		
Literature and Writing Studies, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Emphasis • Single-Subject Preparation Program Option • Writing Emphasis 		
Mathematics, B.S.		
Political Science, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Concentration • Global Concentration 		
Psychology, B.A.		
Social Sciences, B.A.		
Sociology, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Concentration • Aging and Life Course Concentration • Children, Youth and Families Concentration 		

Major	No	Possibly
Spanish, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Major in Spanish Track • Literature Track • Language and Culture Track • Spanish for the Professions Track 		
Visual and Performing Arts, B.A. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Education Track • Arts and Technology Track • Music Track • Theatre Arts Track • Visual Arts Track 		
Women's Studies, B.A.		
Business Administration, B.S. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountancy/Finance Option • Global Business Management Option • High Technology Management Option • Service Sector Management Option 		

CHOOSING A MAJOR

Think about the decision are you making. In this case, deciding on a major, which is tied in some way to your career. Making decisions is a life-long process. You are not alone; eighty percent of college students change majors at least once. The average is 4 times. There are no consequences to changing majors. It does not go on your transcript. You are not stuck in a major. So, use college and GE courses for self-exploration. (SEE change of major form.)

MYTHS ABOUT MAJORS:

- Everyone has a major.
- An academic major leads to a specific career.
- You will have one career in your lifetime.
- You must pursue a specific undergraduate major to gain admission to a postgraduate professional program.
- You can graduate as an undeclared student.

REALITIES ABOUT MAJORS:

- Most career fields do not require a specific major. Many individuals are employed in different positions from their major.
- Majors do not limit you to one kind of work.
- Grades, elective courses, traits, goals, skills, knowledge and interest, and experience tell employers most about you.
- Many of the skills you learn in a liberal arts degree will give you the skills needed in every day life.
- A combination of courses and activities will be rewarding and wanted by employers.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS OF YOURSELF:

- Think of now, 5 years from now, 10 years from now, 20 years from now.
- Who are you, and what's your life like?
- What do you want out of life?
- What do you want to be? What do you want life to be like?
- What kind of person are you, so far?
- What motivates you?
- Imagine yourself at the end of your life. How do you want to be remembered? For what?
- What are your career goals? What academic program best fits those goals?

QUESTIONS TO BRING AWARENESS:

- How do you think you choose a major? How have others picked their majors? What's the process?
- Why do you feel it is important to choose a major?

- How much are majors worth? In graduate school? In employment?
- How do you know a major is right for you?
- What do you get out of a major?
- Look at the 36 majors list and eliminate career options, thinking about why certain majors would not work for you.

STRATEGIES FOR CHOOSING A MAJOR:

- Explore your interests, abilities, and values.
- Talk to your advisor and career center.
- Talk to professionals in the field.
- Get experience in the field.
- Utilize resources: Advising, faculty, Career and Assessment Center, library.

TIME TO EXPLORE:

Spending time exploring and deciding, using alternative majors. Make a list as large as possible.

SELF-EXPLORATION:

Gathering information about yourself. What do you want most out of a career or job? Values and goals are important factors to your exploration and decision.

- Think about what you want and what your overall goals are in college and in life?
- Think about your interests, abilities/skills, needs, personality, and values.
- Think about what school subjects you enjoy most.
- What have you liked and disliked most about school or work experiences?
- How do you spend your time?
- What are your hobbies and interests?
- What is your passion, what drives you?
- Your major and career should be enjoyable.

END with self-exploration through Choices.

HOW TO CHOOSE A CAREER OR MAJOR: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

STAGE 1: ASSIGN TIME TO EXPLORE AND DECIDE

Spend time exploring and deciding, using your initial alternatives of majors or occupations. Make a list as large yet as reasonable as possible.

STAGE 2: SELF-EXPLORATION

Gather information about yourself. What do you want most out of a career or job? Values and goals are important factors.

1. What do you want? What are your overall goals?
2. Think about your interests, abilities/skills, needs, personality, and values. They impact life decisions.

Think about what school subjects you enjoy most. What have you liked and disliked most about school or work experiences. How do you spend your time? What are your hobbies and interests? Your major and career should be enjoyable. What is your passion, what drives you?

STAGE 3: CAREER EXPLORATION (generate alternative career options)

- A. Explore the possible selection criteria below and write down 5 possible careers.
 - a. Activities on the job (See ACTIVITIES ON THE JOB handout.)
 - a. Working with others – Do you want to manage others, work alone, work as part of a team?
 - b. Entry and advancement requirements – Think about educational and training requirements, college degrees, and experience required.
 - c. List career-related skills.
 - d. Education, experience, and other requirements – Competition, continued education needed.
 - e. Extrinsic benefits of the career – Income, retirement plan and benefits, job security, vacation time.
 - f. Work conditions – Hours, freedom of scheduling, indoors/outdoors, office setting.
 - g. Travel, mobility, and location – Where do you want to work? Want to travel?
 - h. Type of organization – Military, education, small or large organization, private or public.
 - i. Your future – Opportunities for career and income advancement, professional growth, stimulation.
 - j. Effects of your life outside of work – Odd hours, moving a lot, come home exhausted.

