Preparing for Your Search

In a tough job market it can be tempting to jump into the job hunt feet first, but the most effective searches start with thoughtful preparation. This chapter presents three keys to preparing for a successful search:

1. **Know Yourself** – Gain an awareness and understanding of your interests, skills, and values

2. **Research the World of Work** – Learn what kinds of career fields, jobs and employers fit your interests, abilities, and values

3. **Make Decisions** – Make choices that take into account what you want and what options are available

**KNOW YOURSELF**

Career counselors can help you kick off the self assessment process. Meet with us to discuss what is important to you. You may consider taking a self-assessment to help you clarify your interests and values.

**Action Items**

- Curious about the job market? Visit us to begin thinking about majors, internships, career options, or advanced degrees

- Engage in self-assessment to clarify what’s important to you in your career

- Consult the **Planning Your Future** and **Career Ladders** sections of the Career Center website for info on self-assessment, researching careers, choosing majors, making decisions, and more

- Use the **Career Fields** section of the Career Center website to research careers that interest you

- Talk to family, friends, peers and professors to explore career options

- Sign up for CareerMail via **Callisto** to get updates on events and opportunities related to your areas of interest

- Also utilize **Callisto** to search position listings as a means of exploring jobs and employers

- Research employers online with Career Center resources and Vault Employer & Industry Guides

- Attend Career Fairs, Employer Info Sessions, and less formal networking events to learn about employers, careers, and jobs

- Shadow a Cal alum through our winter Externship Program
Career exploration is a lifelong process for most people and can begin in many ways. If you’re seeking greater career clarity or hoping to choose a major or a professional path, start with what you already know about yourself. Make an appointment with a career counselor to discuss your needs and how to get started with your own career exploration.

You can start the self-assessment process on your own by using the activities below and the ones in our Planning your Future Know Yourself web section. Feel free to bring them to a career counselor to jump-start a conversation about your future plans.

### Values Ranking Activity

1. Rank the following 15 values according to their importance to you (1 = most important; 15 = least important).

2. On a separate sheet of paper, describe what it would look like to have each of your top 5 values met.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUES</th>
<th>RANK (1-15)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High earnings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping society</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenging problems</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
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<td>Status/prestige</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercising competence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast pace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Personal Traits Activity

1. Put a check mark by your 10 strongest personal traits below.

2. Put a second check mark by the 5 traits you would most like to use at work. On a separate sheet of paper, give detailed examples of times when you demonstrated these 5 traits at work, in an internship or elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONAL TRAITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Interests Activity

Take some time to think about the following open-ended statements designed to help you identify interests that can inform your career decisions.

I am curious about:

I ask questions about:

I’m concerned about:

I like to think, read, or talk about:

My favorite classes are:

### Skills Activity

**Top 10 Qualities Employers Seek In Job Candidates**

Which do you have, which do you need to build?

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 the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell or influence others

*National Association of Colleges & Employers Job Outlook 2014 Survey*
RESEARCH THE WORLD OF WORK

Knowing about career fields, jobs, and employers allows you to construct a targeted resume and develop an initial list of organizations to send it to. There are many different ways to approach researching the world of work:

1. Research Career Fields
2. Research Specific Job Titles or Functions
3. Research Specific Employers
4. Research Employer Sectors

Research Career Fields

Let’s say you have a general idea of what industry, career field, or setting appeals to you—for example, you’d like to do “something in the environmental field”—but have no idea what specific types of jobs you’d enjoy.

Questions you might have:
• What types of jobs are available in this career field?
• What are the positions called?
• What would I be doing in a particular job?
• Is this field geography specific (biotech in the Bay Area, San Diego and Massachusetts; publishing in New York; film in Los Angeles)?
• Where can I best use my skills and talents within this career field?

How to investigate possible options:
• Read about environmental career fields online to generate a list of possible career paths.
• Speak with people working in these areas—see “5 Steps for Informational Interviewing,” p. 7.
• Peruse job listings for entry-level positions and employers who hire college students or recent graduates.
• Use LinkedIn to find alumni who studied the same major and review their career path.

Research Specific Job Titles or Functions

Let’s say you’ve identified a set of skills you’d like to use, but don’t know the names of positions that draw on these skills, or what kinds of organizations typically offer such positions.

Questions you might have:
• In what types of organizations am I likely to find positions that utilize these skills?
• Are these jobs located in a particular division within an organization (human resources, sales and marketing, administration)?
• What qualifications do I need to have?
• What is the salary range?

