

Selecting a Major

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the process of choosing a major that is right for you by defining best practices. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Choosing a Major

If you're not one of those students who arrives at school knowing exactly what they want to do when they graduate, how do you go about determining which course of study and major is the right fit for you and your future?

- **Take a variety of courses your first year.** The first thing you might do to put yourself in the best position to select the right major is to be thoughtful about course selection early on in your college career.
- **Identify the subjects you most enjoy and where you see potential to grow** If you take courses in a variety of subjects—not haphazardly but with an eye on choosing a major—you can evaluate potential areas of study by considering which courses most pique your interest and suit your talents.
- **Consider career options related to your strengths and interests** Some of the most important questions you can ask yourself at this point are: what do I most enjoying doing? What career can I envision myself both enjoying and excelling in?
- **Review the requirements for the majors with the help of your advisor.** After you identify a major or a career you are interested in, follow up with some basic research. What are your school's requirements to earn a degree in the subject you are interested in? A school advisor is there to help you select classes and determine your overall course of study.
- **Determine if you have the time, resources, ability, and focus to complete the major.** Some helpful questions that you can ask yourself at this point are: What does it take to secure a job in a given field and is there a feasible path for you to succeed in that field from where you are right now—essentially, do you have the time, resources, ability, focus, and drive to devise and execute a plan to meet your educational and career goals?

When assessing a potential career path, it is wise to balance being optimistic and being realistic—don't be afraid to aim high, but make sure you are informed about what it will take to get where you want to go before you set out on that career path.

HOW TO CHOOSE A MAJOR



IN CONTEXT

When you declare a major, you become a kind of specialist. Specialization in education at all levels is a lively topic of debate among scholars and policy-makers in the field. Most grade schools and high schools do not have a particular focus, but there are some schools that have, for instance, a focus on the arts, the sciences, or language immersion. In addition, there is a long tradition of technical or vocational high schools. While specialization in the form of declaring a major has long been the norm in higher education, there are still competing ideas and different philosophies about what higher education is for.

As employers increasingly require higher education, and sometimes specific college degrees, more and more students view their education as a means or a necessary step on the way to their career. This perspective is very practical, but it is arguably at odds with what's called the liberal arts model of education, which dates back to ancient Greece. In the liberal arts model of education, the goal is to produce students with a well-rounded base of knowledge across a number of subjects, especially those that don't tend to have direct practical application. While you don't need to engage in the debate at this level, it is a good idea for you to reflect on and determine what your education is for—what do you want to accomplish in it and get out of it?

2. Course Requirements for Majors

Your choice of a major does not simply let people know which subject you are most interested in; it also sets a specific task ahead of you in terms of the requirements to earn a degree in that particular program. This typically means you need to move through introductory courses that give you the broader foundation of your chosen field toward more advanced “upper division” courses that are mainly geared toward students in the major.

Before choosing a major, you should educate yourself about the requirements so that you know what you are

getting into.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Maybe you are considering a major in Nursing, but learning that you would be required to take Organic Chemistry would impact your decision.

When choosing a major, it is also a good idea to consult with an advisor. Recall that the role of an academic advisor is to help students select classes and determine their overall course of study.



HINT

An advisor can answer your questions about the requirements for a major or minor. They can also be a good resource for you in discussing a potential career path.



SUMMARY

Choosing a major is a significant life decision that will have an impact on your career. Choose a major that is a good match for your interests and capabilities by reviewing the **requirements for this major**.