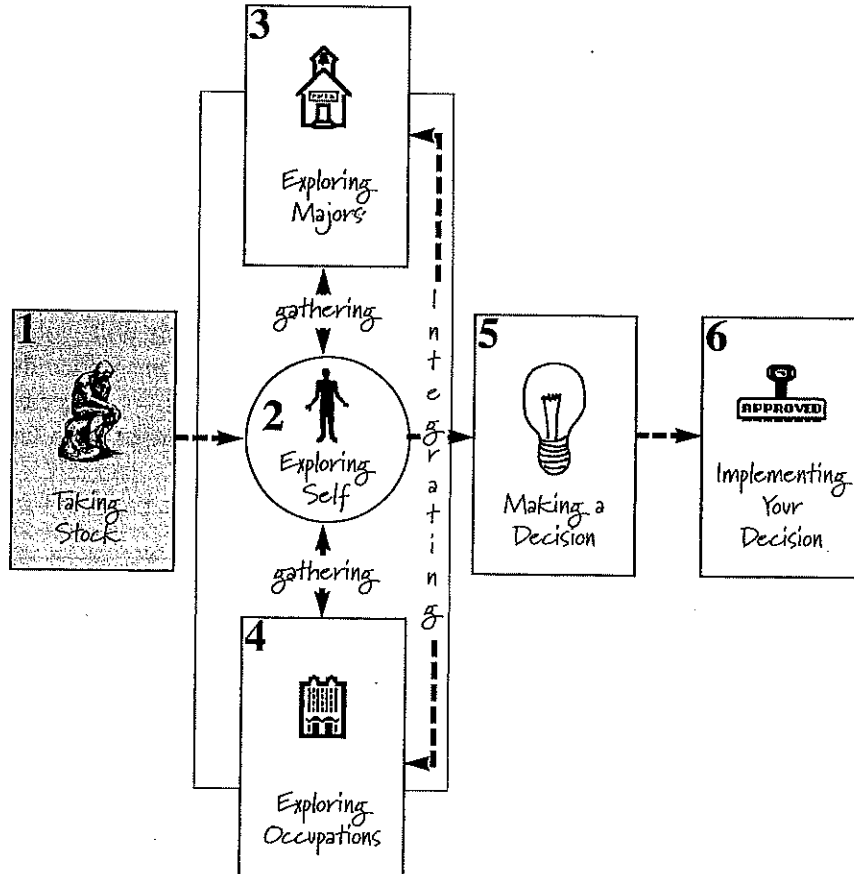


# UNIT ONE

## Taking Stock

**IN THIS UNIT,** you will take stock of your current situation and examine how it has resulted in your decision either to be undecided about your major or to change it. This reflection will help you realistically evaluate past and present decisions and give you a foundation for exploring academic and career alternatives.

Taking stock is not always easy. It may involve looking at some frustrating or painful decisions you made in the past or at your inability to make a decision. Taking stock is vital, however, if you are to move on to the next step in exploring possible academic and career directions.



Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.  
*From "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost*

## MAKING MAJOR AND CAREER DECISIONS

Whenever you are faced with two or more choices, you consciously or unconsciously use a process that usually leads to a decision. Because making decisions is such an integral part of daily life, learning to become an effective decision maker is important. Effective decision makers:

- Experience more personal freedom because they take advantage of new opportunities that appear
- Have greater control over their lives because they try to limit the influence of chance in determining their futures
- Are more likely than indecisive persons to be satisfied with their decisions

Educational and career decisions are among the most important decisions you will make, because these choices largely determine how you will spend your future waking hours. Some students entering college may have decided which occupation to enter after graduation but may not be sure which college major will best lead them to that goal. Other students may be undecided about a future occupational area and yet easily select an academic major. Still others are totally undecided about a major and an occupational choice; they have made a decision to be "undecided" about both.

Of those who declare a major upon entering college, some will later have doubts about their earlier decisions. There are many reasons for wanting to change majors: a lack of interest in the coursework, discouragement over poor academic performance, or inability to meet the criteria established for that major.

To help you begin the process of selecting a college major and/or career field, this unit asks you to take stock of your current status. This involves both determining where you are in the decision-making process and analyzing why you are where you are. In this way, taking stock lays the foundation for understanding how you personally will approach this critical endeavor.

As you complete the stock-taking activities in this unit, you will find some that are divided into two sections, "A" and "B." If you are undecided—that is, totally uncertain of your choice of major and/or occupation—answer the set of questions marked "A"; if you are considering a change of major or even having some doubts, answer the set of questions marked "B."

## ACTIVITY 1.1: YOUR CURRENT MAJOR STATUS

Complete "A" if you are undecided; complete "B" if you are considering a change in major.