How to investigate:
• Research job titles from career self-assessment results.
• Be strategic. If you want to do “some kind of writing or editing,” for example, look for positions with publications or with companies that produce training manuals.
• Search online job listings for employers who have positions utilizing your preferred skills.
• Ask people working in jobs that emerge from your research for names of related job titles—see “5 Steps for Informational Interviewing,” p. 7.

Research Specific Employers

Researching employers lets you know if you are truly interested in working with them; plus, being well informed before you approach employers is essential to marketing yourself.

Questions to research:
• What does the organization do?
• What is the organization’s culture and what type of people work there?
• How large is the organization?
• What sorts of job are available there?
• Are there opportunities for advancement?
• What are the future prospects for the organization?

How to investigate:
• Find the websites of specific employers that interest you. See how the organization describes itself, scan the site for career opportunities, and review annual reports and press releases if provided.
• To get a balanced perspective on an organization, find out what other people are saying about it.
• Search online news articles referencing the organization you are researching. Are they gearing up for a new project or announcing lay-offs?
• Talk with personal contacts, such as a current or former employee or a knowledgeable professional in the field.
Your job search may be influenced by your desire to work for specific types of employers such as nonprofits, government agencies, or business/industry. Within these sectors, you may have a more specific interest, e.g., a nonprofit group working with the environment; a government agency involved in low-cost housing; or a business concerned with consulting. Once you identify types of employers that interest you, you can develop a list of potential employers.

Questions you might have:
- What types of jobs are available in this sector?
- Who are the large employers? Who are the new, small, growing organizations?
- Which employers are doing well and which are not?
- What are some major trends and issues in this sector?
- Are there specific ways people typically begin their careers within this sector?

How to develop a list of potential employers
- Utilize the Book of Lists for info on the fastest growing and largest companies in California, available in the library in our second floor reception area.
- Utilize the websites on the “Resources to Research Employers” page in the Job Search section of our website.

5 STEPS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

An informational interview is a relatively informal conversation with someone working in an area of interest to you who is willing to give you information about a job, career field, industry, or work setting. It is not a job interview, and the objective is not to find job openings.

1. Identify people to interview. Here’s how:
- People you already know, even if they aren’t in fields of interest to you, can lead you to people who are. This includes family, friends, GSIs, professors, and former employers.
- Use social media tools like LinkedIn or Facebook, or even read the news and magazine articles, to find contacts.
- Use the @cal Career Network to identify Cal alumni who will talk to you about their careers.
- Search organizations on LinkedIn or search their websites for names of people working in your area of interest.
- Attend networking events and seminars to identify possible contacts.

2. Initiate contact
- Contact the person by email, phone, or letter. See “Informational Interviewing: How to Say It,” p. 8.
- Mention how you got their name (e.g., let them know if a mutual acquaintance referred you).
- Emphasize that you are looking for information, not a job, and that you are flexible with scheduling and time.

3. Prepare for the interview
- Conduct research on the career field or employer using the Internet and print resources.
- Develop a 30 second overview to introduce yourself, including your reasons for contacting this person.
- Plan open ended questions to keep conversation flowing rather than questions that call for yes/no answers.

4. Conduct the informational interview
- Dress appropriately (you want to make a positive impression even though this is not a job interview).
- Restate that your objective is to get information and advice, not a job.
- Take notes if you like and always ask for suggestions of other people to talk to.

5. Follow-up
- Keep records. Write down what you learned, what you still need to learn, and your reactions to how this field or position would “fit” with your lifestyle, interests, skills and future career plans.
- Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation. See “Thank You,” p. 8.
- Keep in touch. Mention that you followed up on their advice and tell them how things are going. This relationship could become an important part of your professional network.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING
**Informational Interviewing: How to Say It!**

**QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

- What is a typical day like for you?
- What are common entry-level jobs in this field?
- What are the rewards/challenges/frustrations of your work?
- I’ve read that the entry-level salary range for this field is ___? Have you found that to be the case?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level?
- What current issues and trends affect your work most?
- What steps should I take to prepare to enter this field?
- Where do you see growth or change in this industry?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?

**ASKING FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW in person/over the phone**

Modify this script to fit your situation. Remember that most people enjoy reflecting on their professional life and giving advice.

