

CAREER READINESS GUIDE

Prepare for success with your
liberal arts advantage



THE LIBERAL ARTS ADVANTAGE

Employers and alumni have overwhelmingly told us that a liberal arts degree, with its emphasis on a well-rounded education, is the foundation for a productive career. They have also told us that essential competencies—such as thinking critically, communicating clearly, and solving complex problems—are more important than specific undergraduate majors.

The collective expertise of the staff in the Office of Undergraduate Education and Career Services in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota was leveraged to develop the Career Readiness framework to support the career development of all liberal arts students as part of the college's Career Readiness Initiative. This Career Readiness Guide has been made available to partner liberal arts institutions to help their students understand their liberal arts advantage.

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LET'S HARNESS YOUR LIBERAL ARTS ADVANTAGE

You may not be aware of it—you may not even believe it just yet—but if you're a liberal arts student, you will be in an exciting position of strength and possibility when you graduate.

In fact, when you leave here to pursue a job or graduate/professional school or an independent path or some other version of a career as you define it, you will have an unmistakable edge—what this guide calls the *Liberal Arts Advantage*.

“Really?” you might be thinking.

After all, like many students, you may be a little unsure about where your liberal arts degree will ultimately take you. Maybe you've even had to deal with the “what can you do with that?” routine from skeptical (though often misinformed) family members and friends.

Employers especially, though, have a more telling question for you. They don't ask “what can you do with **that**?” They ask, simply: “What can you **do**?”

As a liberal arts major, you can do a lot.

Through your experiences inside and outside the classroom, you are developing 10 *Core Career Competencies*—skills like Analytical & Critical Thinking, Oral & Written Communication, and Applied Problem Solving that are crucial to success in every setting. These competencies, and the *career readiness* they demonstrate, **are** your Liberal Arts Advantage.

But you can't simply say you have these competencies; you have to show it. You have to prove it, convincingly. That's what the tenth competency, Career Management—and this guide—are all about.

You're about to learn a comprehensive, three-phase *Career Management Model* that will help you:

- **Explore** yourself (your interests, values, personality, etc.) and your academic and career options.
- Gain critical **Experience** through various engagement activities, on and off campus.
- Learn how to effectively communicate your competencies and experiences so that you will **Excel** after you graduate, whether it's in a job, in graduate/professional school, or in another capacity.

This *Career Readiness Guide* is designed specifically for you as a liberal arts major. It will help you understand your Liberal Arts Advantage and then harness it. We are here as well, to guide you along the way.

Your future is bright. Your liberal arts background makes it even brighter. We can't wait to see where you take yourself.



SUA CDO

SUA CDO
Soka Career Development Office
Soka University of America

WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU!

TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND PEOPLE

SUA CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

<https://sokannect.soka.edu/cdo/home/>

(949) 480-4140

Ikeda, 3rd Floor - Student Affairs

RATE PLATFORM

<https://rate.soka.edu/>

Handshake

<https://soka.joinhandshake.com>

OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

GoinGlobal

<https://online.goinglobal.com/>

Parker Dewey Micro-Internships

<https://info.parkerdewey.com/soka/students>

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GET READY

This guide has one simple purpose: To help you be READY for your future career, whatever that career may be—because liberal arts students are well prepared to go many directions. Whether you're in your first year or your last or somewhere in between, if you came here from an urban or a rural area, from this state or another state or another country, entering as a freshman or transferring in—and no matter what gender expression or cultural practices or varying backgrounds and experiences you bring: This book is for you. It's for all students as unique individuals with intersectional identities, to help you navigate your career path in a way that supports who you are.

In the context of the liberal arts, *career readiness* means:

- Developing the *Core Career Competencies*, which reflect the very essence of liberal arts education—and the competitive advantage it offers in today's uncertain and dynamic economy.
- Learning to articulate your competencies.
- Being able to translate your competencies into the language of employers and others.

The first part of this guide describes what career readiness is in the context of the liberal arts. You'll learn about the rationale behind it, get a sense of its organizing framework, and discover the collegiate resources available to help you become career ready. Most of what you need is already present in a liberal arts education. The unique focus of the career readiness concept is helping you recognize the Core Career Competencies you gain as a liberal arts student and then articulate them in other settings.

We begin doing that here and continue it throughout the guide.

One aspect of career readiness that is not a standard component of a liberal arts education is Career Management. So the second part of this guide offers an in-depth discussion of Career Management concepts. Here you'll find very practical, nuts-and-bolts advice on everything from exploring majors and pursuing significant experiences to searching for a job or applying for graduate school.

All along the way you'll be guided by the *Career Management Model*—created to help you develop your Career Management competency and prepare you for your lifelong career journey. The model is made up of three interdependent phases, which you cycle through continuously as both you and the world around you change:

EXPLORE » EXPERIENCE » EXCEL

Whatever you do, wherever you go, however you plan to get there, we want you to be READY. Poised for a positive, productive life after college.

THE MORE YOU PUT IN, THE MORE YOU'LL GET OUT

This guide isn't meant to be read straight through in one sitting. We recognize that you will jump around various sections as you need them. Just make sure you use it! It's like the rest of your liberal arts education: The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

So read the guide, but don't stop there. Apply what you're learning. Do the reflection and decision-making exercises and take action. Visit the people, offices, and websites we suggest, and take the time to reflect on—and consistently document!—the Core Career Competencies you are continuously developing through all of your experiences, in and out of the classroom.

Becoming career ready involves hard work and dedicated reflection and decision making, along with taking specific action steps—you'll notice prompts to help you throughout this guide. Career readiness is also exciting and rewarding, especially if you are willing and able to take it on as your challenge and embrace it as yet another reason to study in the liberal arts.

That said: Please know that this guide is not your sole career readiness resource. We also have programs, systems, and knowledgeable people—including advisors, career counselors, faculty members, and others—in place to help you become career ready.

Know, too, that there are many other resources at your fingertips to complement the people who will support you along your way. You'll find a comprehensive list of them on page 3 of this guide.

IT'S TIME TO START DOWN YOUR PATH TO CAREER READINESS; WE'LL BE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Give Yourself “the Time, the Space, and the Effort” to Become Career Ready

“Deciding on your career is (obviously) an enormous decision, and one that requires a lot of careful thought and reflection. But college is so oppressively busy, with so many different demands and obligations cluttering up your mind, that—at least in my experience—it's very difficult to find the time and mental space to consider anything deeply. It can be easy, therefore, to get swept up in a particular track or a particular career path by inertia: because that's the path you started on, and because you've never really taken the time to consider getting off of it. That doesn't mean, of course, that there's anything wrong with staying on the path you started on. Just make sure you give yourself the time, the space, and the effort to really consider what you want to do.”

All Sorts of Career Readiness Help Is Available to You—Right on Campus

“Take advantage of the many resources offered here. Talk to professors. (Even in large classes, they will almost certainly be happy—even excited—to talk with you.) Go to the career center. Watch your email for opportunities sent out by your academic department or the career center. Get involved with alumni mentors. Go to special events and network.”

THE LIBERAL ARTS:

OUR COMMITMENT TO CAREER READINESS

- What Is Career Readiness? Why It Matters for Liberal Arts Students
- Career Readiness Support Structure
- Make Your Liberal Arts Education Meaningful to You
- The Career Management Model: Explore, Experience, Excel

WHAT IS CAREER READINESS?

WHY IT MATTERS FOR LIBERAL ARTS STUDENTS

There are many ways to define and acknowledge the value of a liberal arts degree. Your liberal arts education is preparing you to be an active citizen, a smart consumer, an innovator, a problem solver, an analytical and critical thinker in all you do and in your many life roles. It is also giving you the sheer joy of studying, in depth, something you care deeply about. All of these outcomes matter. All of them are worth the time, energy, and money you invest.

But if you're like most students, one of the reasons you're here in college is to prepare for a future career, whatever that may look like for you. And you want to be **READY**—career ready—when you leave here.

Let's break down this concept of *career readiness*, starting with the word “career.”

In the liberal arts, we recognize and support the idea that “career” means different things to different people at different times. For most college students, it means pursuing employment after graduation, usually in the form of a private-sector job but sometimes in nonprofit organizations, public service (government) agencies, the military, or related opportunities like AmeriCorps or teaching abroad programs. For some college students, “career” means pursuing additional education (i.e., graduate or professional school). For a small but growing few, it means pursuing some sort of independent journey, like starting a small business or doing freelance work.

We define “career readiness” as developing—and then being able to convincingly demonstrate and articulate—ten Core Career Competencies that reflect the very essence of your liberal arts education. These competencies have been identified through exhaustive discussions with employers, graduate and professional schools, faculty members, alumni, government agencies, and national career development organizations.

The Core Career Competencies are:

- » Analytical & Critical Thinking
- » Applied Problem Solving
- » Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making
- » Innovation & Creativity
- » Oral & Written Communication
- » Teamwork & Leadership
- » Engaging Diversity
- » Active Citizenship & Community Engagement
- » Digital Literacy
- » Career Management

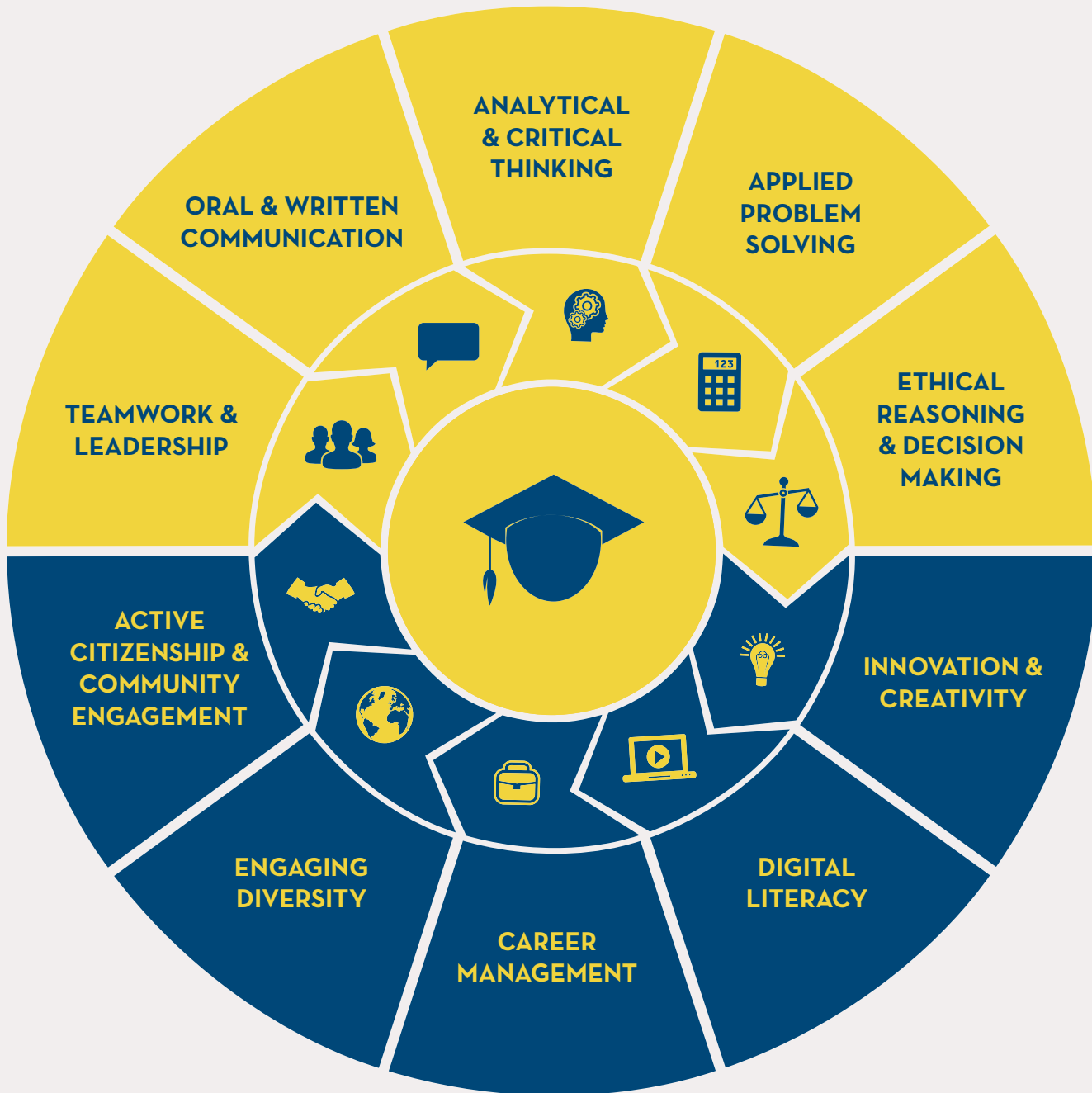
The Core Career Competencies not only define career readiness, they give you a practical framework to **show** your career readiness—to prove it—to prospective employers or to graduate school admissions committees. They also help you and your family see the liberal arts advantage, spelled out in tangible terms.

If you are intentional and plan your education carefully, you will develop these Core Career Competencies in your classes and through outside engagement activities you can pursue as a liberal arts student. You can then make a consistent habit of carefully documenting your experiences—and pinpointing how they have helped you build the various Core Career Competencies—by using a powerful interactive tool called RATE™ (Reflect-Articulate-Translate-Evaluate), which we describe in depth on page 18 of this guide.

All of this—all of your proactive, sustained critical thinking and actions—will give you an indisputable competitive edge in today's changing, complex world.

