

THE CHALLENGE

Miguel was starting his junior year unsure about what career to pursue. He knew he loved technology and helping people, but couldn't figure out how to combine these interests into a career. After conducting a self-assessment, researching options, and talking to professionals, he discovered UX/UI design—a field that perfectly blended his technical skills with his desire to make technology more user-friendly. He set SMART goals, created a plan, and secured his first design internship by summer.

How can a structured approach to career exploration help you identify opportunities you might not have considered and create a clear path to achieving your professional goals?

Learning Objectives

- Understand the difference between a job and a career.
- Identify personal interests, skills, and values for career exploration.
- Research career paths using appropriate resources.
- Develop SMART career goals for short-term and long-term planning.
- Create a personalized career development plan.

CORE CONCEPTS

| Term | Definition |
|-------------------------|--|
| Career | A long-term professional journey that may encompass multiple jobs, involving growth, development, and advancement over time. |
| Job | A specific position or role with defined responsibilities, typically performed in exchange for payment. |
| Self-Assessment | The process of evaluating your own interests, skills, values, and personality traits to inform career decisions. |
| SMART Goals | Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound objectives for career planning. |
| Career Development Plan | A strategic roadmap outlining steps to achieve your professional goals. |

Background: Understanding the distinction between jobs and careers is fundamental to effective career planning. While jobs provide immediate income, careers offer long-term growth and fulfillment aligned with your personal interests and values. A structured approach to career exploration—involving self-assessment, research, goal setting, and planning—helps ensure your professional path aligns with both your personal aspirations and financial goals.

APPLY IT

PART A: JOBS VS. CAREERS ANALYSIS

Read each scenario and determine whether the person is focused on a job or building a career. Explain your reasoning.

Scenario 1: Alex's Retail Position

Alex works part-time at a clothing store while attending college. The hours are flexible, but Alex has no interest in retail management and views this position as temporary until graduation.

This is a: _____ (job / career)

Because: _____

Scenario 2: Jordan's Healthcare Journey

Jordan started as a medical receptionist and is now pursuing nursing certification. Jordan plans to eventually become a nurse practitioner and has mapped out educational milestones for the next 10 years.

This is a: _____ (job / career)

Because: _____

Scenario 3: Taylor's Food Service Work

Taylor works as a server and has been promoted to shift manager. Taylor enjoys hospitality and is taking restaurant management courses while saving to eventually open their own restaurant.

This is a: _____ (job / career)

Because: _____

PART B: SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Complete the skills inventory below to identify your strengths in both categories.

Hard Skills (Technical abilities)

Examples: Computer programming, data analysis, writing, foreign languages

Soft Skills (Personal attributes)

Examples: Communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork

4. Rank your top 5 work values in order of importance (1 = most important):

Options: Work-life balance, Creativity, Leadership opportunities, Financial security, Making a difference, Independence, Recognition, Intellectual stimulation, Variety, Stability

PART C: SMART GOAL DEVELOPMENT

Create one SMART career goal using the framework below.

Your SMART Career Goal

S - Specific (What exactly do you want to accomplish?):

M - Measurable (How will you track progress?):

A - Achievable (Is this realistic given your situation?):

R - Relevant (How does this align with your career aspirations?):

T - Time-bound (Target completion date):

Hint: A well-written SMART goal example: "I will complete an online UX design certification program and build a portfolio with 3 projects within 6 months to prepare for design internship applications."

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. The main difference between a job and a career is that a career:

- ☐ A. Always pays more money
- ☐ B. Involves long-term growth and multiple positions over time
- ☐ C. Requires a college degree
- ☐ D. Must be in a professional field

2. Which of the following is an example of a "hard skill"?

- ☐ A. Teamwork
- ☐ B. Leadership
- ☐ C. Computer programming
- ☐ D. Communication

3. Explain why self-assessment is an important first step in career exploration.

4. What does the "A" in SMART goals stand for, and why is it important?

5. Reflection: Think about a career field that interests you. What are two specific steps you could take in the next month to learn more about this career path?