A. I am undecided about a major. (Check all that apply.)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about various majors.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about possible career fields to which majors may lead.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure about my ability to succeed in the coursework for certain majors.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I have so many interests that I can't narrow my options.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't have strong interests in anything, so I'm not sure where to begin exploring.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure of my values, so I don't know what is important to me in a major or career area.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid to choose a major because it might be the wrong decision.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure what jobs will be available to me if I graduate with a certain major.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty making decisions in general.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other people have suggested majors, but I'm not sure they are right for me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I realize now that instead of a four-year degree, I might want a two-year program.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____</li> <li>_____</li> <li>_____</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

Examine the reasons you checked. In what areas do they indicate you need help (e.g., self, academic or occupational information, decision making)? Why?

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OR

B. I am considering a change in major or am having some doubts. (Check all that apply.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I didn't have enough information about this major when I chose it and have since found out it is not for me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I didn't want to enter college undecided about a major, so I signed up for one that seemed interesting at the time.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I chose this major because other people strongly encouraged me in that direction.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I discovered that the occupations related to this major do not appeal to me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't have strong enough abilities to succeed in the required coursework for this major.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not interested in the coursework required for this major.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure the values associated with this major (e.g., economic security) are as important to me now.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I don't qualify for this program based on the major's entrance requirements.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The major I want is offered at a four-year rather than a two-year college.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____</li> <li>_____</li> <li>_____</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

Examine the reasons you checked. What influenced you to choose your last major? Are any of these strong reasons for you to explore other majors? Why?

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## ACTIVITY 1.2: YOUR CURRENT CAREER STATUS

*Complete "A" if you are undecided; complete "B" if you are considering a change in major.*

**A. I am undecided about an occupational field. (Check all that apply.)**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about various occupations.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid to choose an occupation because it might be the wrong decision.                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have enough information about the relationships between occupations and academic majors.       | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure what specific jobs will be available to me as a result of the occupations I am considering. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure of the abilities needed in certain occupations.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty making decisions in general.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have so many interests that I can't narrow my options.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other people have suggested certain occupations, but I'm not sure they are right for me.                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have strong interests in anything, so I'm not sure which areas to explore.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure if the occupations for which I have an interest require a two-year or four-year degree.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure of my values, so I don't know what is important to me in selecting an occupational field. | <input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____<br>_____<br>_____   |

Examine the reasons you checked. In what areas do they indicate you need help (e.g., self, academic or occupational information, decision making)? Why?

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**OR**

**B. I am considering a change in occupation. (Check all that apply.)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I didn't have enough information about this occupation when I chose it and have since found out it is not for me.               | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not interested in the work tasks involved in this occupation.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I didn't want to enter college undecided about a major, so I selected an occupational area that seemed interesting at the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure the values associated with this occupation (e.g., working conditions) are as important to me now. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I chose this occupation because other people strongly encouraged me in that direction.  | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't qualify for entrance into the major required for this occupation.                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I discovered that the academic majors related to this occupation do not appeal to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure if the new occupations I am considering require a two-year or four-year degree.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have strong enough abilities to succeed in performing the work tasks in this occupation.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons (be specific): _____<br>_____<br>_____   |

Examine the reasons you checked. What influenced you to choose your last occupation? Are any of these strong reasons for you to explore other occupational fields? Why?

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## THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

### Your Feelings About Decision Making

Whether you are undecided or considering a change in major, how you feel about making decisions in general plays an integral role in how you approach the process. Sometimes we ignore our feelings even though they may exert a strong influence on our decisions, consciously or unconsciously.

### ACTIVITY 1.3: DISCOVERING YOUR FEELINGS

How do you feel now about choosing or changing your major? Place a check next to the adjectives that best describe your feelings:

- |                                   |                                       |                                     |                                    |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxious  | <input type="checkbox"/> disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> pressured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confused | <input type="checkbox"/> excited      | <input type="checkbox"/> happy      | <input type="checkbox"/> relaxed   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dejected | <input type="checkbox"/> fearful      | <input type="checkbox"/> numb       | <input type="checkbox"/> stressed  |

How do these feelings affect your motivation for engaging in the activities required to choose or change your major (e.g., When I feel stressed, it's difficult for me to feel motivated)?

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### ACTIVITY 1.4: READINESS TO BEGIN THE PROCESS

As you begin this process of selecting a college major, it is important to acknowledge how ready or committed you are to the time and energy it will take. Sometimes we are motivated to accomplish a task because we genuinely want to have the satisfaction of accomplishing a goal. We can also be motivated because of pressure to make a decision from important persons or our institution. If you are not motivated or tend to procrastinate in the tasks necessary to choose a major, you will probably not complete the process.

