Kick Start Your Career from First Year

Career Exploration and Decision Making

Sometimes our choices are clearly laid out for us and that pathway to the best option is easy to see. Other times it is hard to know where to begin when we have an important decision to make.

Making course and career choices present us with many options – which can be confusing at times. It's tempting to think that there must a "right answer" that will be perfect. This is very rarely the case. Usually the truth is that several options could be equally good for us. Also, people will change jobs a number of times in their working lives, sometimes for career development and sometimes to go in a different direction. You may find you change your direction several times. That's OK too and very common. We just need to be able to work out what to do first or next.

Knowing the right "ingredients" for a positive choice enhances our confidence. The following information can set you up with some tools to help you with your decisions throughout your career.

Regardless of whether you're looking at your first career or faced with a change of direction, the key ingredients and strategies remain basically the same.

Starting your career exploration
What career direction will suit me?

Exploring career options
What are the career options in my preferred field? What career options lead from my degree?

Test driving preferred options
What does it really mean to work in these careers? How do I establish my career in this field?

Firstly you need to start your career exploration with a consideration of the career direction (or directions) that might suit you personally.

The second step is an exploration of career options. Investigate various career options arising from your preferred fields and options that can lead from your degree.

The third step entails test driving options. Your aim here is to find out what it is really like to work in that field or occupation. Also, what are some strategies to establish yourself and get started?

![Griffith University logo]

The process doesn't necessarily have to be linear, but it does need to cover all the bases.

Input from career counsellors, family, friends and mentors can all be highly valuable. But only you can understand yourself entirely and then apply that knowledge to the world-of- work.

Start with Yourself

So what are these key "ingredients" you need to know about yourself? How will you know if the options you are looking at for courses or jobs will be OK for you? Instinct? Certainly. But you need to help that instinct along.
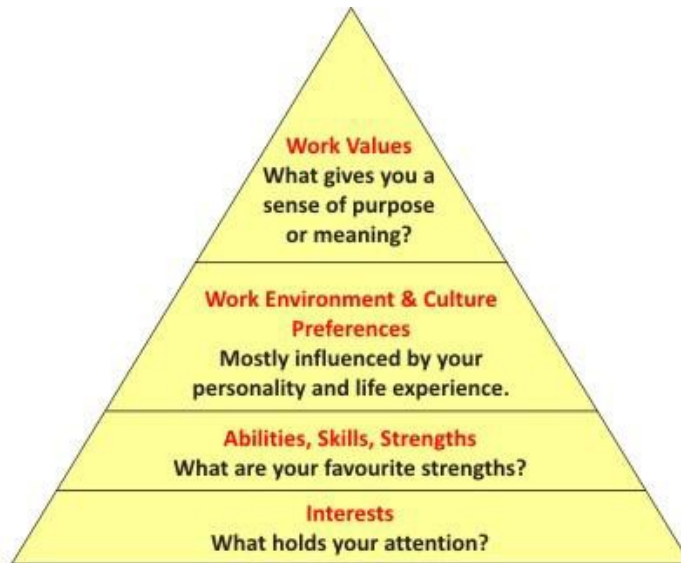
The foundation of your self-awareness is a consideration of your interests and what holds your attention. It is much easier to remain focused on your studies, and later, develop your skills at work, if you have a genuine interest in the field.

This of course needs to be balanced with an awareness of your abilities, skills and personal strengths. Particularly, the strengths and skills you most enjoy using.

After reflecting your interests and strengths, it is vital that you give some weight to the type of work environment and workplace culture you would prefer to spend your time in every day. The environment refers to what we might see going on (eg busy vs quiet, indoors vs outdoors, customers vs no customers, physically active vs sitting) and the culture refers the attitudes, values and communication style of that workplace or field. Our preferences are mostly influenced by our own personality or temperament but also our life experiences too.

Last but not least, our work values help us to understand what factors or ingredients will help us derive a sense of satisfaction, meaning or purpose from our work.

It should be noted however that no test offers any of us a "magic" answer or choice. Exploring these different aspects can help gain you some better insights into your own preferences or motivators, and therefore better clarity on what "ingredients" might be important to you in making career choices.

Career Interests

This is a foundation stone for your career decisions; especially if you are planning to do a course of study. You need a reasonable degree of interest to help you stay focused. Later in your career an intrinsic interest helps you develop new skills and seek out new experiences.

Skills and Strengths

Simply ask yourself some key questions and see what you can glean:

- What type of activities are easier for me to pick up e.g. practical tasks, communicating verbally, working with facts or numbers, working with written words.

- List 4-5 things you enjoy doing that you feel you can do reasonably well compared to your peer

Work Environment and Culture

Work environment refers to what we can see in the workplace. For example, is it indoors or outdoors, customers versus no customers, busy versus calm and quiet, sitting versus moving around and active?

Workplace culture refers more to the communication style, attitudes, believes and priorities of that workplace. Its "personality" if you like. To be happy and successful in a workplace you will need to be reasonably "in sync" with both.

Work Values

Understanding our own work values helps us work out what is important to us personally in our career. Remember that there's no right or wrong answers. Our Values card sort can assist you to understand your values.

Exploring Career Options

Finding out more about career options is the next important step. Once you've done some self-exploration you will be better able to look more clearly at options.

Look up careers that you've considered. Check:

- Qualifications and training required

- General type of activity involved

- Related or similar careers/jobs

- Job outlook/ prospects / salary range

- Other sources of information (including useful websites)

- Key employers

Test Driving Career Options

By now you'll have done some research into different course and career options and considered your own preferences. Next you need to see if reality stacks up to what you are reading.

Strategies include:

- Talking to people in the field to find out more about what they do, entry roles etc.

- Talk to a careers counsellor at Careers and Employment on your campus. Bring your materials with you.

- Get some work experience (paid or unpaid) in the area so you can observe people in different roles and talk to them.

Remember to always evaluate what you're finding out. It's OK to change your mind. A career counsellor can help you with this.