Identify Your Skills, Interests, Values, and Personality Traits

How do you figure out which career is right for you? Where should you even start looking? At CCE, we hear from many students and alumni that the career exploration process can be daunting. While it may feel intimidating at first, there are steps you can take to start making progress towards self-awareness and understanding career options that may be a fit for you.

We help students and alumni through this process, whether they are looking to transition to a new career or are just starting out. Career counselors can help you refine your understanding of your strengths and interest areas and identify potential career options by reviewing results from formal and informal career assessments and through brainstorming conversations.

Self-assessment is the first step in finding a career that is the best fit for you. The more you understand yourself and your motivations, the more informed and productive your career search process will be. Start by reflecting on your interests, values, skills and personality traits, as well as key experiences you have enjoyed. Research shows that people most satisfied in their careers are those who are working in jobs that closely align with these areas. The following section offers several activities to help you think about these areas and to start to connect your preferences to career options. Complete them on your own or discuss them with a CCE career counselor.

Identity:

To begin the self-assessment process, it may be helpful to reflect on fundamental aspects of your identity. Identity is important to career exploration because it represents you on your own terms. It is not another’s perception of you. It is not another’s projection of who you should be. It is you and your core. Knowing who you are and being confident in that identity will help you stay grounded as you explore the next phase of your life. You may think of yourself in terms of many identities and aspects of yourself that intersect. Some of these identities may be grounded in the communities which you are a part of and the life experiences you have had. Your identities may be closely tied to your values, interests, social contexts and self-image. In the exercise below try to reflect deeply on your essential self, that which is part of you regardless of who you are with. This is you at your core.

Describe yourself in the lines below. Try using a mix of demographic descriptors (age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity, etc.), adjectives, or communities in which you consider yourself a member (first-generation college student, military veteran, etc.) in order to paint a full picture of who you are.

At my core, I am…

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Keep these aspects of your identity in mind as you move forward with the self-assessment exercises in this section, as they often influence the other elements of career exploration such as our interests and values. Jot notes in the chart on page 11.
Interests:

Interests may represent things you like to learn about or do as hobbies, but may also give clues to the kinds of careers and jobs you would enjoy. In the spaces below, list 10–20 things that you really like to do or enjoy learning about. Use the following questions to brainstorm ideas:

- What have been your favorite courses?
- In your previous jobs, internships, or extracurricular experiences, what tasks did you enjoy most?
- What are the things you find yourself doing and enjoying, even though you don’t have to do them?
- What local, societal or world problems interest you?
- If you were an excellent writer, what subjects would you want to write about?
- If you could teach a course on any subject, what subjects would you teach?
- What do you do for fun? To relax and unwind?

Now, scan through your list. What trends or topical themes appear throughout? Use the following theme descriptions to identify patterns and circle or highlight two or three that describe your interests. Note which theme contains activities that are most engaging, not necessarily the highest number of items.

Activities involving:

- athletic or mechanical ability; working outdoors or with machines, tools, plants or animals
- observing, learning, investigating, analyzing, evaluating, or problem solving
- imagination and creativity; artistic, innovative, or intuitive abilities; or unstructured environments
- working with people to enlighten, inform, help, train or cure; skill with words
- working with people to influence, persuade, perform, lead, or manage for business goals or economic gain
- organizing, clerical, or numerical ability; step by step tasks, details and data

Write some keywords from the themes that most describe your interests in the chart on page 11.

Related Assessment: Strong Interest Inventory (SII)
The Strong Interest Inventory can help you discover your interests, preferences, and personal styles. It identifies themes and specific areas of interest, and it compares your interests with those of individuals in a variety of occupations. It can also help you identify new career, academic, or extracurricular options to investigate. There is a small fee for this assessment, payable to the online provider. Schedule an appointment with a career counselor to learn if this assessment is right for you.
Values:

Values play an integral role in career satisfaction. Of the following list, prioritize the ten career values that are most important to you now (they may change over time) by circling them, and cross out the ten that are least important. Add any other values that are missing from your list.

