



# Career Choices in a Changing World

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will determine common goals and motivations for pursuing a college degree and entering the workforce. You will also preview some resources that can help you evaluate your values, interests, and work preferences.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Who Am I?
  - a. Values
  - b. Interests
  - c. Preferences
  - d. Understanding Cultural Bias
2. Tools for Self-Reflection
  - a. Personality Tests
  - b. Interest Inventories
  - c. Value Assessments
3. Seeing the Larger Picture: Social Responsibility



## BEFORE YOU START

Think back to when you first started planning for college or looking at college courses. How did you decide which courses to take? Who or what influenced the area of study you decided to pursue?

Learning more about yourself is sort of like driving down the highway—it's important to know where you've been, where you are, and where you're headed. This lesson will help you through this process.

## 1. Who Am I?

To choose a lasting and satisfying career, it is important to gain insight on what you value, what interests you, and your overall work preferences. This type of analysis is called **self-reflection**. Thinking about your behavior

and beliefs is an important part of your self- and social awareness skill which helps to guide your growth and development.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Self-Reflection

The process of thinking about your behavior and beliefs.

#### 1a. Values

Our **values** are the principles that guide our decisions in life. No two people share the same set of values because they are personal. When faced with decisions, our values often guide the choices we make and even our behaviors. The following table shows some common values, but there are many, many more.

Achievement	Community	Fame	Justice	Optimism	Service
Adventure	Competency	Family	Kindness	Peace	Spirituality
Balance	Creativity	Friendships	Knowledge	Pleasure	Stability
Beauty	Culture	Growth	Leadership	Popularity	Success
Compassion	Curiosity	Happiness	Learning	Recognition	Status
Challenge	Fairness	Honesty	Love	Religion	Wealth
Citizenship	Faith	Humor	Loyalty	Respect	Wisdom



#### REFLECT

Choose three values from the table that you consider to be your top priorities in life, or think of three of your own. Why are these three values important to you? Do your values change between school, work, and home?

What you value at home might be different than what you value at school or work. When setting goals, it's important to identify the context. For example, you might value humor when you're with family and friends, but valuing humor in the same way in the workplace could be unproductive and not align with company goals.

Remember that our values are not always static. They can change as we grow older and experience more things. But for many people, values tend to provide a long-term foundation upon which many things are based.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Value

An inherent principle that guides a person's decisions and behavior.

#### 1b. Interests

Our **interests** represent things that bring us joy and pique our curiosities. The definition is broad, but an interest can be an activity, academic subject, culture, period in history, theory, process, and the list goes on. Interests tend to be things that motivate us and push us to want to learn more.

When you enrolled in college, you probably heard the question, “So what do you want to be?” from your friends and family. For some, the answer comes easily but for others, it’s difficult to know. In both cases, one usually answers the question by listing all their main interests to see which option could lead to a specific career.



## REFLECT

Sometimes it helps to think about our interests as sources of energy. Recall everything that you did at home or in the community yesterday. Maybe you worked on a project or completed a number of tasks. Which tasks seemed to *give* you energy? Which tasks *took away* your energy? Create two columns on a separate piece of paper, if you want.

Our interests act like fuel for an engine. When selecting a career path, look for things that energize you and fuel your curiosities.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Interest

Something a person enjoys, finds motivating, and would like to learn more about.

#### 1c. Preferences

Another factor that steers our life and career decisions is our **preferences**. A preference is an option that we choose when given a finite number of things to choose from.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Tamara is interested in a career in chemistry. She looks forward to the challenging lab work and research that lies ahead, but she also appreciates nature and the outdoors. Tamara prefers a chemistry discipline that will balance lab time with time spent in nature. She plans to become a geochemist ("geo" means *earth*) or water chemist, but she has already ruled out pharmacology (medicine).

The number of career preferences is immeasurable—there are simply too many options to list. Maybe you prefer to work in a factory instead of an office. Perhaps you want to work for a small startup instead of a large, established corporation. No matter what the options are, remember to be honest with yourself when it comes to your preferences.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Preference

A personal choice that is made, based on a set of alternatives.

#### 1d. Understanding Cultural Bias

Being honest with yourself means that answers to career questions must come from inside *you*. External guidance and information are also important, but only if they're free from cultural bias. **Cultural bias** is judging situations based primarily on one's own culture. It happens when we apply beliefs we hold about people and situations based on messages that come from within our own cultural group. While cultural beliefs are important, they can also limit our ability to appreciate different perspectives. Falling victim to cultural bias can also lead to mismatches between careers and interests.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** In America, there is an inherent cultural belief that males generally perform better at mathematics than females (Correll, 2001). But the empirical evidence found to support this notion is weak.

