

Career Exploration Workbook

Chapter 15.1: Career Exploration and Goal Setting

Introduction

This workbook will guide you through a comprehensive self-assessment and career exploration process. By completing these activities, you'll gain valuable insights into your interests, skills, and values that will help you make informed career decisions and set meaningful goals for your future.

How to Use This Workbook

1. Complete each section in order, as later sections build on earlier ones
2. Be honest in your responses—there are no right or wrong answers
3. Take your time with each activity to allow for thoughtful reflection
4. Keep this workbook as a reference for your career planning
5. Revisit and update your responses as you gain new experiences and insights

Part 1: Understanding Jobs vs. Careers

Before diving into self-assessment, it's important to understand the difference between a job and a career.

Definitions

- **Job:** A specific position or role you hold to earn income, often focused on short-term needs
- **Career:** A long-term professional journey involving growth, development, and progression over time

Reflection Questions

1. What experiences have you had with jobs so far (including part-time work, volunteering, etc.)?

2. What careers have you found interesting or have considered pursuing? Why?

3. How would you describe the difference between having a job and building a career?

Career vs. Job Analysis

For each characteristic below, indicate whether it's more associated with a job, a career, or both:

Characteristic	Job	Career	Both
Primary focus is earning money			
Requires ongoing skill development			
Involves a sense of identity and purpose			
May be temporary or short-term			
Includes advancement opportunities			
Requires specialized education or training			
Involves networking and professional relationships			
May be unrelated to personal interests			

Part 2: Interests Assessment

Your interests play a key role in career satisfaction. This section will help you identify patterns in what naturally engages and excites you.

Subjects & Topics

Rate your level of interest in the following subjects on a scale of 1 (Not Interested) to 5 (Very Interested):

Subject	Interest Level (1-5)	Why?
Mathematics		
Science		
Technology/Computing		
Engineering/Building		
Arts/Creative Expression		
Writing/Communication		
Business/Entrepreneurship		
People/Relationships		
Education/Teaching		
Health/Medicine		
Law/Justice		
Nature/Environment		

Activities Analysis

List activities that you enjoy and lose track of time doing:

Activity	What specifically do you enjoy about it?	Potential career connection

Interest Patterns

Based on your responses above, what patterns do you notice in your interests?

Part 3: Skills Inventory

Understanding your existing skills and those you'd like to develop is crucial for career planning.

Hard Skills Assessment

Hard skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured. Rate your current proficiency in the following areas:

Skill Area	Current Proficiency (1-5)	Interest in Developing (1-5)	Evidence/Example
Computer/Technology			
Mathematics/Calculations			
Writing/Communication			
Research/Analysis			
Design/Creativity			
Construction/Building			
Languages			
Financial/Budgeting			

List any other specific hard skills you possess:

Soft Skills Assessment

Soft skills are interpersonal and transferable abilities that are valuable across many careers. Rate your current strengths in the following areas:

Skill Area	Current Strength (1-5)	Interest in Developing (1-5)	Evidence/Example
Communication			
Teamwork/Collaboration			
Leadership			
Problem-solving			
Critical thinking			
Adaptability/Flexibility			
Time management			
Emotional intelligence			

Skills Summary

Based on your assessments above:

Your top 3-5 current skills are:

Skills you most want to develop further are:

How might your skills align with potential career paths?

Part 4: Values Clarification

Work values are aspects of work that are important to you and contribute to your satisfaction. Understanding your values helps you find careers that align with what matters most to you.

Work Values Ranking

Rank the following work values from 1 (Most Important) to 15 (Least Important):

Value	Description	Rank (1-15)
Achievement	Sense of accomplishment and seeing results from your work	
Independence	Working with little supervision, making decisions on your own	
Recognition	Receiving acknowledgment for your contributions	
Relationships	Working with people and building connections	
Support	Having supportive management and colleagues	
Working Conditions	Comfortable environment and reasonable hours	
Security	Stable employment and steady income	
Compensation	High earnings and good benefits	
Advancement	Opportunities for promotion and growth	
Creativity	Ability to create or design new things	
Variety	Diverse tasks and responsibilities	
Helping Others	Positively impacting people's lives	
Moral Fulfillment	Work that aligns with your beliefs and values	
Knowledge	Intellectual stimulation and continuous learning	
Prestige	Work that gives you status and respect	

Top Values Analysis

Looking at your top 5 values:

1. Why are these particular values important to you?

2. What types of work environments or careers might align with these values?

3. Are there any values that might conflict with each other? How might you balance them?

Part 5: Career Exploration Resources

Now that you've completed your self-assessment, it's time to explore careers that might align with your interests, skills, and values.

