

Preparing for Your Career

The average person will have 12 jobs in their lifetime – changing jobs about every 4.3 years. Thinking about what interests you and how you can develop your skills and experiences can be helpful in preparing for your career and job growth. Preparing for a career requires a combination of self-reflection, research, skills development, practical experience, and flexibility. This includes exploring your interests and skills, researching potential career paths, gaining relevant experience through job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships or volunteering, continuously developing your skills to stay competitive in your chosen field, and remaining open to new possibilities as your career grows and the job market inevitably changes. As you advance in your career, networking and building a strong professional brand are also crucial for advancement.

The following steps are a guide to help you plan and grow your career.

Step 1: Self-Assessment and Career Exploration

Reflect on activities and subjects that genuinely excite you and assess your strengths and challenges. Brainstorm a list of as many jobs/careers you can think of to relate to your interests, hobbies and skills. Think broadly about what interests you: sports, books, TV shows, movies, crafts, cooking, drawing/painting, knitting, doodling, writing, taking care of pets, younger siblings, etc., as well as those things more obviously career related.

Ask yourself:

- What am I good at? (for example, talking to people, organizing, working with your hands, being creative)
- What jobs make use of those skills?
- What do I enjoy doing?
- What do I not enjoy doing or is uninteresting to me?
- What jobs, careers or industries interest me?

Ask others:

- What activities do you think I enjoy most?
- What am I good at?
- What jobs or careers do you think I am best suited to temperamentally?
- What jobs or careers do you think would make best use of my skills?
- What jobs or careers do you think I would be happiest in?

Review the responses:

- What surprised you about the responses?
- What didn't surprise you?
- Which of the recommended jobs or careers appeals the least?
- Which of the recommended jobs or careers appeals the most?

Explore different professions that align with your interests and skills, considering factors like job outlook, required education, and growth potential. Resources like the [United States Bureau of](#)

Labor Statistics can provide data on growing job markets. School counselors may offer career assessments or other learning opportunities to explore different careers as well as helping identify educational opportunities that align with your goals and guiding college applications, scholarships, and apprenticeships.

Schools may also offer elective courses related to industry-specific skills (e.g., coding, graphic design, healthcare) and dual-enrollment opportunities that provide college credit for career-specific courses. Explore online platforms that offer comprehensive career assessment and planning tools tailored to individual students.

Fields to consider that are in a growth trend:

- **Business:** financial managers, project managers, supply chain and logistics managers, customer service, data entry
- **Creative/Arts:** digital marketing specialist, content writer/editor, social media manager, digital art, animation, art technology, graphic design, videography/photography, game design
- **Engineering:** software, biomedical, robotics, renewable energy, mechanical
- **Healthcare:** nurse practitioners, physician assistants, home health aides, medical assistants, respiratory therapists, speech language pathologists
- **Hospitality/Retail:** front office and event managers, restaurant, hotel, entertainment venue managers, retail managers
- **Technology:** software developers, IT managers, cybersecurity, cloud computing
- **Science and Research:** market research analysts, lab technicians
- **Teaching:** pre-school, day care, pre-K, K-12, community college, college
- **Trades:** electrician, welder, mechanic
- **Transportation:** delivery driver, truck dispatcher, logistics operator
- **Social Services:** community and social services, social worker

Step 2: Skills Development

Determine the hard skills (specific to the job) and soft skills (communication, teamwork) required for your desired career. Consider degree programs, certifications, apprenticeships, or online courses to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Seek out job shadowing opportunities, internships, volunteer positions, or part-time jobs to apply your skills and gain real-world experience. Join and participate in clubs and organizations (academic, social, athletic, political, spiritual, international, or cultural). Some clubs are specifically designed to familiarize students with a career field. Student organizations also offer valuable networking opportunities.

Step 3. Career Planning

Develop a career plan outlining your short-term and long-term goals and the steps needed to achieve them. Determine the skills and knowledge you need to acquire or improve for your chosen path. Outline how you will gain necessary skills, which might include courses, workshops, mentorship, certifications, or on-the-job experience.

Career Plan: Break down your career objectives into goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART goals). Identify your skills and knowledge gaps that would benefit from additional training or experience.

- **Draft Your Career Goals**

- **Specific:** Clearly define what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable:** How will you track your progress and know when you have achieved your goal?
- **Achievable:** Is the goal realistic given your current skills and resources?
- **Relevant:** Is the goal aligned with your overall career aspirations?
- **Time-bound:** Set a deadline for achieving the goal.
 - For example:
 - **Entry-level:** "To obtain a social media manager internship at [company name] within 6 months, utilizing my social media marketing skills to increase engagement by 15%."
 - **2-3 Years Experience:** "To grow my career to transition into a marketing manager role at a media company within two years, leveraging my experience in [specific skills] to successfully manage and deliver at least 3 projects with an average customer satisfaction score of 90%."
 - **Skills Growth:** "To become a certified journeyman electrician within the next three years by completing 4,000 hours (about 5 and a half months) of on-the-job training, passing the journeyman exam, and earning a \$5 per hour pay raise."
- **Plan skill development:** Outline how you will gain the necessary skills, which might include courses, workshops, mentorship, certifications, apprenticeships, internships, or on-the-job experience. Plan how you will gain new skills that will help you advance in your career, like computer and communication skills.
- **Develop a career action plan:** Create a detailed roadmap of the steps and activities to reach your SMART goals, using a calendar or planner to track progress.
- **Build credentials and refine your résumé:** Update your résumé and online profiles (like LinkedIn) to highlight your skills, achievements, and career objectives, tailoring them to target roles.

Step 4: Networking: Build a professional network by connecting with school counselors, work colleagues, mentors, and industry professionals. Networking plays a significant role in job searching, with estimates suggesting that between 70% and 85% of jobs are found through networking. This method often surpasses traditional job applications, as many positions are filled through referrals, internal recommendations, or relationships with recruiters.

- Connect with people in your field through networking events, career fairs, or online platforms (like LinkedIn).

- Find a mentor who can provide guidance and support as you navigate your career path.
- Participate in professional associations associated with your career field. Attend regional and national conferences and volunteer for student panels or presentations.
- Read professional associations' newsletters, journals, and websites to keep informed of trends in your chosen profession.
- Participate in community events and organizations related to your career and interests.

Step 5: Continuous Learning and Adapting

- **Stay updated on industry trends:** Continuously learn and adapt to recent technologies and best practices in your field.
- **Seek feedback and refine your approach:** Regularly solicit feedback from mentors, peers, and industry professionals to identify areas for improvement.
- **Be persistent and adaptable:** Your career path may not always be linear as your interests change or you learn new skills, and you may experience layoffs or other periods of unemployment. Be prepared to adapt to new opportunities, challenges, and setbacks along the way by being prepared to establish new career goals in a different field.
- **Be flexible:** Periodically assess your progress and be ready to adapt your plan as opportunities, interests, or circumstances change.

How to Ask for Help Preparing for Your Career

If one of your TILP goals is getting a job or going to school, ask your social worker, probation officer or other supportive adults (members of your CFT, your attorney, mentors, CASA, teachers, coaches, school counselors, etc.) what they can do assist you in achieving your goals:

- Assistance exploring careers, skills development and career planning
 - Identifying what's interesting to you
 - Building your skills to grow your career through education, training and work experience
 - Identifying resources to fund education and training
 - Creating and implementing your career action plan