“Hello. My name is Jane Wilson and I’m a junior majoring in English at UC Berkeley. I heard you speak at an event sponsored by the Undergraduate Marketing Association last semester. I have become very interested in public relations and would like to find out as much as I can about the field. Would it be possible to schedule 15 or 20 minutes with you at your convenience to ask you a few questions and get your advice on how best to prepare to enter the field?”

**QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW via email**

**ASKING FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW via email**

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am a junior majoring in Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley and spoke with you briefly at the Cal Career Fair in September.

Although I am not currently looking for a job, I am very interested in learning all I can about careers in the field of public policy and what skills I might make a point of developing during my last year at Cal. I would greatly appreciate 15 to 20 minutes of your time to ask you a few questions about your role as Health Policy Analyst with the City of Berkeley, as well as other types of work in the field.

Thank you for your consideration. I will contact you next week to arrange a convenient time to meet with you.

Sincerely,

James Chan

**THANK YOU: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW via email**

Dear Mr. Watson:

I appreciate your meeting with me yesterday to talk about your work as the Ethnic Arts Center’s Public Relations Director. I now have a much better understanding of the PR field, particularly within a large nonprofit arts organization.

It was helpful to hear that an entry-level position often requires some experience in media relations. I have decided to take on those responsibilities for the annual fundraising event sponsored by my student organization. I have also called your colleague, Cindy Jones, at the East Asian Art Gallery to make an appointment to talk with her.

I very much appreciate having had the opportunity to talk with you. Thank you again for your time and advice.

Sincerely,

Tamar Espinoza

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**Sample Scenario: Finding Informational Interviewing Contacts**

A student developed an interest in marketing but wasn’t sure how to find people in the field to talk to. She had worked as an assistant in the payroll office of University Extension. She decided to talk over her career interests with her supervisor, who pointed out that Extension had a marketing department and that she’d be happy to introduce her to the director. This “right in your own backyard” referral led to a great informational interview and a lot of other contacts.
If you have actively engaged in self-assessment and exploration of careers, jobs, and employers, some options have probably fallen by the wayside while others still hold your interest. Hopefully you can now articulate more clearly what you want from work than before you started, although you may not be able to make a decision without gaining actual experience through internships or part-time or volunteer work. In the meantime, here are some questions to consider when thinking about career or job options:

- When do I need to make a decision whether or not to pursue this? When would I like to?
- What skills would I have the opportunity to develop?
- How will I feel if I don't pursue this option? How will others react if I do (or don't)?
- What are the best and worst case scenarios if I do (or don't) pursue this option?
- Do I have to choose just one option? Would a “portfolio career”—which would involve two or more types of part-time work—meet my needs better than one job?
- What information am I missing that would help me make this decision?
- What actions can I take to test this decision?

Decision Making Activity

There are many different decision making methods, including the Pros and Cons method outlined below. The method you use will depend on your personal decision making style and the weight of the decision. To learn more about decision making methods, visit the Career Center’s Planning Your Future web section or make an appointment with a career counselor.

Pros & Cons Activity

1. On a piece of paper, write down the decision you need to make. Write it as if you had already made the decision (for example, “Accept the XYZ Company job offer in Los Angeles.”)

2. Divide the piece of paper into two columns, “Pros” and “Cons.” Write down the outcomes of the decision that are positive in the “Pros” column; the negatives in the “Cons” column.

In the course of writing down your pros and cons, you will probably notice that there are some outcomes that are uncertain or are too hard to predict. Write these outcomes down on a separate piece of paper.

3. Conduct research about the outcomes that you are unsure about, then add those to the Pros or Cons column. For the outcomes that are simply too hard to predict, you might want to talk with other people to get their input or opinions. If possible, evaluate if the outcome is a pro or con and add that to your table.

As you begin to complete the table, it may become clearer whether this decision is what is best for you.

Note: Some outcomes carry more weight than others, so the number of pros and cons in each column is not necessarily indicative of whether or not you should move forward with the decision.

Career Myths

If you find yourself immobilized by any of these career myths, make a career counseling appointment to get your job or internship search back on track!

- Everyone else knows what they want to do.
- I’m behind and losing time by the minute.
- If I don’t go straight into a great job after graduating, I’ll be seen as a loser.
- If I don’t know what I want to do, I’ll wander aimlessly from one meaningless, menial job to another forever.
- Someone else can discover the right career for me.
- I should be able to make a quick decision on a career or job.
- Once I make a career decision, I’m stuck with it.
- I will or should be able to find the “perfect” career.
- I have to make this decision on my own.