YOUR LIBERAL ARTS ADVANTAGE

*The Core Career Competencies
That Define Career Readiness*



THE CORE CAREER COMPETENCIES THAT DEFINE CAREER READINESS

Analytical & Critical Thinking comprehensively explores issues, ideas, knowledge, evidence, and values before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. Those competent in Analytical & Critical Thinking:

- Recognize there may be more than one valid point of view.
- Evaluate an issue or problem based on multiple perspectives, while accounting for personal biases.
- Identify when information is missing or if there is a problem, prior to coming to conclusions and making decisions.

Applied Problem Solving is the process of designing, evaluating, and implementing a workable strategy to achieve a goal. Those competent in Applied Problem Solving:

- Recognize constraints.
- Generate a set of alternative courses of action.
- Evaluate alternatives using a set of criteria.
- Select and implement the most effective solution.
- Monitor the actual outcomes of that solution.

Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making recognizes ethical issues arising in a variety of settings or social contexts, reflects on the ethical concerns that pertain to the issue, and chooses a course of action based on these reflections. Those competent in Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making:

- Assess their own personal and moral values and perspectives as well as those of other stakeholders.
- Integrate these values and perspectives into an ethical framework for decision making.
- Consider intentions and the short- and long-term consequences of actions and the ethical principles that apply in the situation before making decisions.

Innovation & Creativity generates new, varied, and unique ideas, and makes connections between previously unrelated ideas. Those competent in Innovation & Creativity:

- Challenge existing paradigms and propose alternatives without being constrained by established approaches or anticipated responses of others.
- Employ their knowledge, skills, abilities, and sense of originality.
- Have a willingness to take risks and overcome internal struggle to expose their creative self in order to bring forward new work or ideas.

Oral & Written Communication intentionally engages with an audience to inform, persuade, or entertain. Those competent in Oral & Written Communication:

- Consider relationships with the audience and the social and political context in which one communicates, as well as the needs, goals, and motivations of all involved.
- Have proficiency in, knowledge of, and competence with the means of communication (including relevant language and technical skills).
- Ensure that communication is functional and clear.

Teamwork & Leadership builds and maintains collaborative relationships based on the needs, abilities, and goals of each member of a group. Those competent in Teamwork & Leadership:

- Understand their own roles and responsibilities within a group, and how they may change in differing situations.
- Are able to influence others without necessarily holding a formal position of authority, and have the willingness to take action.
- Leverage the strengths of the group to achieve a shared vision or objective.
- Effectively acknowledge and manage conflict toward solutions.

Engaging Diversity cultivates awareness of one's own identity and cultural background and that of others through an exploration of domains of diversity, which may include: race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, ability, class, gender, age, spirituality, etc. This requires an understanding of historical and social contexts and a willingness to confront perspectives of dominant cultural narratives and ideologies, locally, nationally, or globally. Those competent in Engaging Diversity:

- Understand how culture affects perceptions, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Recognize how social structures and systems create and perpetuate inequities, resulting in social and economic marginalization and limited opportunities.
- Commit to the fundamental principles of freedom of thought and expression, equality, respect for others, diversity, and social justice; and to participate in society as conscious global citizens.
- Are able to navigate an increasingly complex and diverse world by appreciating and adopting multiple cultural perspectives or worldviews.

Active Citizenship & Community Engagement develops a consciousness about one's potential contributions and roles in the many communities one inhabits, in person and online, and takes action accordingly. Those competent in Active Citizenship & Community Engagement:

- Actively engage with the communities in which they are involved.
- Build awareness of how communities impact individuals, and how, in turn, an individual impacts, serves, and shapes communities.
- Evolve their awareness of culture and power in community dynamics.

Digital Literacy leverages knowledge of information and communications technology and media literacies, and utilizes the interpersonal skills necessary to succeed in a digital space. Those competent in Digital Literacy:

- Assess sources of information.
- Use technologies responsibly.
- Adapt tools to new purposes.
- Keep up with the evolving technology landscape.

Career Management is the active engagement in the process of exploring possible careers, gaining meaningful experience, and building skills that help one excel after college and lead to employment or other successful post-graduation outcomes. Those competent in Career Management:

- Understand their values, interests, identity, personality, skills, strengths, and Core Career Competencies.
- Are able to articulate how those characteristics, combined with and shaped by a liberal arts education, lead to career success.



BEYOND YOUR MAJOR

Notice that the Core Career Competencies are independent of your major. When the Association of American Colleges & Universities asked employers what they most value in both their recently hired and their more experienced employees, 93 percent of the respondents said they want employees with liberal arts backgrounds—and that fundamental liberal arts competencies such as thinking critically, communicating clearly, and solving complex problems are more important to them than a specific undergraduate major.

Employers are telling us again and again that your value goes beyond your major. They are concerned far less about what you major in and far more about what you can do: about your competencies. That's why you need to complement your major with a competency mindset and ensure that you develop the Core Career Competencies during your undergraduate years. Developing the Core Career Competencies—and being able to show it—*is career readiness*.

All of that being said, it makes sense to spend some time and energy choosing a major that is a good fit for you. Your major should reflect your interests and values because it dictates what you will be studying in many of your college classes. In some ways it should reflect what you're most interested in studying. Your major might end up leading you toward a career area where you may spend much of your professional life. It will be part of your identity, and the gym where you give your mind its most in-depth workout. So choose your major wisely, but do not let career indecision prohibit you from making a choice.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What steps do you need to take to actively and purposefully plan your education so that it works for you—so that it helps you achieve your interests and goals?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

Which Core Career Competencies might you want to focus on the most, and how might you tailor your academic and engagement experiences to help you develop these competencies?



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP



What Is Engagement?

Engagement activities, sometimes referred to as *co-curricular* or *experiential* activities, are activities outside the classroom that complement your academic pursuits—and therefore play their own essential role in your journey toward career readiness.

Some examples:

- Student groups
- Leadership
- Volunteering
- Learning abroad or away
- Research
- Employment
- Internships

COMPETENCIES: THEIR KEY ROLE IN YOUR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

Liberal arts institutions use many lists that guide where they will take you as a student—lists that articulate what you'll learn by the time you graduate. There are lists of student learning outcomes; student development outcomes; and now the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness.

If you examine these lists—whether they come from institutions themselves or from outside groups like the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)—you will see that certain ideas appear in multiple places. This is not simple redundancy. The fact that some ideas, such as critical thinking and communication, show up on multiple lists merely indicates the importance of the idea in multiple contexts.

All of the academic and engagement activities you pursue as a liberal arts student contribute to your development of the Core Career Competencies, related competencies, your knowledge and skills associated with your major, and your broader liberal arts education. So you must not only plan your undergraduate years to complete your major(s), minor(s), and other requirements; you should also plan carefully to develop your Core Career Competencies. This alone does not make you career ready, but it is the first step: Learn it, then show it. That's what you need to do in a competitive world.

ALIGNMENT ACROSS COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

LIBERAL ARTS Core Career Competencies	AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes	NACE Career Competencies
Applied Problem Solving	Teamwork and Problem Solving	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
Analytical & Critical Thinking	Critical and Creative Thinking; Inquiry and Analysis	
Engaging Diversity	Intercultural Knowledge and Competence	Global/Intercultural Fluency
Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making	Ethical Reasoning and Action	
Oral & Written Communication	Written and Oral Communication	Oral/Written Communications
Innovation & Creativity	Critical and Creative Thinking	
Active Citizenship & Community Engagement	Civic Knowledge and Engagement— Local and Global	
Career Management	Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning	Career Management
Teamwork & Leadership	Teamwork and Problem Solving	Teamwork/Collaboration & Leadership
Digital Literacy	Information Literacy; Quantitative Literacy	Digital Technology
		Professionalism/Work Ethic
Majors and Minors: Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies		

CAREER READINESS SUPPORT STRUCTURE

You are not alone on your journey toward career readiness. In fact, expert help is all around you, right here on campus. There are four key career readiness resources you can access as a liberal arts student:

- Advising
- Academic Departments
- The Career Center
- RATE™ (Reflect-Articulate-Translate-Evaluate)

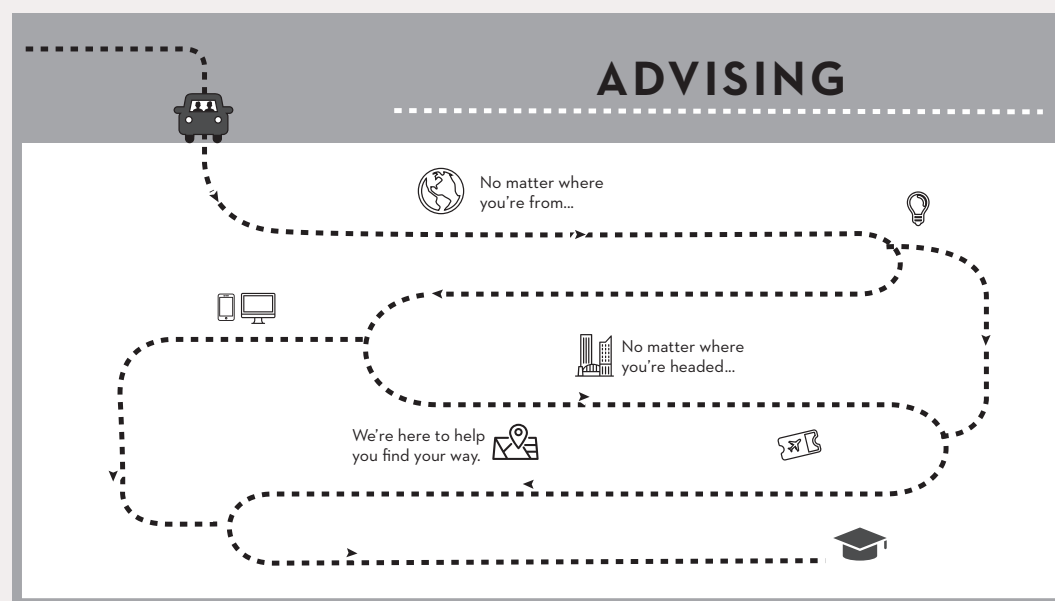
These resources are integrated into the academic and engagement offerings here, and behind them are people who care about your future and want to help you navigate the complexities of your unique career readiness journey.

ADVISING

As a student, you have an advisor here to support you. Your advisor will guide you—purposefully and continuously—on the career readiness path.

Your advisor offers you the resources and information you need to start identifying your strengths and interests; choose a combination of major(s), minor(s), and certificate(s) that aligns with your academic and career goals; and graduate on time. Your advisor is in a learning partnership with you. In collaboration with your advisor, and through an ongoing process of reflection and decision making, you will develop plans for academic achievement, engagement, and career readiness. Of course, if you're like many students, your overall plans may change along the way, either by choice or by necessity. That's why your advisor will also lead you through a process of parallel planning—so that you have route B to fall back on if you decide to choose a direction different from the original route A.

Meet with your advisor at least once each semester.



Specifically, your advisor can support your liberal arts education by helping you:

- Talk about what's going well for you, as well as any challenges you're encountering.
- Share what you enjoy about your classes and engagement experiences—and what you don't like as well.
- Discuss how your courses and engagement experiences build your Core Career Competencies.
- Create an academic and engagement plan for the next year.
- Investigate majors and minors that align with your values and interests.
- Navigate campus resources.
- Participate in courses that broaden your perspectives and enhance your abilities.
- Articulate your Core Career Competencies and transferable skills.
- Recognize the value of your liberal arts education.
- Attain timely graduation.

Your advisor will help you explore majors and select one (or perhaps more than one); select courses in your chosen program(s); connect with related student organizations (which are often their own career readiness outlet!); and resolve your discipline-related questions in such areas as career options, graduate school, and learning abroad.

You can think of your advisor as your navigator—helping you find the academic and career path that works for you.

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

The various academic departments here offer their own wide assortment of career readiness resources and activities. Among them:

- Student organizations connected to the department.
- Department-specific alumni connections.
- Periodic career readiness-related events—presentations by professional speakers, panel discussions with people working in a particular industry, and site visits to related companies and organizations.
- Research activities.
- Mentoring opportunities.
- Internships.

To see what career readiness resources a specific department has, just ask them!

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Meeting with Your Advisor Regularly Matters—Once Per Semester Is Ideal

1. You'll be able to reflect upon what you've done.
2. You'll have time to talk about your progress and what you hope to accomplish in the next semester or year.
3. You can get some feedback about the engagement activities you have planned.
4. You can connect your academics to your post-graduation plans.
5. You'll get to know your advisor and have a personal connection with them—so that when you need help solving a problem, you'll know where to turn.

THE CAREER CENTER

The career center helps you with the entire range of career-related concerns you might have—throughout your undergraduate experience (not just senior year, as some students mistakenly believe!). Indeed, you can begin working with a career counselor freshman year and develop a career planning partnership that you can utilize throughout your time as a student. You'll find contact and location information for the career center on page 3 of this guide.

(Note: Later in this guide, you will learn more about the Career Management Model that we use to support the unique career needs of liberal arts students.)

The career center can help you:

- Learn more about yourself—your interests, your skills, what matters to you, your personality—and how it all relates to your choices about majors, careers, and the specific ways you'll develop the Core Career Competencies.
- Explore majors or minors and then choose one.
- Research and prepare for potential career paths.
- Discover internship, volunteering, research, campus leadership, and employment opportunities.
- Learn job search techniques like writing a solid résumé and preparing effectively for interviews.
- Get information on post-graduation possibilities, including full-time jobs, gap-year service opportunities, and graduate programs.
- Connect to a variety of career-related events and opportunities to engage with employers.