- C. Consult experts. Use the Career and Assessment Center, faculty, academic advisors. Interview professionals in the field. Gain meaningful work experience. (See INTERVIEWING PEOPLE IN THE OCCUPATION handout.)
- D. Use the Occupational Outlook Handbook, Dictionary of Occupational Titles, and company literature.

STAGE 4: CHOOSE TWO CAREER OPTIONS

STAGE 5: DECISION-MAKING EXPLORATION

Make more effective decisions. You may be deciding upon two possible majors/careers. Carkhuff’s decision-making model may assist you in determining the major or career for you.

CAREER SELECTION CRITERIA

Career Values	Mark Y (YES) or N (NO) if important or not	Career #1 Mark if career satisfies value	Career #2 Mark if career satisfies value
Income			
Benefits (Insurance, vacation, retirement)			
Helping others			
Future job options			
Working hours (set, flexible, odd, regular)			
Occupational outlook (supply and demand)			
Contact with others			
Job security			
Future income advancement			
Enjoyment			
Personal growth			
Supports for continued learning			
Pleasing physical work environment			
Psychological environment and stress			
Variety of work activities			
Opportunities for creativity			
Stimulating and challenging tasks			

Steps to using the decision-making model: This can also be done with majors.

1. List two possible career alternatives
2. Review the career selection criteria list above
Add other important criteria in the blanks.
3. Weigh the criteria

4. Evaluate if the career value is important or not. Mark which career satisfied the value most.
5. Compare the alternatives with each other and with the ideal.
Does the first or second career option satisfy your values most?
6. Predict the best alternative.
Choose the alternative with the most marks.

STAGES 6 & 7: ACTION AND GATHERING FEEDBACK

Keep updating your information as you change your plans. Remember this is a process. Be open to feedback from others and to your own feelings. Receive feedback from those whose opinions you respect.

SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM-SOLVING METHOD

STAGE 1: EXPLORATION OF THE NEED/ISSUE/PROBLEM

What decision are you making? In this case, deciding on a major or career. Making decisions is a life-long process. You are not alone; eighty percent of college students change majors at least once. The average is 4 times. There are no consequences to changing majors. It does not go on your transcript. You are not stuck in a major. College and GE are times of natural exploration. Some of us are not sure of what we want to do even after we graduate.

STAGE 2: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

What do you want? What is your overall goal? Gather the best information about possible solutions. Consult experts. Use the Career and Assessment Center, faculty, and academic advisors. Interview professionals in the field. Gain meaningful work experience. Think of your interests, abilities/skills, needs, personality, and values. They impact life decisions.

STAGE 3: CHOOSING THE BEST ALTERNATIVE

- a. List all alternatives you are considering.
- b. List all the values or criteria that will be affected by the decision.
- c. Evaluate each alternative by each criteria or value.
- d. Choose the alternative(s) you predict will satisfy the criteria the best and lead to your greatest overall happiness. Narrow down to 2 – 3 majors.

STAGE 4: PLANNING AND ACTION

Implement your plan. Act on your decision.

STAGE 5: GATHERING FEEDBACK

Gather feedback from others you value: faculty, friends, family, advisors, others in the field.

ACTIVITIES ON THE JOB

What are the interests and activities you would like to do? Imagine what a typical day might be like with some of these activities.

- **THING-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES**
Machine or manual activities?
- **CREATIVE & IDEAL-ORIENTED**
Creative writing? Athletic activities? Art? Engineering or other design?
- **DATA-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES**
Detailed data processing? Scientific or knowledge discovery? Numerical or accounting? Clerical work? Designing computer programs?
- **MANAGING OTHERS & SALES & MARKETING**
Organizing, planning? Persuading others? Supervising? Self-direction? Conflict resolution? Creative interpersonal ideas? Motivating others? Conversing with many others?
- **HELPING, TEACHING, COUNSELING ACTIVITIES**
Speaking to groups? Counseling, advising, consulting? Instructing, teaching? Learning, reading?

How much change and variety do you like? Do you like doing a lot of different tasks each day, or would you like to work on one big project until it is completed? Would you like to change jobs or projects frequently or not?

How mentally challenging or difficult do you want your work to be?