(continued)

Place an "x" on the line below at the point that indicates your true commitment and readiness to engage in the process of choosing a major:

Extremely ready \_\_\_\_\_ Not ready at all  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

If you have marked 5 or 6 on the line above, you will want to question your readiness to begin the process. If you marked 7, you should definitely reconsider becoming involved at this time.

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### Your Decision-Making Strategy

Theorists in the field of decision making identify different strategies people use when they are faced with both daily choices and more important but infrequent life decisions. The following activity lists strategies that several theorists have identified.

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#### ACTIVITY 1.5: FINDING YOUR STRATEGY

Which of these decision-making strategies most closely resembles how you are approaching the decision of selecting or changing a major?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Procrastinator</b>—I know I must make a decision but will put it off as long as possible.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Impulsive</b>—I take the first choice that seems reasonable without looking at other majors or collecting information.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fatalistic</b>—I will leave the decision to fate since I have very little control over it.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Agonizing</b>—I have invested so much time and thought into possible majors that I feel overwhelmed and can't decide.</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Compliant</b>—I think it is best if someone else who knows more about the subject (e.g., parent, teacher, advisor) makes the decision for me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Intuitive</b>—I will make a decision when it feels right.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Planful</b>—I will make a decision based on an orderly, rational process that requires solid information and reflection and involves both thinking and feeling.</p> |
|---|--|

How does the strategy you checked affect the way you did or will choose a major?

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If you checked a strategy other than "planful," what can you do to overcome any negative aspects of your approach?

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## Your Decision-Making Style

Have you ever analyzed how you approach decisions? Over the years you have developed a personal decision-making style or set of behaviors that you use when confronted by a decision situation. Some styles are effective, while others may be counterproductive. You may use one style in major decision situations (e.g., choosing a major, buying a car) and a different style for smaller ones (e.g., what to wear, what to buy in the grocery store).

Decision theorist William Coscarelli determined that how you gather information and how you analyze it after you have collected it are important determinants of your decision-making style. You *gather* information either spontaneously or systematically; you *analyze* it either internally or externally. When these two dimensions are joined, four distinct decision-making styles emerge: spontaneous external, spontaneous internal, systematic external, and systematic internal.

- *Spontaneous*—You make a decision quickly, because it feels right; you know you can change it easily.
- *Systematic*—You collect all the necessary information first and then methodically weigh all the pros and cons before deciding.
- *External*—You talk with many people whose judgment you trust.
- *Internal*—You think about the situation and come to a decision on your own.

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### ACTIVITY 1.6: UNDERSTANDING YOUR STYLE

Now apply these dimensions to your decision making to discover why you are undecided or why you decided to change your major or occupation. *Complete "A" if you are undecided; complete "B" if you are considering a change in major.*

A. My decision to be undecided about a major and/or occupation was:

#### Spontaneous

- I changed my mind so many times, I couldn't decide.
- It just felt right not to make a decision.
- I know that once I decide, I may change my mind, so it's not that important.

#### OR

#### Systematic

- I collected a great deal of information from many sources, but still wasn't sure.
- I analyzed my skills and abilities to see how they matched certain majors, but I still wasn't sure.
- Once I make up my mind, I seldom change it, so I want to be sure before I make the decision.

#### External

- I talked to my parents and friends about what to do.
- I consulted with my teachers and counselors.
- I considered the advice of others when choosing to remain undecided.

#### OR

#### Internal

- I thought a lot about my situation before choosing to be undecided.
- I really didn't seek the advice of too many people.
- I examined all the information by myself but still couldn't decide.

(continued)

Circle the style you think you used in choosing to be undecided:

spontaneous external      spontaneous internal      systematic external      systematic internal

**B. My decision to change my major and/or occupation was:**

**Spontaneous**

**OR**

**Systematic**

- My other major/occupation just didn't feel right.
- I lost interest quickly in my last choice and started to think about changing.
- If my next decision doesn't work out, I can always choose another.

- I examined my situation carefully and decided to change.
- I gathered a great deal of information about my situation before deciding to change.
- I know it will take careful study and thought before I can make a new decision.

**External**

**OR**

**Internal**

- I talked to many people about my situation before deciding to change.
- I weighed the advice of others who knew my situation and decided to change.
- My friends encouraged me to change.

- I am changing only after a great deal of thought.
- I thought about my situation for some time before consulting with others.
- I am still reflecting on my decision to change and will continue to do so.