The career readiness support structure ensures that you have plenty of help available to you as you work toward your own career readiness—that you have knowledgeable, caring people you can turn to for guidance. All along the way.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

How much do you know about the career readiness resources available to you?

Which career readiness resource(s) will you use in, say, the next few months?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

1. Read about the Core Career Competencies in detail to learn more about them.
2. Commit to 1-3 action steps in your career management that you can accomplish today, next week, and this semester.



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP >>

Employer Engagement

The career center engages with employers to help you connect with organizations of all kinds—business, education, government, healthcare, technology, arts, and others—looking to meet, recruit, and hire liberal arts students just like you.

RATE™ (REFLECT-ARTICULATE-TRANSLATE-EVALUATE)

You do so much, and learn so much, as a liberal arts student. But to you, it can feel like it's all just the daily routine: your version of the undergraduate life. You likely don't think about, let alone comprehend, the full scope of what you're getting from your liberal arts education. And you may not realize how much you'll be able to give (in the workplace, in graduate/professional school, or elsewhere) as a result. RATE™ helps you tell your own unique story: everything you have to offer.

RATE is an innovative online tool that is a core element of career readiness. It is a reflective learning and self-assessment activity that guides you through the process of thoroughly Reflecting on, Articulating, Translating, and Evaluating your many and diverse experiences. It helps you focus in on the Core Career Competencies you are continuously developing in all of your experiences, in and out of the classroom and throughout your liberal arts education. Some faculty members may even assign you a RATE as part of their course. Best of all, the tool is available to you anytime. You'll find the URL for the RATE portal on page 3 of this guide.

Every time you engage in an experience—a significant class assignment or activity, a community service project, an internship or a volunteer opportunity, a leadership position, a research study—you can go to the RATE portal to:

- **Capture it** so you don't forget about it!
- **Connect it** to your continuous building of the Core Career Competencies.
- **Communicate it** as tangible, specific evidence of how you have been developing the competencies—which, remember, are so highly sought-after by employers, graduate/professional schools, and others.

Whenever you complete a RATE for an experience, you'll be able to either write your thoughts about it or record them in a short video. You'll choose the Core Career Competency that the experience has helped you develop. Prompts will guide you through each of the Reflect, Articulate, and Translate steps of the process. In the Evaluation step, you'll respond to a series of statements evaluating your proficiency in the Core Career Competency you've selected. You'll then instantly receive a score—1, 2, or 3—summarizing how you self-assessed. You'll see where you are in the development of that competency, and get specific suggestions on how you can build it even more.

RATE helps you understand—perhaps for the first time—all you've done and what you've gained from it, both of which are far too easy to take for granted or overlook. Ultimately, you will not only become career ready; you'll also be able to articulate your career readiness to yourself, your family, and future employers or graduate school programs—when and where it matters most.



MAKE YOUR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION MEANINGFUL TO YOU

USE YOUR ACADEMICS TO TELL YOUR STORY

Your academic journey is built to give you a liberal arts advantage. One key aspect of that advantage is that you will end up with a unique degree. No two students take the exact same courses for their degree; choice is built in. How you choose to use your credits can tell your story to future employers and graduate/professional schools. With so many courses to choose from, there are probably as many combinations as there are students. This is the advantage of the liberal arts—**no one else is on the same path as you!** The challenge for you is to articulate why you made the academic choices you made along the way.

It's easy to think of your major as the most important part of your degree. Your major accounts for a significant percentage of the total credits for a degree. One question you'll have to answer is: What else can you do in addition to your major coursework? You need credits beyond your major to graduate, after all.

Second Language

Knowledge of another language makes you more competitive when you're looking for jobs or applying to graduate/professional schools. And with 1 in 6 U.S. jobs being tied to international trade, the demand for language skills and international expertise in the arts, social services, the sciences, business, education, the military, law, and government is increasing.



Studying another language develops your competencies in Oral & Written Communication as well as Engaging Diversity—how you are able to work effectively with people of different cultures.

Studying another language allows you to:

- Connect with family history, traditions, and cultural heritage.
- Participate in a global conversation.
- Appreciate what it takes to learn a language with cultural sensitivity.
- Pave the path to learning other languages.
- Step outside your familiar scope of existence, and view your culture's customs, traditions, norms, and value system through the eyes of others.
- Open up doors to learning abroad or traveling overseas.

“ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS”

Tailor Your Academic Path with the Future in Mind

“BAs can be very useful for a variety of fields that are not necessarily directly related to your major, but you should use your elective credits to show future academic programs or future employers that you've tailored your degree to fit the industry you're interested in.”

Develop Your “Other Plan A”

“Look at three options because your first choice might not happen right away.”

Outside Your Major and Elective Credits

These credits give you an excellent way to explore more areas and customize your educational experience—to build connections in your learning that are broader than just your major. You may decide to use these credits to earn a second major or minor. Some students take courses that simply interest them. Keep in mind: Your story of why you took the courses is more important to employers than whether or not you were able to acquire a list of minors. Take advantage of this freedom to choose and build knowledge in a new area.

Complete Required Courses for Graduate or Professional School Admission

If you're thinking about going to graduate or professional school, many programs have a set of prerequisite courses that are required for admission. Planning ahead may allow you to take prerequisite courses that also count for graduation without delaying it.

Be sure to research and know in advance the specific prerequisites you need to apply, and what factors will make you a competitive applicant, for the graduate or professional school of your choice. Then work with your advisor to create a plan that fits in those pieces and gets you to graduation on time.

Majors and Minors

You have to have a major. Minors are an option to consider. What major(s) makes the most sense for you? Is there a minor(s) that will nicely complement this major(s), in terms of both the subject matter and the Core Career Competencies it will help you develop? What courses will help you get where you want to go, whether that's a job

immediately after graduation, graduate/professional school, or something else? What is an area that you are genuinely interested in and want to learn more about? You can't make a wrong decision in a liberal arts major. Pick one that is a good fit for you, one where you can be successful.

Engagement Activities

The courses you take to complete your degree requirements are one part of your story. Another important part of your journey are the things you do outside of your coursework. Volunteering or student leadership or learning abroad? Which are a good fit for you, and how can you actually make them happen—and when? Perhaps you're interested in pursuing an internship at some point, to explore a potential career field or to show the commitment you already have to one. In either case, how does the whole internship process work, anyway? Maybe you should do an internship while learning abroad.

Working closely with your advisor and/or others, you can develop a comprehensive plan you can follow to not only develop the Core Career Competencies, but also, on a broader scale, to achieve your academic and career goals and turn your dreams into reality through careful research, informed decision making, reflection, and proactive, purposeful action. The liberal arts way.

Ask Professors About Their Research

"The most positive experience in my undergraduate career was taking a course that I was really interested in and then basically just going up to that professor and asking them more about their research, and do they need help on their research. I think that if students can muster up that kind of courage, a lot of faculty are looking for students that are passionate."

THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL

You may have noticed that nine of the Core Career Competencies reflect the very essence of liberal arts education and the competitive advantage it offers in today's dynamic economy. Career Management, the tenth competency, gives you the tools to seek and obtain the career you desire. Career counselors, advisors, faculty, and others can guide you through the development of this competency and prepare you for your lifelong career journey.

We believe that you need to actively engage in planning for life after college—by taking the necessary steps to **explore** possible careers, gain meaningful **experience**, and build skills that help you **excel** after college and lead to employment or other successful post-graduation outcomes.

But where do you begin? What do you actually do, practically speaking? How do you know when you're done? To help you answer these questions, we offer the *Career Management Model*, which you can use to progress toward your goals, even if you are unsure of your path.

The Career Management Model isn't a set of linear steps. It's actually three interdependent phases that overlap at times. Indeed, you'll find yourself partially revisiting a previous phase on occasion—especially later in life, as you and the world around you both change, but even as you discover more about yourself and future career possibilities while you're still an undergraduate.

Here are the three phases of the Career Management Model, which you will cycle through continuously:

EXPLORE Learning more about yourself as well as how you can proactively and purposefully develop your Core Career Competencies through various academic, engagement, and career activities. Examples of exploration include:

- Meeting with your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member.
- Taking a career assessment or a career management workshop/course.
- Arranging a meeting, or *informational interview*, with a professional in a career of interest.
- Enrolling in courses that interest you.

EXPERIENCE Engaging in experiential opportunities to apply what you are learning in the classroom, further explore your options, and continue developing the Core Career Competencies. Examples of experience include:

- Getting involved in a student organization or club related to your unique combination of major(s), minor(s), and certificate(s).
- Participating in volunteer activities, part-time work, micro-experiences, or leadership.
- Meeting with your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member to get support pursuing other experiential opportunities, such as internships, research, service-learning, and/or learning abroad or away.

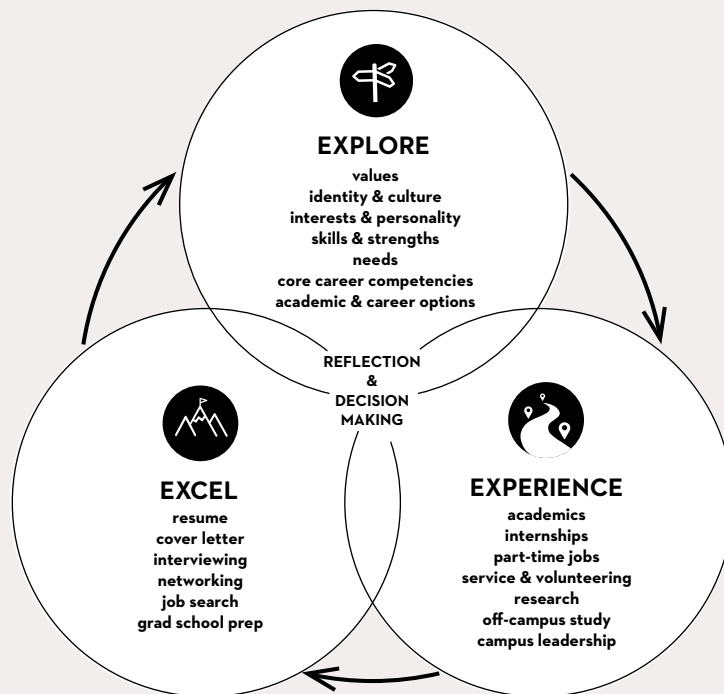
EXCEL Preparing for your post-graduation life, whether that means pursuing employment, going to graduate or professional school, or something else. And knowing that, to achieve your career goals, you'll need to convincingly demonstrate and articulate your development of the Core Career Competencies: to **show** that you are career ready, not simply say it. Examples of excelling include:

- Working with a career counselor to develop a solid résumé.
- Participating in practice interviews with a career counselor, a volunteer employer, and/or a faculty member.
- Attending career fairs to meet with prospective employers and learn about job opportunities.

The reflection you do along the way, and your resulting decisions, will determine your specific path through the Career Management Model. Just know that you will continue cycling through the phases throughout your life as you refine your interests and goals and respond to your changing needs.

CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL

Navigating your lifelong career development process



The Career Management Model is a realistic, practical way to navigate the complex process of becoming career ready, inside the classroom and out. It helps you see where you are on your career readiness journey and where you still need to go. Ideally, by the time you graduate, you will be able to:

- ✓ Describe your values, interests, identity, personality, skills, and strengths.
- ✓ Explain how your own domains of diversity—which may include: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, class, gender, age, etc.—will be an asset to your future organization.
- ✓ Develop and implement academic and career plans that integrate self-assessment and occupational information.
- ✓ Demonstrate completion of at least two experiences, which may include: internships, research, service-learning, or learning abroad and away.
- ✓ Identify at least five connections within your chosen career field by utilizing LinkedIn, past experiences, and events.
- ✓ Articulate (on your résumé, in your cover letter, in interviews, in networking, on your LinkedIn profile, etc.) how your academic and co-curricular experiences in the liberal arts make you a strong fit for professional opportunities.
- ✓ Utilize at least three search strategies, one of which is networking, to pursue your job, internship, or graduate school goals.
- ✓ Craft a professional identity that is authentic to you and your career field.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Where do you currently identify yourself within the Career Management Model, knowing that it's perfectly normal and OK to be in multiple places at once?

What do you already know about yourself and your career interests as a result of your prior life experiences?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

1. Plan to explore a career management workshop/course.
2. Think about one experience you've had in life—in school or out—and identify the Core Career Competencies it helped you build.
3. Explore the career readiness resources listed on page 3 of this guide.

THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL

- Self-Exploration
- Exploring Your Academic and Career Options



THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXPLORE**

The journey toward career readiness begins with the **Explore** phase of the Career Management Model, which includes exploring yourself and exploring your academic and career options:

- **Self-Exploration**—pinpointing your interests, skills, personality, values, strengths, identity, and needs.
- **Exploring Your Academic and Career Options**—thoroughly understanding the academic and career options that exist, or that you could create.

SELF-EXPLORATION

You already know a lot about yourself. Take some reflective time to get your thoughts out of your head and onto paper. Capture your vision and ideas, organize them, and look for patterns that will offer clues about potential academic and career paths for you to pursue. Things may shift over time, but it's helpful to see where you are today.

How can you more specifically pinpoint who you are, what you want, and what you have to offer in the context of a future career?

You have four strategies you can use, in any combination you'd like:

- Perform a “brain download” (see below).
- Ask for feedback from people who know you well.
- Take career assessments.
- Have an in-depth discussion with a career counselor.