Think about what natural interests you have and the type of organization you might want to work for. Perhaps you could begin working in that type of organization before graduation to get an early start and make your part-time work more interesting and informative. It may help you get a good job after graduation.

INTERVIEWING PEOPLE IN THE OCCUPATION

Step 1: Finding persons in the occupation to interview.

Think of faculty, friends, relatives, friends of relatives, or just "call cold" persons in various organizations.

Find professors in related major departments and interview them.

Ask everyone you know (including professors) if they or anyone they know either

- Works in the profession or
- Knows anyone who works in the profession. For example, if they work in a large organization they may be able to get you an interview with someone else in that organization or
- Go to the library or Career and Assessment Center to get names and phone numbers of such organizations.

==> TIP: Find people to interview who are happy and successful in their job.

Step 2: Getting the interview

Most professionals truly enjoy helping students. How would you feel if 10 years from now a college student came to you?

When you find a person to interview or call an organization, try saying something like, "I'm a college student who is trying to make a decision about going into this occupation, and it would be very helpful to me if I could interview you to ask a few questions about this type of career." If you reach a secretary, be persistent about getting the actual person in the occupation to make the decision about whether to interview you or not.

Step 3: Conducting the Interview

If possible meet the person in their place of work. Come with a list of questions based upon your list of career selection criteria, and use the list openly during the interview.

What to ask the interviewee

His/her title and job description. Educational background. Entry level requirements: education & training, credentials, experience, personal resources and skills.

Opportunities and requirements for advancement. Occupational outlook for persons in that field.

His/her activities: exactly what he/she does in a typical day or week. What other types of work does this type of job or occupation prepare a person to do in the future if one wants to advance or change? What does this person like and dislike about this occupation?

Ask what else you should know about this occupation that you have not asked so far. What would this person have wanted to find out that they didn't know before getting into field?

Use your CAREER SELECTION CRITERIA to create additional questions. These are probably your most important questions!

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Remember to evaluate what you hear by your own Career Selection Criteria. Your interests and values may be quite different from those of the person you are interviewing. During the interview tell the person about yourself so that he/she may give information which may be more relevant to you. During the interview, ask for the names and phone numbers of persons your interviewee knows, whom you can later call to interview. Later call them and tell them you were referred by Mr. so and so.

Check for opportunities for volunteer or paid work experience. Don't be turned off to the whole profession by one unhappy or negative interviewee. If you get too much negative information, try at least one other person who is happier in their work. When finished thank the interviewee and later write a thank you letter.

Decision Making

Decision Making:

Do you ever have trouble making decisions? Little Ones? Important ones?
How do you generally go about making a decision? Describe the process.
What specific strategies do you use?
Would you use the same method for all types of decisions?
Would you describe yourself as a spontaneous or a systematic decision-maker?
Do you make decisions by yourself or do you need other people's opinions first?
Are you feeling anxious about deciding on a major? Pressured? Why?
How long do you think it will take you to make a decision? How long do you want it to take?

Academic Major/Occupational Information:

What academic areas are you currently considering? What do you like about these areas?
What occupations are you considering? What about these occupations attracts you?
How do your abilities and skills fit the tasks necessary to succeed in these areas?
Will these occupations provide the rewards and satisfactions you want for your life?
Why?
What are the differences between the two majors (occupations) you are tentatively considering? The similarities?
Who has influenced your ideas about these alternatives?

Self-Exploration:

As far back as you can remember, what general occupational fields have you thought of?
What subjects did you enjoy in high school? In what subject were your best grades?
Do you consider your strengths to lie in the math/science areas or in the social sciences?
What type of extracurricular activities did you take part in in high school?
What are your best personal qualities? What do your friends like most about you?
What do you see as your limitations? Your strengths?
Name the highest point in your life so far (your greatest accomplishment). What about the experience made it so?
In what kind of work environment do you picture yourself five years out of college?
If you have a spare hour to use, what do you do?
Why are you in college?
What does a college degree mean to you?

CHOOSING A MAJOR/CAREER

Questions to ask yourself

Self-Exploration:

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- What subjects did you enjoy in high school? In what subjects were your best grades?
- Do you consider your strengths to lie in the math/science areas or in the social sciences?
- What type of extracurricular activities did you take part in, in high school? What were the most enjoyable? What did you learn about yourself from them?
- What are your best personal qualities? What do your friends like most about you?
- What do you see as your limitations?
- Name the highest point in your life so far (your greatest accomplishment). What about the experience made it special?
- In what kind of work environment do you picture yourself, five years out of college?
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Source:

Gordon, V.N. (1995). *The Undecided College Student: An Academic and Career Advising Challenge*. Second edition. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Springfield, IL. p.114-115.