Circle the style you think you used in deciding to change your major or occupation:

spontaneous external      spontaneous internal      systematic external      systematic internal

What do your answers suggest about how you tend to gather and analyze information before making a decision?

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Which style do you consider most effective in making realistic major and occupational decisions? Why?

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### Occupational Stereotypes

Some like to believe that occupational stereotypes are a relic of the past. Today's reality suggests otherwise. For example, one in ten engineers is a woman, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational and academic stereotyping can exert significant influence on female decision making. From elementary school



through high school, many girls learn from parents, teachers, and their peers that males are dominant or smarter in math and science while females are dominant in English and communication. Stereotyping begins early. In elementary school, when students are asked to draw scientists, both sexes draw males in white laboratory coats.

Males, to a lesser extent, avoid some occupations that society tells them are too feminine. For example, occupations such as elementary teaching and nursing are wide open for male participation, but males rarely are encouraged to enter these professions.

These subtle and not-so-subtle messages about appropriate occupations for each gender are found in textbooks, on television, in movies, and society in general. This sometimes results in girls avoiding math, science, and engineering occupations and males avoiding elementary teaching and nursing—even though both sexes have the ability and skills to succeed in all those areas. As you make decisions about your major and your future occupation, be certain to consider all options. Don't be afraid to take the road less traveled. Use the next activity to reflect on the stereotypical messages that may have influenced you.

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### ACTIVITY 1.7: REVEALING OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPES

Take a few minutes and list some of the messages you think you received about appropriate roles and occupations for females and males while growing up.

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Do you think you have allowed these messages to limit your choices? Why or why not?

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If your choices have been limited, plan to rethink your occupational options as you complete the activities in this text.

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## Your Goals and Decision Making

Setting short- and long-term goals is an important part of decision making. Without goals, you cannot estimate how your current choices will influence your future. In Unit Two you will examine your work values. Goals are simply values projected into the future, so identifying what is important to you will shape the major and career decisions you make now and in the future. Later, in Unit Six, you will be revisiting these goals.

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### ACTIVITY 1.8: SETTING YOUR GOALS

Think about the day after graduation and write down three goals you would like to accomplish by then.

*Personal goal* (e.g., I will be a well-rounded, educated person.)

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*Academic goal* (e.g., I will graduate with at least a 3.0 grade point average.)

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*Career goal* (e.g., I will develop the skills and knowledge to be successful in the workplace.)

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## SUMMARY

As you read Unit One and worked through the activities, you took stock of your current situation and learned how your personal decision-making style has affected it and will affect it in the future. The stock-taking you did in this unit has prepared you for the next step in exploring possible academic and career directions. As indicated earlier, the decision-making process that you will be engaged in as you progress through this book is evolutionary, not static. You will gather information, identify alternatives, weigh them against your strengths and limitations, and ultimately decide on a direction to explore. You are in control of every aspect of this process.

### SUMMARY

Check the appropriate column below to indicate how much you were aware of these elements in making previous decisions.

ELEMENTS OF DECISION MAKING	VERY MUCH AWARE	SOMEWHAT AWARE	NOT AWARE
1. understanding how I made past academic decisions			
2. understanding how I made past occupational decisions			
3. understanding my reasons for being undecided			
4. examining my feelings about making choices			
5. determining how ready I am to engage in the decision-making process			
6. understanding the decision strategies I use			
7. examining my decision-making style			
8. examining gender-role stereotyping in regard to myself and my occupational choices			
9. need for compromise when choosing between equally desirable alternatives			
10. importance of setting personal, academic, and career goals			

If you were somewhat aware of or not aware of some of these elements, be sure to emphasize these as you begin the process of academic and career planning.

**CASE STUDY 1.1: ASHLEY***(for undecided students)*

Ashley entered college with her major listed as undecided. She had so many ideas about a college major that she could not decide on one. She thought she could choose a major during her first year after taking a few courses. She was concerned that some of the majors she was considering, such as English and history, might not lead to a specific job. At one time in high school, Ashley had decided to be a teacher, because her mother was a teacher. Although she still felt this was a good profession for her—she would have the same hours as her children some day—she had never felt fully committed to the idea.

As a sophomore, Ashley finds herself no closer to a choice of major than the day she entered college and is feeling rather depressed and frustrated. She realizes she needs to take stock of her situation and take some action toward making a decision soon.

Certain ideas and people have influenced Ashley's occupational decisions in the past. What or who have influenced yours?

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Why is she undecided? Why are you?

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What are her feelings at this point? What are yours?

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Ashley's views of herself and/or occupations might be influenced by gender-role stereotypes. Could yours be too? How?

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To begin the process of deciding on a major, what could Ashley do next? What next steps do you need to take?

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