Perform a “Brain Download”

A “brain download” is just what it sounds like: downloading what you already know about yourself out of your brain and connecting it to your academic and career decisions; writing down everything you can think of about:

- Your top **interests**: What captures your attention? What are you curious about? What types of things are you drawn to (e.g., people, data, ideas, things, numbers/finances) at this stage in your life?
- Your top **skills**: What skills have you built—or could you build—that are transferable from one area to another? And where do you currently stand on each of the Core Career Competencies?
- Your **personality**: Where do you get your energy? How do you take in information? What types of information do you trust? How do you tend to make decisions—with logic, with your “gut,” or some combination of both? How do you organize your time?
- Your top **values**: What's most important to you? What grounds you? What will you fight for? Which of your values align with the career path you're thinking about?



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



There Are Far More Career Options Than You're Probably Aware of

“Explore the different options out there—there are a lot of occupations you have never even dreamed of. Think about who you are and what you enjoy doing and then consider what jobs incorporate those same things.”

- Your **strengths**: Where do you naturally excel? What are you good at almost inherently, especially when it comes to the Core Career Competencies?
- Your **personal identity** or **culture**: How has your identity or culture (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, age, religion, family position, etc.) influenced your ideas about a major, a career path, or the type of organization you will work for in the future?
- Your **needs** and **other influences**: What are some needs and influences (e.g., expectations about pay, location, abilities, family or cultural expectations, education/training needed, life experiences, special circumstances) that may impact your career-related decisions?

Ask for Feedback from People Who Know You Well

If you're like most people, you're much too close to yourself to rely on a brain download alone as a self-exploration exercise. You will inevitably overlook—or, worse, ignore—key characteristics about yourself that will be critical in your academic and career planning decisions.

So ask other people in your life—people who know you well and care about you—to do this same brain download exercise, but with **you** in mind.

For example: What insights does your best friend have about **your** interests, **your** skills, **your** personality, **your** values, **your** strengths? How does it all look from your mom's angle, or your favorite high school teacher's point of view? You will be surprised, often pleasantly, by the things others see in you that you simply cannot see in yourself. Competencies you take for granted, for example, may be competencies others don't have and can easily spot in you.

Take Career Assessments

The career center offers formal and informal assessments in common self-exploration categories like interests, skills, and values. If you want to learn about yourself in great depth, set up an appointment with a career counselor there. Together, you can explore assessment options and determine which ones might be helpful to you.

You can also take career assessments online, usually for a fee. If/when you do, just make sure the assessment you're taking is legitimate and valid.

Have an In-Depth Discussion with a Career Counselor

A career counselor can get you started on the self-exploration process or, if you've already begun on your own, help you understand the complexities of what you're learning about yourself.

The in-depth, one-on-one conversations you have with a career counselor can give you the targeted guidance you need, especially as you begin to see the breadth and depth of the information you're trying to analyze and understand—and, eventually, act upon. It can be a lot to manage. A career counselor can help.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Interests Are Learned

You're not born with a set of interests; you learn what you're interested in as you go through life. So there may be things you're actually very interested in that you simply haven't been exposed to yet.

Part of the beauty of a liberal arts education is that you will cultivate new interests along the way. For now, just know that your current set of interests will evolve over time.

EXPLORING YOUR ACADEMIC AND CAREER OPTIONS

Getting to know yourself better through purposeful self-exploration is only part of the Career Management Model's Explore phase. It's also time for you to start exploring your academic options, and your future career options as well.

Take academics: With so many majors (and minors) to choose from—in so many diverse disciplines—you're probably unfamiliar with the many academic possibilities available to you as a liberal arts student.

Likewise, the career possibilities you have as a liberal arts student are almost endless; your liberal arts degree—and the Core Career Competencies you build through it—can lead to a diverse range of career paths in a wide variety of career fields.

It's exciting to explore your academic and career options, and this is your chance. The self-awareness you've already been working on allows you to at least begin identifying what academic and career options might be a good fit for you. Now, as you take the next steps in the Explore phase, explore your academic and career options in more depth by focusing on two additional key tasks:

- Exploring majors
- Exploring career fields

Exploring Majors

As we stress throughout this guide (most notably on page 13, in "Beyond Your Major"), the major(s) you ultimately choose does not and will not define you, especially in the eyes of future employers or graduate/professional school admissions committees. But a major is the prescribed set of courses (some required, some elective) that comprises a particular academic program. So you need to know which majors are available, what they're about, and what they might lead you to in the future; you'll eventually need to pick at least one, after all.

How can you begin exploring majors, then? Start simple: Read through the online listing of majors and their brief descriptions. Don't rush! Take the time to study each major closely, and try not to rule anything out at this point. For each major, ask yourself: "My abilities aside, does this major sound interesting to me?" If the answer is yes, add the major to a "Sounds Interesting" list of possibilities to explore further. If the answer is no? Well, be careful. Far too often, "no" is actually "I don't know enough to say one way or the other." If that's the honest case for you where a particular major is concerned, add it to a separate list called "Majors I Know Little or Nothing About."

Now, use your lists to visit the websites of the academic departments housing the various majors. Read through the fine details on each major, including the courses each offers.

Once you've completed these preliminary steps, get some help: Ask a career counselor, your advisor, or a faculty member to guide you in deeper exploration of the majors that intrigue you the most—along with any additional majors that come up during your discussions together.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

You Don't Have to Explore Majors by Yourself

A career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member can help you explore a major by:

- Giving you an overview of the major and the key skills students develop in it.
- Telling you about internship and job search websites related to the major.
- Pointing you to student groups and professional organizations connected to the major.
- Identifying alumni from the major along with their job titles and employers.

Exploring Career Fields

The other piece of exploring your academic and career options involves researching broad career fields you might like to pursue, and learning how your liberal arts degree can help you prepare for the career field(s) you ultimately choose.

Here again, you can start small and simple by turning first to online resources. The federal government, for example, offers two tools that will help you explore various career fields in considerable depth:

- Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/ooh), which allows you to explore some two dozen broad occupational groups (e.g., Architecture and Engineering, Healthcare, Media and Communication, Sales), along with numerous subgroups.
- O*Net Occupational Research Tool (onetonline.org), which allows you to explore possibilities by “Career Cluster” (e.g., Education & Training, Marketing), industry, or even future job outlook.

You can also explore career fields by tapping into the often extensive career resources of professional organizations, particularly those at the national level. Say you’re interested in psychology, for example, and you want to know what types of careers exist in that area. The American Psychological Association, like so many other national professional groups, devotes a portion of its website (apa.org/careers) to helping people understand the types of careers available in the field.

Here are a few other prominent examples of professional organization career sites:

- American Historical Association (history): historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development
- American Philosophical Association (philosophy): apaonline.org/career
- American Political Science Association (political science): apsanet.org/PScareers

Books—whether you check them out at the career center or library or you buy them yourself—offer yet another way for you to explore broad career fields. If you know you’d somehow like to work in sports, for instance, a book like *Careers in Sport, Fitness, and Exercise* (published, by the way, by a professional organization: the American Kinesiology Association) will help you see what’s possible.

Once you’ve completed some initial research on career fields using one or more of the tools described here, sit down once again with a career counselor, your advisor, or a faculty member to get one-on-one help in exploring in more depth. With this guidance, you can research a field(s) more extensively to learn about associated job titles, internship possibilities, and more.

Crucially, you’ll also learn about alumni and others who work in the field (and perhaps even arrange to talk to them via an *informational interview*, a topic we cover on pages 56–60 of this guide), as well as specific employers and organizations that are connected with the field.

The Career Center’s Job Platform Will Reveal Possibilities

The career center’s job platform will quickly and easily give you a sense of the types of jobs (and internships and volunteer opportunities) available to you, along with their academic and experiential requirements. Learn how to access the career center and its job platform on page 3 of this guide.

How to Explore Academic and Career Options

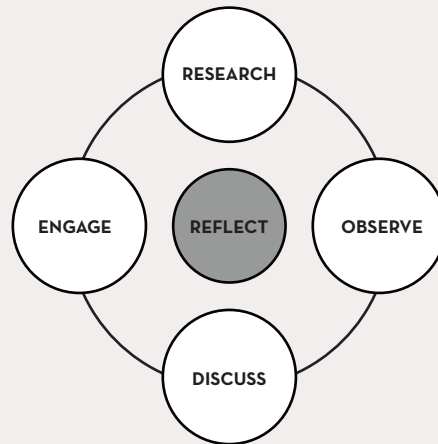
Here's a strategy that will help you explore your academic and career options in depth, and make confident decisions about what path(s) you would like to pursue. (Remember, as always, that you're not alone in this work: Your advisor, career counselors, and/or faculty members are available to support you along the way.)

Here's the strategy you can follow:

- **Research** your options.
- **Observe** work environments.
- **Discuss** your options.
- **Engage** in meaningful experience to explore even further.
- **Reflect** on what you've learned.

Research Your Options

As you begin exploring your academic and career options in depth, it's helpful to start by gathering basic information about the different options available to you. Doing research—primarily through reading—is a low-risk, low-commitment activity that can help you begin to answer some questions about what pathways might make the most sense for you, given what you know about your values, interests, personality, skills, needs, and identities.



Common Questions/Barriers

- Knowing where to start and what information to look for.
- Knowing what resources are credible and how to use them.
- Organizing the information you find in a manageable way.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Search on the Phrase “What Can I Do with a Major in”

Many college and university career centers have developed extensive websites to help their students answer the very common question, “What can I do with a major in _____?”

So use Google, Bing, and/or other Internet tools to search on the phrase “What can I do with a major in”—and you’ll quickly have in front of you dozens of sites offering detailed information in answer to the question.

The listings on a “What can I do with a major in _____?” site typically include:

- A brief description of the major and its associated discipline(s)
- Job titles associated with the major
- The key skills/competencies the major will teach you
- Links to additional sources of information (e.g., other websites, professional organizations related to the major)

Strategies for Researching Academic and Career Options

- Start broad. Generate a list of options by brainstorming ideas you've already thought about, identifying common career paths of alumni, and/or crossing off options you know you don't want to consider.
- Once you have a list of options, gather basic information about the academic majors/minors or career options you are considering. This could include looking up required coursework for a given major, identifying student organizations related to your interest areas, and/or looking up general occupational information about careers you want to explore.
- Get specific. Identify real examples of alumni in various career paths to determine what majors, experiences, and skills helped them get where they are. Begin analyzing job descriptions to determine what employers are looking for in candidates.

Observe Work Environments and Discuss Your Options

Doing your research and gathering information is important. But you can only gain so much insight from reading about your options. That's why it's important to find opportunities to connect with people in your desired field, and to observe various work environments in that field. You can do this by requesting an informational interview (learn about informational interviewing on pages 56-60 of this guide) with someone in a career field of interest; shadowing a professional in their workplace; networking with employers at a career fair; talking to upper-class students or alumni in a major you're exploring; and discussing your choices with your advisor, a career counselor, a faculty member, a mentor, a friend, or a family member.

Common Questions/Barriers:

- Knowing how to find people to connect with and how to reach out to them.
- Understanding and navigating the

"unwritten rules" of networking.

- Figuring out what questions to ask during a networking situation.

Strategies for Observing Work Environments and Discussing Your Options

- Talk to more than one person, and/or visit more than one work environment, during your observe and discuss activities. Get multiple perspectives.
- Don't overlook people who are already in your life—your own family members, for example, or friends' family members. They can be excellent people to talk to, and they may also be able to help you observe various work environments. "Warm" contacts, such as alumni, are also good possibilities because they share a common connection with you.
- Know that most people are happy to talk about themselves and what they do. In fact, many people find it flattering to be asked for career-related guidance.

Resources for Observing Work Environments and Discussing Your Options

- Meet with a career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member.
- Access the school's alumni page on LinkedIn ([linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)).
- Attend alumni and employer networking events, on campus and in the community.

(Note: Later in this guide, you'll find additional tips and resources to help you learn how to identify networking contacts, craft an effective email invitation, prepare for your interactions, determine what questions to ask people, and follow up.)

Engage in Meaningful Experience to Explore Even Further

During the Research and Observe/Discuss phases of exploring, you will likely build various assumptions about given academic or career options. Sometimes, though, the best way to clarify a potential path is to try it for yourself to see what you really think.

It's one thing to read about a particular academic discipline, for example, or even to talk to someone about a career field of interest. But what if you were to participate in a research experience with a professor who has been studying one of the nuances within an academic discipline for years or decades? What if you were to complete a brief volunteer experience or internship at a nonprofit agency where a career like the one you're considering is actually available? Books, websites, and even short observation and discussion opportunities just can't compete with this more hands-on type of exploring (though they are all still valuable in and of themselves). So engage in meaningful experience to explore your academic and career options even further.

*(Note: Later in this guide, you'll see that the entire second phase of the Career Management Model—**Experience**—is devoted to gaining experience, largely for the purpose of building your Core Career Competencies and related skills. But as we emphasize here, getting experience is also an excellent way to **explore** various academic and career options in real-world settings and situations.)*

What Are Your Engagement Options?

There are many engagement opportunities awaiting you here—lots of possibilities to supplement your academic experience with out-of-the-classroom experiences of all kinds, both on and off campus. You can even explore opportunities nationally or internationally.

The engagement activities you pursue will help you learn more about yourself, as well as your academic and career options, in more depth. They'll also help you build the necessary Core Career Competencies that employers and graduate schools desire in their candidates. It's a win-win!

Common Questions/Barriers

- Knowing how to find opportunities for gaining experience.
- Deciding which experiences will be most beneficial.
- Managing your time and juggling coursework, experiences, and other responsibilities.