Online Resources Guide

Use these valuable online resources for your career exploration:

Recommended Career Exploration Websites

- **O*NET OnLine** (onetonline.org): Comprehensive database of occupations with detailed information about skills, tasks, work environments, and more
- **Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook** (bls.gov/ooh): Information on hundreds of occupations, including job duties, education requirements, pay, and outlook
- **CareerOneStop** (careeronestop.org): Videos, career assessments, salary data, and training information
- **My Next Move** (mynextmove.org): User-friendly tool to explore careers by keyword, industry, or interest

Research Activity

Based on your self-assessment results, identify 3-5 careers to research:

Career Title	Why I'm Interested	Key Information to Research

Career Research Worksheet

For each career you selected, complete the following research (use additional paper if needed):

Career 1:

Education/Training Required:

Skills Needed:

Typical Work Environment:

Salary Range:

Job Outlook:

Aspects I Find Appealing:

Potential Challenges or Concerns:

Path to Enter This Career:

Part 6: SMART Career Goals

Now that you've explored potential careers, it's time to set SMART goals to help you move toward your career aspirations.

SMART Goal Framework

- **Specific:** Clearly defined and focused
- **Measurable:** Includes concrete criteria for measuring progress
- **Achievable:** Realistic and attainable
- **Relevant:** Aligned with your interests, skills, and values
- **Time-bound:** Has a defined timeline with a deadline

Example SMART Goals

Non-SMART Goal: "Get better at public speaking."

SMART Goal: "Complete a public speaking course by the end of the semester and deliver three practice presentations to my study group, receiving feedback to improve my skills for future career opportunities in marketing."

Non-SMART Goal: "Find an internship in healthcare."

SMART Goal: "Apply to at least five hospital administrative internships in the Chicago area by March 15, securing a summer position that provides at least 120 hours of experience to build my resume for nursing school applications."

Your SMART Career Goals

Based on your career exploration, create SMART goals for the following timeframes:

Short-term Goal (next 6-12 months):

How does this goal meet SMART criteria?

- **Specific:**

- **Measurable:**

- **Achievable:**

- **Relevant:**

- **Time-bound:**

Mid-term Goal (1-3 years):

How does this goal meet SMART criteria?

- **Specific:**

- **Measurable:**

- **Achievable:**

- **Relevant:**

- **Time-bound:**

Long-term Goal (3-5+ years):

How does this goal meet SMART criteria?

- **Specific:**

- **Measurable:**

- **Achievable:**

- **Relevant:**

- **Time-bound:**

Part 7: Career Development Plan Introduction

A comprehensive career development plan includes multiple components to help you achieve your career goals.

Career Plan Components

For each component, identify specific actions or steps you'll take:

Education/Training

What education or training will you need to pursue your career goals?

Experience Building

What experiences (internships, volunteer work, part-time jobs, etc.) will help you develop relevant skills and knowledge?

Skill Development

What specific skills do you need to develop or improve for your target career?

Networking/Relationships

How will you build professional connections in your field of interest?

Career Development Timeline

Create a basic timeline for your career development activities:

Timeframe	Education/Training	Experience	Skills	Networking
Short-term (0-1 year)				
Mid-term (1-3 years)				
Long-term (3-5+ years)				

Part 8: Reflection and Next Steps

Self-Assessment Summary

Based on all the activities in this workbook:

My top interests are:

My key skills (current and developing) are:

My core work values are:

Careers I'm most interested in exploring further:

Career Exploration Reflection

1. What has surprised you most about your career exploration so far?

2. What additional information do you need to gather to further refine your career plans?

3. What potential obstacles might you face in pursuing your career goals?

4. What resources or support might help you overcome these obstacles?

Next Steps Action Plan

List 3-5 specific actions you'll take in the next month to move forward with your career exploration and planning:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Final Tips

- Keep this workbook as a living document and update it as you gain new experiences and insights
- Review your SMART goals regularly to track progress and make adjustments as needed
- Seek feedback from teachers, counselors, family members, and professionals in your fields of interest
- Remember that career development is an ongoing process—it's normal for your plans to evolve over time
- Use this self-assessment as a foundation for more detailed career planning in the future