- Achievement
- Advancement and promotion
- Adventure
- Arts
- Challenging problems
- Change and variety
- Close relationships
- Community
- Competence
- Competition
- Cooperation
- Country
- Creativity
- Decisiveness
- Democracy
- Ecological awareness
- Economic security
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Ethical practice
- Excellence
- Excitement
- Fame
- Fast pace
- Financial gain
- Flexibility
- Freedom
- Friendships
- Growth
- Having a family
- Helping other people
- Helping society
- Honesty
- Independence
- Influencing others
- Inner harmony
- Integrity
- Intellectual status
- Involvement
- Job tranquility
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Location
- Loyalty
- Meaningful work
- Merit
- Money
- Nature
- Order
- Personal development
- Physical challenge
- Pleasure
- Power and authority
- Privacy
- Public service
- Purity
- Quality
- Recognition
- Religion
- Reputation
- Responsibility and accountability
- Security
- Self-respect
- Serenity
- Sophistication
- Stability
- Status
- Supervising others
- Time freedom
- Truth
- Wealth
- Wisdom
- Work under pressure
- Working with others
- Working alone

Now, prioritize your top five values by considering which could be compromised if necessary and which cannot be compromised. After completing this exercise, write your top five values into the chart on page 11.

Related Assessment: Career Values Card Sort
The Career Values Card Sort is a quick, simple tool that allows you to prioritize your career-related values. Fifty-four variables of work satisfaction—such as time freedom, precision work, and public contact—are listed on cards that you then sort based on importance. This assessment is an effective tool for providing a deeper understanding of what you intrinsically need out of a career. Schedule an appointment with a career counselor to learn if this assessment is right for you.
Personality:

Personality can be defined as a combination of qualities that form an individual’s distinctive character, which influence how you see, experience, and interact with the world. We all have certain innate preferences and personality characteristics that feel more comfortable and natural, such as how we gain energy, perceive information, make decisions, and organize our external environments.

Below are just eight aspects of your personality to consider. For each row, check off the one option that most describes you. While you may relate to both descriptions, think about which is most comfortable, or the option you would choose first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People and Interaction</th>
<th>Gain energy by being with other people; tend to be sociable, seek out others, enjoy interacting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Alone</td>
<td>Gain energy by spending time alone; enjoy social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk and Participate</td>
<td>Talk more than listen, think out loud, focused on outside world of people and things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen and Reflect</td>
<td>Listen more than talk; reflective, like to think and then respond, focused on inner world of ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical and Concrete</td>
<td>Value realism and common sense, practical solutions, practical matters, concrete information, immediate action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative and Abstract</td>
<td>Drawn to imagination, creative new ideas, different ways of doing things, innovative solutions to problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Details</td>
<td>See the trees in the forest and then the forest, give detailed descriptions, patient with routine details, precise step by step instructions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Picture</td>
<td>See the forest and then the trees, give more global descriptions, impatient with routine details want to know the purpose of projects &amp; general goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Prefer analysis and putting things together in logical order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Prefer harmony and empathy, gathering consensus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impartial Standards</td>
<td>Value one standard for all</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Analysis</td>
<td>Value exceptions to the rule and consider the effect of actions on people and feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closure</td>
<td>Prefer to have matters settled. Happiest when there is a plan and clear structure, like to bring closure to the external world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-Ended</td>
<td>Prefer flexibility. Happiest when time is unstructured, like to stay open to all possibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control and Organization</td>
<td>Organized, enjoy making lists of tasks and subtasks, prioritize effectively, attached to calendars, goal sheets, and outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unexpected and Go with the Flow</td>
<td>Enjoy variety and the unexpected, comfortable with ambiguity and last minute changes, open to new information</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Of those that you checked, select 3–5 that describe you best or resonate the most with you, and write them in the chart on page 11.

Related Assessment: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
The MBTI can help you identify your personality preferences and provide insight into how you make decisions, interact with people, gather information, and get energized. The MBTI does not measure aptitudes, but helps you better understand your motivations, strengths and potential areas of growth, and career areas for exploration. There is a small fee for this assessment, payable to the online provider. Schedule an appointment with a career counselor to learn if this assessment is right for you.
Skills:

According to a 2015 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the top qualities/skills employers seek in hires are:

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
4. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell or influence others

Throughout the course of your life, you have gained competencies in many areas. In which of the following do you excel? This list will help you to realize your strong points that you can apply to career decision-making as well as to transitioning to different fields. Check off the skills that you have demonstrated inside and outside of the classroom. Then, go back and circle those skills you most enjoy using and cross off those that you do not enjoy using.