Strategies for Engaging in Meaningful Experience

- Try a reasonable variety of activities, not just one, so that you get a well-rounded view of what you're exploring. Keep in mind, though, that you also need to maintain a healthy balance so that you can get the most out of each experience and prioritize your time.
- Know that many engagement opportunities are available right here on campus. You can start with lower-risk, lower-commitment activities. Get involved in student organizations, for example, or volunteer somewhere. Later, you can pursue an internship in a field of interest or in an organization that intrigues you. Or you can participate in a research activity of some kind.
- Understand that you probably won't get the chance to tackle the full-fledged duties of the job you're investigating. But you'll still get a sense of the opportunity and its associated work setting.

Resources for Engaging in Meaningful Experience

- Visit various campus offices and academic departments to learn about different types of engagement opportunities: student groups, leadership, volunteering, learning abroad and away, research, employment, and internships.
- Your advisor and campus faculty members also know what engagement options exist and can help you explore them and eventually pursue them. So can career center personnel and staff in academic departments.

- Search the school's website for relevant student organizations and on-campus leadership positions. Get suggestions from your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member too.
- Search the school's website and outside websites to identify potential service-learning and volunteer opportunities. Again, your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can offer ideas as well.
- Use the career center's job platform to find jobs and internships in the area.
- Search the school's website and outside websites for information on learning abroad opportunities. Talk to your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member too.
- Search the school's website and talk to a faculty member, your advisor, and/or a career counselor to learn how you might get involved in research.
- Talk to people you know! Your course instructors, peers, family members, and other networking contacts are great resources for referrals.
- Take an introductory class in a major or topic of interest.
- Meet with a career counselor, your advisor, or a faculty member for one-on-one assistance.

Reflect on What You've Learned

Always remember to reflect on what you've learned from any given experience, positive or negative. Be sure to consider what factors may have contributed to your overall impressions (i.e., what did you learn about your preferences for work environment, individual activities vs. team collaborations, communication techniques, supervision styles, workplace professionalism, schedule/hours, etc.?).

Remember: Even if an experience was less than enjoyable, you gained insights that can help narrow down or expand your options. (You also developed your Core Career Competencies, by the way.)

Meet with a career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member to reflect upon your options in even more depth. It's often beneficial to do your reflecting with someone who can ask you insightful questions, help you spot patterns, and offer suggestions from a different perspective.

IT'S TIME TO MOVE FROM EXPLORATION TO GAINING EXPERIENCE

Once you have a better idea of who you are and what academic and career options are available to you, it's time to focus in depth on gaining *Experience*—keeping in mind that exploration never really ends!

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Who can you talk to about your academic, engagement, and career options?

What connections or themes do you see among your interests, skills, personality, values, and strengths, based on all you've done so far?

Which self-exploration strategies do you see yourself using, and why?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

1. Talk to a career counselor about taking a career assessment and discussing its results.
2. Pick one of the academic and career exploration methods described in this section and use it to begin looking at various major and career options that interest you.

THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL

- Internships
- Research
- Volunteering
- Employment, On- or Off-Campus
- Learning Abroad
- Leadership
- Student Groups



THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXPERIENCE**

Why does **Experience** matter so much? For starters, engagement activities help you further explore potential academic and career options. As we noted earlier, in the Explore section of this guide: Books, websites, and even short observation and discussion opportunities can only get you so far in your exploration efforts. Sometimes you need a more hands-on type of experience to answer the questions that mere reading or observing can't resolve.

The engagement activities you pursue might also lead you to stumble upon brand new academic and/or career options you'd like to explore—possibilities you've never considered, in great part because you've never even heard of them! The number of people who say they "fell into" their careers is staggering. But chances are they didn't really "fall into" them. It was their own experiential actions that led to possibilities emerging. You don't have to know your end goal to make progress toward it.

Maybe you (think you) already know what major(s) you want to pursue, or what career path you want to work toward. Experiential activities related to that major and/or career might help you confirm your prior assumptions: "My internship is only helping me solidify my decision to major in _____ and become a _____ after I graduate."

On the other hand, engagement activities related to a particular major and/or career could convince you that you need to seek a different path: "This volunteer work is showing me that I don't want to major in _____ after all, nor do I want to become a _____ after I graduate." Admittedly, this can be a painful realization in the short term. But better to know sooner vs. later. And better to come to this understanding not through guesswork but through actual, hands-on experience. Be assured that **all** experiences will be valuable to you, especially if you take the time to connect them with your Core Career Competencies.

Finally, experiences offer you a way to gain new skills and competencies and, later, to demonstrate them to prospective employers or graduate/professional school admissions committees. If you become the activities coordinator for a student organization, for instance, you quickly begin honing your Oral & Written Communication competency, your Teamwork & Leadership competency, and more. If you participate in learning abroad or maybe even do an internship abroad, you can tell future employers how that specific experience has helped you develop the Core Career Competencies.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Experience Is Another Way to Explore

"Get experience in many different fields to figure out what you like. Within a certain field, like health-care, do a lot of volunteering in your areas of interest to narrow down your search for what you enjoy."

You Learn Your Interests Through Trial and Error

"Try everything! You never know what you may end up liking without trying it first. So say YES to everything you can in your career path, whether it is a project or an event. Say YES!"



Of course, the continuing documentation and analysis you do using RATE™ (the URL for the RATE portal is on page 3 of this guide) will help you keep track of your diverse experiences, make sense of them all, and tie them to your Core Career Competencies. You'll then be able to communicate everything you have to offer, when it matters most.

There are far more ways to gain experience than you might be aware of. As you're about to see, you have lots of experiential paths to explore as a liberal arts student.

In this section, you'll learn about how to get started with gaining experience.

INTERNSHIPS » RESEARCH » VOLUNTEERING » EMPLOYMENT » LEARNING ABROAD » LEADERSHIP » STUDENT GROUPS

WHAT ARE MICRO-EXPERIENCES?

Micro-experiences are short-term experiences that give you initial insights into a position or career of interest. They are a way to start small with building experience—which can make them easier to fit into your busy schedule.

- Gain **project-based experience**, perhaps working briefly for a faculty member on campus or for an organization (for-profit or nonprofit) off campus. Check out the third-party vendor Parker Dewey (info.parkerdewey.com) as well to learn about paid professional assignments ranging from 5 to 40 hours.
- Seek out an **externship**. An *externship* is an opportunity for you to engage in practice-based learning and observation in a specific field of interest. In its simplest form, it allows you to shadow a more experienced professional in an industry of interest. The duration of an externship is much shorter than that of an internship; thus, it doesn't require the same amount of time or level of commitment.

Engaging in these short-term experiences will prepare you for more robust experiences such as internships, research, or leadership opportunities—the completion of which will make you more competitive in the job market or graduate/professional school admission.

Don't Be Afraid to Pursue Experience Independently

"Make connections through the school, but also try new experiences independently. Researching internships, jobs, and experiences is something that all college students should know how to do with little assistance. Take your future into your own hands and do what you want to do, even if it might be different from what your peers are currently doing."

Education and Experience Pave the Way Toward a Career

"Career paths are based not only on your field of study, but also on the experiences you gain during your time in college."



INTERNSHIPS

What Is an Internship?

An internship is a paid or unpaid experience that is connected to your learning and career goals, as well as your professional growth and your development of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness.

An internship helps you:

- Test out potential career choices and organizations.
- Get a better sense of the types of job tasks you enjoy (or don't enjoy, as the case may be).
- Develop professional skills and build a network of contacts that will help you when you're looking for a job, applying for graduate school, or pursuing another post-graduation path.
- Connect what you're learning in the classroom and through your engagement activities with the world of work.

Internships can also lead directly to full-time, permanent jobs. If you think about it from the perspective of the employer, this makes sense. If you were the boss and you wanted to hire someone, who would you hire? A relative stranger—for example, someone who applies for your open position because they saw it on the Internet? Or would you hire the fantastic summer intern who was already trained in and working for you?

The choice is clear: Employers want to hire people they trust.

In fact, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), while 65 percent of employers look for any type of relevant work experience on the résumés of new college graduates, 56 percent prefer the kind of work experience that comes from internships or co-ops. Moreover, another NACE study shows, when employers are deliberating between two otherwise equally qualified candidates for an entry-level position, two key attributes play the biggest role in the final hiring decision:

- Internship experience with the employer's own organization.
- Internship experience in the employer's industry.

How Do I Find an Internship?

Start by using the career center job platform, which also features internship listings. Talk to career center staff to learn how to best leverage this tool.

Search Online

- Contact organizations of interest—by visiting their websites or contacting internship coordinators there—to learn about opportunities.
- Use internship directories and internship websites.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



You Never Know Which Internship Experience(s) Will Be Valuable

"Obviously look for internships related to your career aspirations, but do not hesitate to also apply for internships that may not be totally related if you are struggling to line up a position. This experience may be more valuable than you think, and the skills you develop may still be applicable to a position more in line with your ideal career path."

Internship Experience Is Worth the Sacrifice

"Don't give up opportunities just because of your current job. Take risks. If you want to do an unpaid internship but you currently have a paid job, do the unpaid internship. It helps build your network and experiences."

Search Your Network

- Get help from a career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member who can work with you one-on-one to uncover internship possibilities and prepare you to land one of them.
- Talk to professors and staff members, many of whom a) have connections at various organizations, and b) will know where previous students have interned.
- Talk to your fellow students—particularly juniors and seniors—to see where they (or people they know) have interned.
- Search for the school's alumni page on LinkedIn (linkedin.com) and contact alumni for internship leads and related advice.
- Talk to your parents and other family members, as well as neighbors, relatives ... anyone you can think of!

Here's what you can say:

"I'm hoping to get an internship soon so that I can explore career options and develop my skills and Core Career Competencies before I graduate. My major is _____, and I hope to get an internship doing _____. Do you know anyone who works in this field, or who works somewhere that might have internships in this field? Or can you think of any other ways I might find an internship? If not and you hear of something later, I'd appreciate you keeping me in mind."

Other Search Strategies

- Attend career fairs—on campus, in the community, and/or in your hometown.
- Explore interning abroad—your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you.



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP >>

Parker Dewey: Project-Based Micro-Experiences

Don't have time for a full-fledged internship? Consider gaining experience through project-based work. Parker Dewey offers students the opportunity to apply for micro-experiences. These are short-term, professional assignments similar to those given to new hires. Unlike a traditional internship, these paid opportunities range from 5 to 40 hours of work and take place year-round, and most can be completed remotely. Assignments range from copywriting and market research, lead generation, and data cleanup to web updates and user testing.

To learn more or apply for assignments, visit info.parkerdewey.com.

How Do I Know If a Particular Internship Is Right for Me?

First, consider your academic and personal goals. Also factor in your strengths and values. Do you want to work for a nonprofit? Then focus your search there. Do you want to pursue advertising, whatever the setting? Then search for internship opportunities related to that field (e.g., advertising, marketing, public relations).

Write a brief goal statement for yourself.

"I would like an internship that will give me an opportunity to..." This type of statement, if you take the time and energy to develop it, will guide your internship search better than almost anything else can.

Do an informational interview. Talk to someone in an organization or a field that interests you. If it seems like a good fit, ask this person about internship possibilities in the organization. (Note: You'll find extensive advice on informational interviewing on pages 56-60 of this guide.)

If you have trouble finding the right internship, try pitching your own.

Wondering how to successfully pitch an internship? Ask your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member for advice and guidance.

Internship FAQs

When should I do an internship? Getting career-related experience early in college is a smart thing to do. Some employers have a preference for sophomores or juniors, but it is quite possible to get an internship as a first-year student.

Is an internship required? An internship may be required for some majors and not others, so you'll want to check with your advisor. Either way, internships are strongly recommended for all liberal arts students.

What can I do now to get ready to be a competitive internship applicant? Gain experience in other ways: through research, volunteering, part-time jobs, learning abroad, student groups, leadership roles, and micro-experiences. Work hard in the classroom as well; your grades matter, of course, and so do your applied projects.

What financial resources exist for internship participation? While many internships are paid, some are not. Your advisor (and/or a career counselor or faculty member) may be able to help you identify and pursue financial assistance opportunities such as scholarships, grants, and stipends. Be sure to talk to someone before you rule out an unpaid internship.

CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP

International Students and Internships

If you are an international student and you would like to pursue an internship, you will need Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization. This authorization allows you to work in a position directly related to your major area of study before you have completed your degree.

To learn more, talk to your advisor and/or an international students specialist on campus.

How do I get academic credit for doing an internship? To earn credit for your internship, you need to have an academic component to your experience. Your advisor can help you understand this process and complete the necessary paperwork and/or coursework.

Can I do an internship abroad? Yes! To learn how, talk to your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member.

How Do I Get the Most Out of an Internship?

It's one thing to simply obtain an internship. It's quite another to get something valuable out of it—and to contribute something valuable to it as well.

When it comes to getting the most out of an internship, think about the experience in three phases:

- Preparing before your internship begins
- Succeeding during your internship
- Ending your internship skillfully

Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you navigate all three of these phases successfully, as can your internship supervisor(s). So don't try to go things alone. Tap the expertise and insights of the people around you to make your internship experience a great one.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Even if you can't name a specific company/organization right now, can you think in general terms of the **type** of place where you might want to pursue an internship?
What makes you choose this type of setting?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

1. Research one internship that interests you, either by searching for one online or talking to someone who has an internship lead for you.
2. Create a saved search on the career center's job platform and/or an internship-related website to receive notifications when relevant opportunities are posted.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Complete As Many Internships As Possible

"Complete as many internships as you are able, in a variety of different areas to find out what you're interested in. If one internship doesn't lead to a further opportunity, don't worry—another one might. ... My first couple of internships did not make me feel like I was moving forward professionally, but it was my experience with those prior internships that landed me the one that grew into a salaried, full-time position."