This cultural bias leads to **stereotypical** perceptions of a person's math abilities, especially at an early age.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** A young woman who is the first person in her family to attend college may wish to study engineering. But, she may face criticism from family or friends who do not believe in the value of a college education and who also believe that engineering is only a career option for men. As a consequence of these continued objections, the young woman decides to set aside her goal of pursuing a college education.

These examples show the unfortunate results of how cultural bias can affect one's career choices. Women who aspire to become mathematicians, physicists, and engineers may be discouraged to do so, even though their beliefs about math are unfounded. These examples stress the importance of looking inward versus outward and being scrupulous about what you see and hear to maintain your self-confidence. To avoid cultural bias in any situation, you need to respect others' beliefs and cultures. You also need to know yourself. This is a key part of your self and social awareness skill that will have lasting effects on your relationships with others.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Cultural Bias**

Judging people or situations based primarily on beliefs derived from one's own culture.

##### **Stereotype**

A widely-held but oversimplified idea of something.

## 2. Tools for Self-Reflection

Reflecting on our own skills, values, interests, and preferences is not always easy. The picture can get murky with so many legitimate career paths to follow, and your interests can change over time.

The good news is that there are many tools offered by organizations and universities that can help you gain insight into yourself. Some tools are free and others charge fees, so be sure to read the fine print or consult with a career counselor before using them. Below are just a few.

### **2a. Personality Tests**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is an example of a personality test. It's a questionnaire that determines your preferences about how you perceive the world and make decisions. The test places you on a continuum based on your personality traits. Here are the preference pairs on which you're judged:

The way you direct and receive energy		The way you take in information	
E Extroversion	I Introversion	S Sensing	N iNtuition
Energized by other people and taking action	Energized by one's own ideas and experiences	Focus on perceptions through the five senses	Focus on patterns and seeing the larger picture

The way you decide and come to conclusions		The way you approach the outside world	
T Thinking	F Feeling	J Judging	P Perceiving
Decisions based on truth and logic	Decisions based on personal values, society, and harmony	Take an organized, planned approach and come to conclusions quickly	Seek out more information, taking a flexible and spontaneous approach

At the end of the test, each participant receives a personality designation based on the four preference pairs. An ESTJ, for example, is a person who tends toward extroversion, sensing, thinking, and judging.

## 2b. Interest Inventories

The Myers-Briggs Strong Interest Inventory® is a tool that assists with career planning. If you have difficulty choosing a career, this tool helps you get to the root of what's important to you. The inventory uses data from like-minded people who are working in the field to match your interests to theirs for a strong career fit. Other organizations also offer similar tools.

## 2c. Value Assessments

Some tools help you uncover your personal values. For example, the Values Assessment by MyPlan.com helps you understand what you look for in a job and what motivates you. The results give you six work values with a ranking of which values are most important to you:

- achievement
- independence
- recognition
- relationships
- support
- working conditions

# 3. Seeing the Larger Picture: Social Responsibility

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'"



THINK ABOUT IT

Think about Dr. King's quote. What do his words mean to you? How might you use this profound question to guide you as you transition from college to career?

**Social responsibility** is acting in the best interest of society as a whole. It means making positive contributions to all facets of society including the environment, human rights, government, healthcare, education, and economics. Social responsibility is often referred to more casually as *the greater good*.

Few would argue that the skills, academic training, and life experiences you've been acquiring since you were a child belong to you. But your story really doesn't end there. With a college degree on the horizon, one intriguing question ahead of you is, "How might you share your wonderful gifts and talents with society?"



#### KEY CONCEPT

Your skills and natural talents are your single best starting point for realizing your contribution potential (Rath, 2020).

A college education means different things to different people. For some, an education is an assurance of a career that will help them live a comfortable lifestyle. Others are simply driven by curiosity and a thirst for new knowledge. These are both admirable and valid reasons for pursuing higher education. Irrespective of your reason, asking not only *what you need* but also *what the world needs from you* can help you match your ever-growing talents to just the right occupation.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Social Responsibility

Acting in the best interest of society as a whole.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that your **values**, **interests**, and work **preferences** shape **who you are** and are a strong indicator of future job satisfaction. Gaining insight into your preferences isn't always easy. You must be aware of **cultural biases** that could derail your career selections. Some companies, organizations, and universities have developed free and fee-based **tools for self-reflection** to pinpoint your strengths and interests. Several examples include **personality tests**, **interest inventories**, and **value assessments**. **Seeing the larger picture** helps promote **social responsibility**. It's one way that you can positively share your gifts and talents with the world.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

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**Interest**

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**Preference**

A personal choice that is made, based on a set of alternatives.

**Self-Reflection**

The process of thinking about your behavior and beliefs.

**Social Responsibility**

Acting in the best interest of society as a whole.

**Stereotype**

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**Value**

An inherent principle that guides a person's decisions and behavior.