

Using a SWOT Analysis in Your Career Planning

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A key tool in the strategic planning process can also be applied to career planning. This tool is a marketing analysis using the SWOT technique. A SWOT analysis focuses on the internal and external environments, examining strengths and weaknesses in the internal environment and opportunities and threats in the external environment. Imagine your SWOT analysis to be structured like the table below:

SWOT Analysis

I N T E R N A L E X T E R N A L	Your Strengths	Your Weaknesses
	Opportunities in Your Career Field	Threats in Your Career Field

To construct your own SWOT analysis to set a course for your career planning, examine your current situation. What are your strengths and weaknesses? How can you capitalize on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses? What are the external opportunities and threats in your chosen career field?

I N T E R	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Internal positive aspects that are under control and upon which you may capitalize in planning •Work Experience •Education, including value-	Internal negative aspects that are under your control and that you may plan to improve •Lack of Work Experience •Low GPA, wrong major

N A L	<p>added features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strong technical knowledge within your field (e.g. hardware, software, programming languages) •Specific transferable skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership skills) •Personal characteristics (e.g., strong work ethic, self-discipline, ability to work under pressure, creativity, optimism, or a high level of energy) •Good contacts/successful networking •Interaction with professional organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lack of goals, lack of self-knowledge, lack of specific job knowledge •Weak technical knowledge •Weak skills (leadership, interpersonal, communication, teamwork) •Weak job-hunting skills •Negative personal characteristics (e.g., poor work ethic, lack of discipline, lack of motivation, indecisiveness, shyness, too emotional)
E X T E R N A L	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>Positive external conditions that you do not control but of which you can plan to take advantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Positive trends in your field that will create more jobs (e.g., growth, globalization, technological advances) •Opportunities you could have in the field by enhancing your education •Field is particularly in need of your set of skills •Opportunities you could have through greater self-knowledge, more specific 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Negative external conditions that you do not control but the effect of which you may be able to lessen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Negative trends in your field that diminish jobs (downsizing, obsolescence) •Competition from your cohort of college graduates •Competitors with superior skills, experience, knowledge •Competitors with better job-hunting skills than you

	<p>job goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for advancement in your field • Opportunities for professional development in your field • Career path you've chosen provides unique opportunities • Geography • Strong network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitors who went to schools with better reputations. • Obstacles in your way (e.g., lack of the advanced education/training you need to take advantage of opportunities) • Limited advancement in your field, advancement is cut-throat and competitive • Limited professional development in your field, so it's hard to stay marketable • Companies are not hiring people with your major/degree
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To further refine your list of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, you may also want to ask yourself some critical questions adapted in part from an article by Dave Jensen, managing director of Search Masters International.

Explore your own self-perception of your **strengths**, but also put yourself inside a prospective employer's head as you consider your strong points. Avoid false modesty, but also be brutally honest and realistic with yourself. Start out by simply making a list of words that describe you; chances are many of these characteristics comprise your strengths.

One of your greatest strengths can be loving the work you do. Learning to "follow your bliss" should be a critical component of managing your career. Some people know from an early age what kind of work will make them happy. For others, nailing down the self-knowledge that leads to career fulfillment comes from a process of exploring interests, skills, personality, learning style, and values. Take a look at some career assessment and exploration tools, such as those described in Career Assessment Tools and Tests. Take one or more of the tests and react to the results. Do the results match your general plans and expectations?

In assessing your **weaknesses**, think about what prospective employers might consider to be the areas you could improve upon. Facing your frailties now can give you a huge head start in career planning.

As humans, we find it relatively difficult to identify the areas where we are weak. But this assessment helps to identify areas where we may need to improve. If you identify a skill that you know is in your chosen field, but you are weak in that skill area, you need to take steps to improve that skill. Past performance appraisals and even your grades and teacher comments from school provide valuable feedback.

For a good collection of sites on the Internet that enable you to research the trends that will tell you more about external **opportunities** and **threats** in your chosen field, go to Career Exploration Resources. It's also helpful to visit online databases (often available through library Web sites), such as ABI/INFORM, Business News Bank, and Lexis/Nexis and conduct a search of "hiring trends in _____" or "employment trends in _____," filling in the blank with your career field.

Don't forget print resources, such as newspapers, periodicals, and trade publications. Check out job postings on the Internet to get a feel for the relative number of openings in your field. If you are a college student, check out your school's Career Services office for information on file on opportunities and threats in your field.

From this analysis, you will have a road map that shows you how to capitalize on your strengths and minimize or eliminate your weaknesses. You should then use this map to take advantage of opportunities and avoid or lessen threats.

After you've analyzed your strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities, you should use that information to plan how to market yourself.

The marketing planning process entails a three-step process:

- 1.determining objectives.
- 2.developing marketing strategies.
- 3.strategizing an action program.

Objectives—define your career objectives. What is your ideal job upon graduation (or the job you would like to transition to from your current job)? What are some other positions you could accept? What is your five-year career goal?

Marketing Strategies—a broad marketing strategy or “game plan” for attaining your objectives. What are the companies and organizations you're going to target to obtain your objectives—your ideal job? How will you communicate with these firms? The strategies you identify should utilize all of the resources available to you, such as your personal network and a partnership with a mentor.

Action Programs—according to marketing principles, marketing strategies should be turned into specific action programs that answer a number of questions, including: What will be done? When will it be done? Who is responsible for doing it? Your key task here is setting specific timetables and deadlines for getting the career and company information you identified in the marketing strategy step.