RESEARCH

Why Do Research?

Research experiences offer all kinds of opportunities for you to develop the Core Career Competencies—like Analytical & Critical Thinking, Applied Problem Solving, and Oral & Written Communication—that signify career readiness. Through research, you study difficult problems without any guarantee that you will eventually find “the answer.” You’ll need patience, persistence, and perseverance.

Research experiences also help you:

- Build relationships with faculty and other students who are studying topics of strong interest to you.
- Explore research itself as a possible career path.
- Develop expertise on a subject that fascinates you.
- Make money and/or earn academic credit for your efforts.

Research FAQs

How can I participate in research? Start by talking to your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member to learn about potential research opportunities.

Some academic departments also offer opportunities to engage with faculty members through research and related activities. You can also volunteer, or find a paid on-campus job that involves research.

What is the first step to getting started with research? Consider what subject you’re interested in studying, and then find a faculty member who is an expert in that area. You can reach out to a faculty member

you’ve had for a class, ask your academic department for recommendations, or read faculty profiles on department websites.

You don’t need to have a completely formulated research plan. You just need an interest that matches the interests of the faculty member, along with a willingness to see how you could get involved. Here’s an example of a brief email you could send to a faculty member:

Hello Dr. Maxwell,

My name is Heidi Angen, and I am contacting you because I took a course with you last semester and really learned a lot from you. I particularly enjoyed when you discussed your research on women in politics.

I was wondering if we could meet to discuss your research further, and also to discuss if you have any opportunities for a student like myself to get involved and contribute to a future project.

Thank you for considering!

*Sincerely,
Heidi Angen*



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP



Research Experience Grabs Attention

If you’re interested in graduate school, research experiences will strengthen your application. Oftentimes, research experience is required for admission to graduate/professional programs. To explore opportunities to do research, on or off campus, talk to your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member.



VOLUNTEERING

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering is a beneficial way for you to start gaining experience and building a professional network. It's also accessible. Not only do you need no prior experience to engage in volunteering at an organization, but you also frequently have flexibility with the time commitment, making it easier to fit into your busy schedule. Volunteering allows you to explore various organizations, career paths, and work settings, all while continuing to develop your Core Career Competencies. In short, volunteering acts as a meaningful stepping stone to future experiential learning or professional opportunities.

But there's more: Volunteering gives you the chance to create positive change in your community, too, whatever that community may look like. Perhaps it's a city. Perhaps it's a center where children gather to play after school. Perhaps it's a nursing home where senior citizens live out their remaining years.

Whatever the case, your volunteer work matters—and the impact likely goes well beyond your own personal and professional development.

Employers agree. In a Deloitte survey, 92% of the more than 2,500 employers questioned said they believe volunteering expands an employee's professional skill set. And 82% said they are more likely to hire job candidates who have volunteer experience.

Volunteering FAQs

How do I find volunteer opportunities?

Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you identify volunteer opportunities on campus and in the surrounding community. The website VolunteerMatch (volunteermatch.org) is also an excellent resource, as is the career center's job platform.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Volunteering Can Confirm What You Want to Pursue

"Volunteer at places or in areas where you think you want to work. I often doubted what I wanted to do until I did service-learning in schools, assisting teachers. Through service-learning, I realized that I had made the right decision for my future career. You can never know until you try!"

Volunteer Experience Offers "Insider Knowledge"

"Get involved in as many volunteer work opportunities as possible. Even if the opportunity isn't teaching you new skills, it can teach you industry insider knowledge, which is incredibly valuable."

Your Volunteer Work May Lead to a Job

"Volunteering in your field really helps. The only hospital that offered me a job after graduation was the hospital I had volunteered at for years."



EMPLOYMENT, ON- OR OFF-CAMPUS

The Value of Work Experience

Whether you pursue it on- or off-campus, employment offers yet another chance for you to continue developing your Core Career Competencies, while also providing you with the obvious benefit of added financial support.

On-campus student employment can be particularly helpful. For starters, it often comes with flexibility: You don't need to travel (or at least travel very far!), and you can plan your work schedule around your course schedule. An on-campus job can be especially useful to you if you're an international student. Both F-1 and J-1 students are eligible to work on campus, and the work does not need to be related to your field of study.

Off-campus employment is also a valuable way to build your Core Career Competencies. Part-time customer service positions, for instance, teach you skills related to Applied Problem Solving, Oral & Written Communication, Teamwork & Leadership, and Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making.

Finding work that is somehow related to a career or field you are exploring can be

especially beneficial. Working as a camp counselor, for instance, builds competencies and knowledge that will be essential to your success if you want to become a teacher. Similarly, working as a social media assistant for an office on campus allows you to hone your expertise for a future marketing career.

Employment FAQs

How do I find on- or off-campus jobs?

Begin by using the career center's job platform and outside websites to explore potential job opportunities. Then talk to friends, family members, your advisor, a career counselor, faculty members, and others to ask about specific job leads. You could even stop by the offices/places (on or off campus) that interest you to inquire about the possibilities.

*(Note: The **Excel** section of this guide offers extensive information on job search strategies.)*

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

If you've already worked in a part-time job—in high school, perhaps, or during the summer before your college career began—which of the Core Career Competencies did it help you develop? Can you offer specific examples of how certain tasks or responsibilities built certain competencies?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

Are there any part-time jobs, on- or off-campus, that you're interested in pursuing right now (or very soon)? What is one step you will take in the next few weeks or months to get started pursuing them?



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



All Work Experience Matters

"Work as much as you can while you're in school. No matter what it is, it will give you workplace experience. Workplace experience will help you truly develop your work ethic, and help you develop self-awareness so that you know how to change and how to be better at whatever it is you try to do."



LEARNING ABROAD

Why Participate in a Program Abroad?

It's difficult to fully articulate the many benefits of an educational experience abroad. The existing program options are full of opportunities for you to not only develop the Core Career Competencies, but also gather experiences that will help you demonstrate those competencies later—to prospective employers, for example, or graduate/professional school admissions committees.

By going somewhere new, experiencing a different culture, and perhaps even speaking a different language, you have the chance to sharpen competencies like Applied Problem Solving, Innovation & Creativity, and Engaging Diversity, to name just a few. The (seemingly) simplest things become more challenging when you're out of your element and in a new culture whose norms and expectations might be quite different from those of your home culture.

When you successfully navigate these challenges, your confidence will soar. And for good reason: You will know that you can succeed in situations where you may find yourself, at least initially, outside of your comfort zone. You'll see that you can handle whatever is thrown at you—then adapt and succeed anyway.

Learning Abroad FAQs

How do I get started with exploring learning abroad options? Search the school's website as well as outside websites to get a general sense of the learning abroad opportunities and programs that are out there. Then seek additional, in-depth guidance from your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member.

What programs exist? There are opportunities to study, work, intern, volunteer, or conduct research abroad. Experiences vary in length. Some last only a few weeks during an academic break or in the summer. Others last for a semester and up to a full academic year. Your advisor (and/or a career counselor or faculty member) can help you match your academic, personal, and professional interests and goals with opportunities available in an array of countries.

How do I pay for learning abroad experiences? Program costs vary depending on the length of the program and the location you choose, but know that there are a lot of cost-effective options available. Your advisor (and/or a career counselor or faculty member) can help you explore them.

Learning Abroad Expanded My Worldview

"Through my study abroad experience, I met professionals and scholars and saw how businesses and education worked in another country. What was even more impactful was the insight I got into the lives of regular people and how strongly culture shapes people's lives. I learned to genuinely appreciate and embrace differences and to be open to new change and new ideas."

"I Learned So Much"

"I was shocked by how much I learned when I was abroad. I was taking two content classes as well as Arabic, and I learned so much. I came back and my professors were shocked at how much I had learned."



LEADERSHIP

Why Get Involved with Leadership?

If you'd really like to develop the Leadership part of your Teamwork & Leadership Core Career Competency, working in some sort of leadership capacity is perhaps the best thing you can do.

Whatever leadership path you pursue, you'll be setting yourself up well for the future. Leadership is a highly sought-after competency—among employers, graduate/professional school admissions committees, and others. In fact, according to a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), when employers are deliberating between two otherwise equally qualified candidates for an entry-level position, the trait “has held a leadership position” plays the fourth-highest role in the final hiring decision. Leadership is also the sixth-most-frequently-identified attribute (cited by 73 percent of the respondents) that employers look for on the résumés of new college graduates.

You may or may not see yourself as a potential leader. There is no one, “right” personality type or skill set you need to have.

Leadership **development** is just that: the development of your leadership competency. You can do it your way, and you don't have to be—or lead like—someone you're not.

Leadership FAQs

How do I get connected to leadership opportunities? Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you identify leadership opportunities and develop a plan for pursuing them.

You'll want to especially consider applying for leadership and peer positions on campus—in student government, for example, or in the residence halls or student groups.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Do you see yourself as a potential leader? Why or why not? What misconceptions or fears do you have that might hold you back from exploring leadership possibilities?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

Identify 1-3 specific characteristics that you possess currently that make you a potential leader. What is one step you will take this semester to further build upon your leadership?

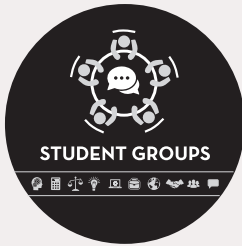


ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Say Yes to Leadership Opportunities

“Through my leadership experience, I have been challenged, scared, hopeless, hopeful, irritated, overjoyed, and every other emotion possible, as the students I have helped show me that there is still much to learn and that I will always have to grow. This happened because I said yes to this experience and have continued to say yes.”



STUDENT GROUPS

Why Get Involved with Student Groups?

Whether you join a well-established organization or help launch a new one, getting involved in student groups is a fantastic way for you to develop the Teamwork (and quite possibly the Leadership) part of your Teamwork & Leadership Core Career Competency. You'll work with your fellow students to get things done, after all—to create some sort of positive change.

Some of the work you'll do will already be precisely defined; some you'll define as you go. Along the way you'll be developing other core career competencies as well: Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making, for example, as well as Innovation & Creativity and even Digital Literacy. (You'll use all of these in something as apparently straightforward as developing compelling, informative content for your student group's website.)

Your work with student groups will also help you build friendships with other students who share your interests—its own lifelong benefit. And it will frequently connect you with alumni, prospective employers, and other potentially helpful people, since some student organizations bring in guest speakers and/or host community events.

Student Groups FAQs

How do I find student groups of potential interest? Start by searching on the school's website. Then ask for suggestions from your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member. Look for organizations that meet regularly, host programs and events, and provide service to the greater community.

And if the type of group you're looking to join doesn't yet exist on campus, think about starting your own!

USE RATE™ TO DOCUMENT YOUR EXPERIENCES AS YOU GO—SO THAT YOU'RE READY TO EXCEL

The more experience you gain, whatever the method(s)—and the sooner you gain it—the better you'll be able to continue shaping your academic and engagement path toward career readiness. Purposefully. Proactively. Planfully.

As you take part in each experience, keep going back to RATE™ (you'll find the URL for the RATE portal on page 3 of this guide) to thoroughly document what you're doing, what you're learning, and what you're gaining—especially in terms of your Core Career Competencies and related skills. Don't wait until weeks ... or months ... or years after an experience ends to capture it! Your memory of it will be much more clear, and therefore much more valuable, if you document it sooner vs. later.



The time and energy you put into carefully documenting your experiences—as you go—will be well worth it in the end. You'll know exactly what you're getting from your liberal arts education and what you have to offer as a result. You'll then be poised for the next phase of the Career Management Model: *Excel*, which focuses on how to effectively communicate your career readiness to employers, graduate/professional school admissions staff, and others.

THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL:

EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE, EXCEL

- Your Professional Identity: Your Personal Brand
- Navigating Your Identity As You Pursue Your Career Goals

Pursuing Employment

Job Search Strategies

- Networking
- Informational Interviews
- Job/Career Fairs
- The Career Center's Job Platform
- Job/Internship Websites
- LinkedIn
- Staffing Agencies

Job Search Communication Tools

- Résumés
- Cover Letters
- Recommendation Letters
- Thank-You Notes

Interviews

- Virtual Interviewing
- Before the Interview
- During the Interview
- After the Interview
- Offers

Pursuing an Independent/Entrepreneurial Career

Pursuing Education

Planning for Graduate School

- Deciding If Grad School Is Right for You
- Researching and Evaluating Graduate Programs
- Application Materials
- Making a Decision



THE CAREER MANAGEMENT MODEL: **EXCEL**

In the **Excel** phase of the Career Management Model, you focus on the tools, activities, and strategies you'll need to demonstrate your career readiness and then actually apply it as you work toward whatever practical career outcome you're seeking.

For many undergraduates, this desired outcome is **Employment**, typically in the form of a private-sector job or in nonprofit organizations, public service (government) agencies, the military, or related opportunities like AmeriCorps or teaching abroad programs. So we devote most of this section of the guide to the basics of the job search: uncovering job opportunities, writing solid résumés and cover letters, performing well in interviews, and the like.

For other undergraduates, **Education**—in the form of graduate or professional school—is the next stage on the career development journey. So we cover the graduate/professional school research, application, and decision-making process in considerable depth too.