Communication Skills

- Present information to large and small groups
- Handle complaints in person/over the phone
- Sell ideas, products, or services
- Listen carefully and attentively
- Develop rapport easily with diverse individuals and groups of people
- Read or speak another language
- Edit and proofread written material
- Write clearly and concisely

Leadership, Management, and Administrative Skills

- Set financial priorities
- Develop cost cutting solutions
- Negotiate financial deals
- Understand economic principles

Counseling, Serving, and Interpersonal Relations Skills

- Counsel, advise, consult, guide others
- Demonstrate empathy, sensitivity, and patience
- Help people make their own decisions
- Help others improve health and welfare
- Listen empathically and with objectivity
- Create positive, hospitable environment
- Encourage, empower, advocate for people

Creative and Innovative Skills

- Visualize concepts and results
- Brainstorm and make use of group synergy
- Design materials, products, or services
- Express ideas through an form
- Use computer software for artistic creations
- Write poetry, fiction, plays

Mechanical and Technical Skills

- Invent
- Assemble/build/install
- Perform precision work
- Operate hand/power tools
- Troubleshoot/diagnose problems
- Drafting/mechanical drawing
- Understand manuals/diagrams
- Learn new technology easily
- Program/Code

Financial Skills

- Develop/stay within a budget
- Eye for profit
- Recognize money making opportunities
- Manage money/make money grow

Numerical Skills

- Solid ability with basic arithmetic
- Multiply numbers in your head
- Figure out percentages
- Recognize patterns and relationships in numbers
- Gain valuable information from graphs, tables, and charts
In the chart on page 11, write down 5–8 of the skills that you feel are your strongest and you would most like to use in a career.

**Likes and Dislikes:**

Using the table below as a template, use a separate sheet of paper to list each job you have had and what you liked and disliked about each. When listing your likes and dislikes, be sure to think about the job tasks, skills you used, work environment, people you worked with, your boss/supervisor, the company culture and politics, hours, pay, perks, benefits, socialization, friends, resources available to complete the job, commute, professional development/opportunities for growth, travel, etc. Also, consider what was going on in your personal life at the time of each job—do you think that had any influence on the satisfaction of this particular job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title, Company/Organization &amp; Brief Description</th>
<th>What I Liked about Job</th>
<th>What I Disliked about Job</th>
<th>Influence of Personal Life Factors?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Use this chart to record the interests, values, personality traits, identities, and skills you have identified through the previous exercises. Also note potential career options you have considered, or any careers that may connect to some of your preferences which you would like to explore further. Next, move to page 12 to learn about how to connect the information below to possible careers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Personality Traits and Identities</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Career Options</th>
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Connect Your Skills, Interests, Values, and Personality Traits to Careers

Once you have identified your interests, values, aspects of your identity, personality traits and skills to develop a picture of your career preferences, use the following resources to discover potential career options that may be a fit. Refine or add to your list of options in the chart on page 11 using the online and in-person methods in the following pages, and/or schedule an appointment with a CCE career counselor to review your chart and brainstorm possibilities.

While you are gathering information ask yourself whether you can see yourself working in this particular career area. Does it match with your interests as well as you had anticipated? Will it afford you the lifestyle you seek? Does it use your top skills and match your top values and personal strengths? Aspects to consider and information to gather about career options include:

- Education and skill requirements
- Typical positions
- Day-to-day job operations
- Industry trends and developments
- Personality traits valued by the field
- Salary information
- Hiring cycles and recruiting practices
- Geographic location

Online and In-Person Career Research Tools

There are many opportunities to connect with professionals in-person to learn more about career paths and gain industry insights, such as:

- CCE events like Industry Showcases, Professionals in Residence, Employer Information Sessions, and Employer Site Visits.
- On- and off-campus events such as professional association meetings/conferences
- Speaking with alumni, employers, and your own networking contacts in your fields of interest through informational interviewing (learn more on page 66).

Once you have narrowed down to a few areas of interest, try them out through extracurricular activities, volunteering, internships, and part-time jobs (see page 77). The following sections will help you to find and prepare for these opportunities.

Visit CCE’s website for more online resources, including our “Exploring Majors and Careers” and “Careers Beyond Academia” pages.

careereducation.columbia.edu/industryexploration

careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/vault
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onetonline.org

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