This is the critical time to redouble your focus on the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness. Remember: These competencies—more than your specific major, for example—are what employers and other real-world decision makers say they value most in liberal arts graduates. So if you haven't done so already, begin using RATE™ (Reflect-Articulate-Translate-Evaluate) to carefully document your experiences, in and out of the classroom, and to pinpoint how they have helped you build the various Core Career Competencies. (Note: You'll find the URL for the RATE portal on page 3 of this guide.) This careful process of cataloguing, analyzing, and synthesizing what you have to offer will be crucial to your success, whatever your next career step will be.



WHAT IF I WANT TO WORK FOR MYSELF?

You may be one of the growing number of liberal arts students who want to pursue a career path with a degree of independence and/or entrepreneurship. Perhaps you'd like to start your own business, for example, or pursue freelance/contract work, or run for political office, or launch a nonprofit organization, or blaze your own trail in some other way and be part of the gig economy.

The individual nature of these types of career paths makes them difficult to comprehensively cover in a guide like this one. But they are valid, worthy, realistic pursuits—and you can get help pursuing them on an individual basis from your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member. (We cover this enterprising path in a bit more detail starting on page 89 of this guide.)

Know, too, that many liberal arts alumni have gone on to do similar things. We can help you connect with them so that you can learn from their experiences.

YOUR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

We cannot have a discussion about the job search or applying for graduate/professional school without first talking about the critical concept of your *professional identity*, often called your *personal brand*.

Your personal brand is the outward expression of who you are and who you strive to be (as we discussed in the **Explore** section of this guide). It's how you choose to show up in the professional world, how others perceive you, and what you are known for. The question is, what do you want to be known for, and how can you tell your story in a way that communicates that? You are the only person who can manage your brand. So you need to be thoughtful and consistent about how you present yourself—in person, on paper, and online.

Your Brand in Person

As you go about the various activities in the job search or graduate/professional school application process (or in the pursuit of your own path), keep these tips in mind:

- Research the organization(s) you're interested in to evaluate the norms and expectations for that unique setting. What it means to present yourself professionally can vary greatly, and you'll want to take time to think about how you can show up in a way that honors your professional identity.
- Choose clean clothing that makes you feel confident while also respecting your desired personal brand, organizational norms, and expectations. Networking contacts or career counselors can also help you identify clothing options.
- Be aware of the cultural norms and expectations around time. In some settings this means showing up early for meetings, prepared to contribute, whereas in other situations people take a more relaxed approach to time.
- To fully engage with people and make a positive impression, minimize distractions, including use of your cell phone, social media, email, etc. You don't want people to misread you as not being engaged.

Your Brand on Paper

Your printed documents communicate a message beyond the words. Here are some tips about your personal brand on paper:

- Make sure your written documents are clear and easy to understand. Don't use "text speak" (e.g., writing in all lower-case letters). Proofread your documents.

- Use formatting techniques (e.g., font size/style, spacing, bolding, italics, underlining, color, and/or capitalization) to emphasize key information.
- Customize job search documents, such as résumés and cover letters, so that they are targeted specifically to the people you're sending them to. By tailoring your documents you can amplify the unique aspects of your professional identity that match the job qualifications and describe why you are interested in working for that organization.

Your Brand Online

What will a prospective employer, admissions representative, or other key decision maker find on your Instagram account ... or Facebook feed ... or Twitter feed ... or [tomorrow's social media sensation]? What will they uncover via a simple Google search, or on LinkedIn? Here are key considerations to think about:

- Be intentional about any images, content, and communication you use. Choose visuals that demonstrate the qualities you want to be known for.
- Use the "Summary" or "About Me" section to share highlights.
- Watch everything you say and portray. Assume it can be viewed by anyone. Nothing is truly "private." Google yourself—what do you find?
- Monitor everything that others say and portray about you too. (Note: This includes how you are tagged in photos or posts by others.)
- Ask for feedback from others and determine if those impressions are consistent with your goals.

NAVIGATING YOUR IDENTITY

AS YOU PURSUE YOUR CAREER GOALS

Whether you're pursuing employment or educational opportunities, this is a time when you navigate who you are and what you are seeking, all while you manage your professional identity. Aspects of your personal and social identities, as well as culture (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, age, religion, citizenship status, family status, etc.), are assets you will bring to your future opportunities. However, you may have questions about how and when to share aspects of your identity. The tips below are meant to empower you with information to help you proceed in pursuing your career goals in ways that honor who you are. Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can also support you, with the questions below and beyond.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Here are some frequently asked questions and common concerns you might want to think about as you begin the process of navigating your identity. The questions often require nuanced answers. Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you decide which answers best fit your unique situation and help you achieve your goals.

- How do I disclose my identities in my job search or graduate/professional school application?
- I'm worried my appearance (e.g., hair color/style, piercings, tattoos, religious attire, gender expression, etc.) may raise concerns to employers or admissions committees. How do I decide whether to change my appearance for an upcoming interview? What are my other options?
- Should I list a certain organization on my résumé/CV (e.g., religious group, political affiliation, LGBTQIA organization, etc.) that may "out" me?
- What should I do if I'm asked an illegal question during an interview?
- I do not shake hands for cultural reasons. What should I do at my interview?
- How do I identify whether a company, institution, or organization will be a good fit for me?
- I know I will need accommodations. How do I address this?
- I'm worried my background check may raise concerns. What should I do?
- How do I address citizenship status if I am unable to legally work in this country? (undocumented or international students)
- How do I answer the question, "Do you need a sponsor to work in the U.S.?"
- What are the legal protections for transgender individuals in the workplace in this state?
- How can I research health benefits available to me through an employer or institution?
- I have a gap on my résumé/CV due to a leave of absence for a mental health crisis. How can I manage this in my application process or address the impact to my GPA for graduate school?
- Where can I get help knowing how to best highlight my military service as being relevant to an opportunity?
- I received a job offer and have heard that women often make less than men in the U.S. How do I make sure I am paid fairly?
- There are changes in my family (e.g., marriage, pregnancy, children, adoption, death of a family member, changes in primary-care status, etc.), and I am worried about this impacting perceptions of my ability to do my job or succeed in my studies. How do I navigate this?

RESOURCES FOR DIVERSE POPULATIONS

All of these questions are valid, and your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member can help you address them and direct you to additional helpful resources. You may also want to consult mentors in the communities with which you identify.

ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In the United States, it is illegal for employers or educational institutions to ask you questions about: your marital status; whether you have children or are expecting a child; religious practices; political affiliations; race or nationality; sexual orientation; age; whether you have a disability; your gender; or whether or not you have been arrested. These questions are illegal because information shared in a candidate's response may be used to discriminate against them. If you are asked an illegal question, you do not need to answer it. Instead turn the focus back on your qualifications for the position.

HOW TO RESEARCH A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE CULTURE

- Talk to family, friends, advisors, career counselors, community leaders, and/or instructors. Ask if they know any professionals who share your identity or identities, who could then give you their perspective about organizations you're interested in.
- Research organizations' or programs' websites—and/or their listings on *LinkedIn.com*, *Glassdoor.com*, and social media—to see if the following items appear:
 - A diversity and inclusion statement or non-discrimination policies and procedures.
 - LGBTQIA benefits like trans-inclusive health insurance and LGBTQIA-friendly parental leave.
 - Affinity or resource groups for different populations.
 - Gender-neutral bathrooms.
 - Trainings around diversity and inclusion for employees, faculty, and students.
 - Disability resources.
- Review ratings via DiversityInc (diversityinc.com) or the Human Rights Campaign Best Places to Work (hrc.org/campaigns/corporate-equality-index).
- Check job boards and LinkedIn groups for others who share your identity/ies.
- Ask questions in interviews to help you assess culture/climate, such as:
 - How would you describe the culture and values of this organization? This department?
 - What kinds of affinity groups, if any, does this organization or program have?
 - What kinds of training and professional development are provided or encouraged?

DISCLOSURE

Whether you want or need to disclose aspects of your identity (such as ability status and accommodation needs, gender identity or expression, racial or ethnic background, citizenship status, criminal record, veteran status, religion/religious affiliation, family status, etc.), it will be important for you to decide what to disclose and when. In most cases, there is no perfect timing. Options for when to disclose include networking situations, during the application process, in an interview, after the interview, or when you start. There are pros and cons to each choice.

Here are some tips for increasing your confidence with disclosure:

- Practice your disclosure language with a trusted mentor, your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member.
- Make a list of the toughest questions you may receive, and make a plan to address them.
- Educate yourself about the laws and legal environment related to your disclosure. Equip yourself with information so you know what to anticipate, how to respond, and how to advocate for yourself.
- Reflect upon, and be ready to share, how your identity/ies and lived experiences will add value to the organization, position, or program you're interested in. Consider how these assets may set you apart from other candidates and enable the organization or institution to diversify.
- Get support from mentors, trusted friends or family, career counselors, mental health therapists, and others. You don't have to manage this process alone!

PURSuing EMPLOYMENT

JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

The job search process is both exciting and daunting. How do you begin to uncover job opportunities to pursue in the first place? You know the openings are out there. Somewhere. How do you find them, especially when so many of them aren't even advertised?

Fortunately, in addition to the career center and related offices/personnel, you also have many other job search tools and strategies at your disposal:

- Networking
- Informational interviews—
networking with a learning focus
- Job/career fairs
- The career center's job platform
- Job/internship websites
- LinkedIn
- Staffing agencies

NETWORKING

Networking—which is, quite simply, talking to people—is by far the most effective way to uncover job opportunities to pursue. Why? Because, given the choice, employers would prefer to hire people they already know, or people who come highly recommended by people they already know. It's less risky, it's faster, and it's cheaper.

If **you** were an employer, how would **you** try to find someone to fill a key position? You would undoubtedly turn first to your own personal network of contacts, hoping someone you already know and trust would either a) apply for the position themselves, or b) recommend someone.

Networking is a way to build a community of support around you for your job search, which includes connections with professionals. It might sound daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Most of us network all the time without realizing it. When you talk to someone about interests you both share, for example, you're already networking.

What Is Networking?

Networking means building professional relationships. You can plan your networking activities out in advance if you'd like, or simply take advantage of networking opportunities spontaneously as they come to you (or you to them). Either networking approach works well.

When you plan your networking activities, you often contact someone to find out if you have mutual interests; you then have a conversation about those interests. When you meet new people by chance, on the other hand, and you end up discussing mutual interests or goals, you're networking spontaneously.

You've actually been networking for years without even realizing it. You're networking when you:

- Talk to friends or friends of friends.
- Chat with your neighbors.
- Volunteer somewhere.
- Talk to the person sitting next to you on the bus.
- Stay in contact with your professors, instructors, advisors, and counselors.

Don't Be Intimidated by Networking

Many people cringe at the thought of networking, thinking they have to show up in a space full of people they don't know and begin small talk. People often assume that networking means you have to be "schmoozing" or inauthentic in your conversation. But true networking is actually relationship building.

Networking becomes relatively easy after you've put in a little effort and time. If you're shy, or if you're uncomfortable contacting people you don't know, that's understandable. But keep this in mind: The worst response you're likely to get is someone saying they're too busy to talk. Or you may get no response at all, which still isn't a negative.

Most of the time, though, you will find that people are remarkably happy to share information about their work, company, or profession. Especially since many of them have been in your shoes themselves—and know they likely will be again. Someday.

Introducing Yourself: The Elevator Pitch

At a career fair or networking event, you'll be introducing yourself to potential employers and recruiters. That's a conversation you'll need to initiate and lead. The elements below help you craft your introduction, or "elevator pitch," so you can concisely make a connection in a tailored way.

Elevator Pitch Elements	Talking Points	Nonverbals
1. Identity and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name, year in school, major Opportunities you're seeking Motivations, passions, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greeting: handshake, wave, or head nod Smile Eye contact Active listening Take notes if necessary
2. Confidence and preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of organization/company Relevant experience (work, internship, volunteer, student group, etc.) 	
3. Interest and enthusiasm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question to start the conversation Ask for a business card at the end (if applicable) 	

Here's an example of an elevator pitch:

"I'm excited to talk to you today, as I've been doing a lot of research about Community Action Partnership. I'm a liberal arts major, and I'm also the Director of Communications for the Office of Student Experiences at my college. I really value working with people, have an analytical mindset, and am hoping to find an internship where I can build upon my leadership and communication competencies. I noticed that for the Volunteer Management Internship, projects relate to real-world experiences relevant to our area's current child and family needs. Could you give me some examples of past summer projects that interns have completed?"



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP



International Students and the U.S. Job Search

If you are an international student and you would like to work in the U.S. after graduation, you need Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization. This authorization allows you to work in a job directly related to your major after completing your degree, for 12 to 36 months, depending on your major.

OPT application processing takes two to four months, so be sure to apply for OPT as soon as possible, even before securing employment. You can file for OPT as early as three months before graduation.

To learn more, talk to your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member.

Ways to Get Help with Networking Activities

As a college student, you have several resources at your disposal that will make your networking activities more fruitful and less intimidating.

You can:

- Search for and join the students/alumni LinkedIn group (linkedin.com) affiliated with the school.
- Join the LinkedIn groups and other social networking platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) of student organizations at the school.
- Attend career events on campus, in the community, and/or elsewhere (in your hometown, for example).
- Attend gatherings of professional associations in disciplines that interest you.

How to Contact People and What to Say

In addition to networking with people you already know, you can also network with complete strangers. It's actually very common in the world of working professionals, and there are many ways to find people to contact.

The easiest way to begin is to start with someone you do know, or someone a friend, relative, or professor knows. Think about who is currently in your network and how each of these people could support you in finding names for networking purposes.

You can also find people through:

- The school's alumni association and/or alumni office
- Conferences and workshops
- Company/organization websites
- Student groups
- Professional associations
- Industry directories
- Service organizations
- The career center
- Your advisor
- Social media sites, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook
- Faculty and course instructors



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS—NETWORKING WITH A LEARNING FOCUS

An *informational interview* is a special type of networking activity. It is a brief, typically face-to-face meeting with a person who is working in a position or field you want to explore or pursue. It gives you the chance to:

- Learn in depth about a specific industry, field, organization, and/or position, and then assess whether it's a good fit for your skills, personality, and career goals.
- Observe and get a feel for different work environments.
- Connect with professionals who may have tips about future job or internship opportunities.
- Develop the social skills you'll need in professional interactions.

You don't use an informational interview as a way to apply for a specific job or internship opening. Instead, you ask about **overall** opportunities in an organization or profession. (Or, more broadly, you use an informational interview to simply explore potential occupations or career possibilities.)

If you aren't able to have a face-to-face meeting at your interviewee's workplace, you can do an informational interview by phone, email, or live videoconference. Or you can meet at a coffee shop or another public place. You won't get to experience the interviewee's work environment firsthand, but you'll still learn a lot.

How to Request an Informational Interview

After you've found someone you'd like to talk to, contact that person to request a brief interview. You can call or send an email, whichever you prefer. Usually you'll ask to meet for 20 to 30 minutes.

Include the following information in your initial contact:

- Your first and last name.
- How you got the contact person's name.
- A brief summary about yourself (two or three sentences is plenty).
- The fact that you're contacting the person for an informational interview.
- Your phone number and email address. (Note: If you leave a voicemail message, be sure to say your name and phone number slowly and clearly.)



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Build Relationships with Your Professors

"Create strong relationships with your professors. They are the best resource, and they are willing to help you. They want you to succeed."

Networking Is a Critical Skill

"Networking can be intimidating, but it is one of the most important skills to pick up in college. I've quickly learned that the saying 'It's not about what you know, it's about who you know' is 100 percent accurate."

Talking to People Leads to Opportunity

"Talk to your professors! Talk to your advisors! Talk to their peers and colleagues. I ended up getting my job because I contacted someone in one department and they pointed me in another direction. Just keep asking. Don't give up. And don't settle."

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

If the interview is for career exploration:

Hello, Ms. Olmos.

My name is Lee Douglas, and I'm a student at Sample University majoring in _____. I received your name from Professor Chris Jones.

I'm doing some career research in the field of advertising, which I'm thinking about pursuing after school. I'm hoping you could meet with me for 20 or 30 minutes for an informational interview to discuss the field.

If that would be possible, please let me know when that might be convenient for you.

Again, my name is Lee Douglas, and I can be reached at 123-456-7890 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

Thank you.

If the interview is to uncover actual job opportunities:

Hello, Ms. Olmos.

My name is Lee Douglas, and I'm a senior at Sample University majoring in _____. I am beginning my job search, and I'm hoping to conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field of advertising. My goal in meeting with you would be to gain your perspectives about the field, and perhaps referrals to others in your network to learn more.

I am beginning my job search, and I'm hoping to conduct informational interviews with professionals in the field of advertising. My goal in meeting with you would be to gain your perspectives about the field, and perhaps referrals to others in your network to learn more.

If you could meet with me for 20 to 30 minutes, please let me know when that might be convenient for you.

Again, my name is Lee Douglas, and I can be reached at 123-456-7890 or ldouglas@gmail.com.

Thank you.

Tips for the Informational Interview

Here are a few tips for making your informational interviewing activities successful, both for you and the person you're meeting with:

- Be flexible. Work around your contact's busy schedule when arranging a date and time to get together.
- Research the person's occupation/organization ahead of time so that you can go in with thoughtful questions.
- Dress in a way that is authentic to you, comfortable, and showcases how you would like to be viewed in a professional setting.
- Arrive five to 10 minutes early so that you're respectful of the interviewee's schedule.
- Bring a list of questions you want to ask, along with a notebook where you can take notes.
- Ask for the names of additional people you can contact, and ask if you can use your interviewee's name as a referral.
- Before you leave, ask for the person's business card so that you have accurate name, title, and address information.
- After the interview, send a thank-you note promptly—within 48 hours.

It may be appropriate to bring your résumé to the informational interview—not to apply for a job but, rather, to request some feedback on it. You could also ask the person you're interviewing to pass it along to others if appropriate.

Alternatively, you could send your résumé along with your thank-you note after the interview. You can say something like: "I've included my résumé in case opportunities come up in the future." Tailor your résumé to the specific company/organization as much as possible.

What to Ask in an Informational Interview

Here are a few sample questions you can ask in an informational interview. You'll likely have lots of your own questions too. Be sure to think your questions through in advance so that you'll know how to proceed efficiently, being ever mindful and respectful of your interviewee's time.

Bring your list of questions with you, but don't feel tied to it. Having some questions prepared ahead of time will simply help you feel more confident, and will allow the conversation to flow more naturally once you get under way.

Personal information

- How did you become interested in this field?
- What are the most and least satisfying aspects of your work? What would you change?
- What experiences in your background have contributed to your success in this career? What would you have done differently?
- If this job or field were to become obsolete, in what other kinds of jobs could you apply your skills?

Questions about the organization/company

- How would you summarize what your organization does? How is it unique from your competitors?
- How would you characterize the culture of this organization and/or your department? For example, would you describe your position as closely supervised? Is this a high-pressure organization?
- What does your company look for when recruiting people?
- What other types of internships and jobs are available in your company/organization?
- How has the company grown, and what are its strategies for future growth?
- What is the dress code here?
- What is turnover like in this organization? Why do you think people stay or leave?

Questions about the field or position

- What background is necessary or helpful for this position? For example, are there any particular educational or training programs required or recommended for this position?
- What are the best ways to enter this field? What are the best ways to learn about specific job openings?
- What are the five most important competencies or traits for a person going into this field?
- What are some of the most current trends or changes in this field? What about challenges or controversies?
- Can you suggest professional publications and associations related to your field?
- What are your job responsibilities? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What is the employment outlook for this field, nationally and locally? Is demand increasing or decreasing?
- What is a typical salary range for this position? How does this vary by setting/industry/size of company/geography?
- Does this position go by any different titles in other organizations?
- What are typical career paths for people in this field?
- Does this type of position typically involve a lot of team projects, or do people work independently?

Additional contacts

- Can you suggest other companies where I might want to contact people?
- Can you suggest other people I might meet with to gain additional perspectives about this career, or about future job or internship opportunities?
- Would you be willing to provide an email introduction to any contacts you have?

What Now? How to Maintain the Relationship

Your informational interviewing activities don't end with the interview itself, nor should they. You'll want to stay connected with the people you meet.

You can start by sending a thank-you note after each informational interview. A handwritten thank-you card or formal email is appropriate. Your message should include something specific you learned during the meeting; it needs to be more than merely a generic note. If you have agreed to forward your résumé to the contact, now would be the time to do so.

While it may not be possible to re-engage with all of your informational interviewing contacts regularly, it is important to keep in touch genuinely. This is one of the most difficult aspects of networking in general: keeping up with your network! Reaching out to your contacts on a regular basis—every three to six months, perhaps—helps you maintain these key relationships. You can reconnect with people to:

- Say you followed their advice and share the results.
- Send them articles of potential interest.
- Update them on your résumé, experience, or personal situation.
- Tell them you read or heard something about them or their company/industry.
- Offer them something—like volunteer help on a project, for example, or a college student's perspective on their market or their mission.
- Simply tell them you'd like to touch base and meet again.

One final, critical tip: Be sure to ask your informational interviewee and other networking contacts to connect with you on LinkedIn; it's an easy way to keep in touch with professional colleagues, current and potential. You can do this immediately after meeting someone by using LinkedIn to send them a personalized invitation request. Once you're connected with someone on

LinkedIn, you will be updated if that person gets promoted, for example, or changes organizations. This type of informational nugget can be the perfect prompt for you to follow up.

CAREER FACT: LinkedIn Offers Critical Career Connections

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network, with nearly 700 million members in 200 countries and territories. Use the site for free at [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com). Be sure to search for groups affiliated with our school there.

JOB/CAREER FAIRS

It isn't all that often that employers come to you, but a career fair offers you that very opportunity.

A career fair is simply an event where multiple employers gather in one place to meet with prospective job and/or internship seekers. The typical career fair lasts for a few hours and gives you a chance to talk to many employers in a very short period of time. You might even end up leaving your résumé with some of the participating recruiters, and perhaps take part in informal mini-interviews as well. The connections you make can lead to all sorts of positive results!

Watch for career fair opportunities on the career center website, on other job search-related websites, and in the newspaper.

Tips for Career Fair Success

Here are a few key tips to help you succeed at career fairs and related events:

- Create or update your résumé.
- Research the organizations that are attending the event.
- Practice introducing yourself.
- Prepare questions to ask organization representatives.
- Dress in a way that is authentic to you, comfortable, and showcases how you would like to be viewed in a professional setting.
- Request business cards.
- Send thank-you notes immediately after the event to reiterate your interest and qualifications.



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP



At Career Fairs, Knowing the Organizations Gives You an Edge

Nothing impresses an employer less than a prospective candidate asking: "What does your company do?" So when you go to a career fair, be one of the relatively few attendees who knows something about the organizations in attendance. Visit their websites. Read about them in industry media and business publications.

The more informed you are, the better the impression you will make.

THE CAREER CENTER'S JOB PLATFORM

The career center's online job platform features many postings for entry-level jobs, in the local area and elsewhere. (Note: The platform also lists internships, co-ops, and volunteer positions you can explore.)

On a typical day, you'll find dozens or even hundreds of postings on the platform, making it one of the best tools you can use to identify job (and internship) opportunities. Best of all, the listings on the platform are geared specifically to college students and recent graduates—i.e., people like you!

Talk to a career counselor, and/or your advisor or a faculty member, to learn more about how you can harness this powerful job search resource.

GET STARTED ON THE CAREER CENTER'S JOB PLATFORM

Set Up Your Account

Go to the career center job platform's main screen and set up your account. (The career center website's URL is listed on page 3 of this guide.)

Complete Your Profile

Fill out your profile in as much detail as you can so that you can maximize the platform's benefits.

Upload Your Résumé

Upload your résumé so that you can conveniently apply for jobs (and internships etc.) that are advertised through the platform.

Set Your Notification Preferences

Receive notifications about jobs (and internships etc.) of interest, your pending applications, and more.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Use the Internet to Uncover Internship Possibilities to Explore

You'll find many websites that are geared exclusively to internship opportunities and internship-related advice. Here are a few of the most prominent:

- Internship Programs (internshipprograms.com)
- GoAbroad.com (goabroad.com/intern-abroad)
- Idealist (idealist.org)

JOB/INTERNSHIP WEBSITES

Here are some additional job/internship websites you can investigate:

- LinkedIn (linkedin.com)—Combine your job/internship search with networking and find out who you're connected with at an organization of interest, whether local, national, or global.
- Idealist (idealist.org)—This site features local, national, and international nonprofits and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) hiring for full-time employment, internships, and volunteer roles.
- USAJOBS (usajobs.gov)—This is the official job search website of the United States government.
- Professional Organizations—Professional organizations often devote a portion of their websites to job and internship postings. (Note: College students can frequently join professional organizations—or student branches of professional organizations—at a fraction of what working professionals have to pay.)

You can also use other job search websites that have helpful information and listings geared toward entry-level job seekers. Most companies, for example, post job opportunities on their own websites and/or on larger job-posting websites. There are also many independent websites that focus partially or exclusively on job and internship listings geared toward college students and recent graduates.

Just be cautious, and remember the key pros and cons of using Internet job search websites:

PROS

- They offer an easy way for you to see who's hiring and explore various roles in an organization.
- They may allow you to post your résumé for prospective employers to review.
- Many of the sites also offer automated job search agents that notify you by email or text when a position is posted that meets your criteria.

CONS

- You may not get a response from the employers who use these sites.
- The information you see about open positions may not be complete.
- You may find yourself putting so much time into using these sites that you neglect more effective, productive job search strategies such as networking.

Use the USAJOBS Website to Explore Federal Government Jobs by College Major

The federal government's USAJOBS website features a "Federal Occupations by College Major" section that allows you to identify federal government job titles associated with a major(s) of interest.

About 200 majors are covered, ranging from the common (e.g., accounting, engineering, political science) to the relatively obscure (e.g., poultry science, psychodrama, toxicology). Each occupational listing is accompanied by a four-digit code you can use to search the USAJOBS website for current federal government opportunities.

Visit: usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/federal-occupations-by-college-major.

LINKEDIN: A MUST-USE CAREER TOOL

LinkedIn (linkedin.com) is a social networking website with a **professional** emphasis. It offers an assortment of powerful tools that will help you connect with other people in your field(s) of interest, uncover career-related opportunities, and more. Here are five key ways you can—and should—use LinkedIn to pursue your career-related goals:

Build a Professional Online Presence. Think of your LinkedIn profile as your virtual résumé, but with much more room for detail and visual impact. You can use your LinkedIn profile to highlight not only your various experiences and your educational background, but also:

- Your key skills and knowledge areas (including the Core Career Competencies).
- The positive recommendations you’ve received from professors, supervisors, colleagues, etc.
- Your experiences and educational background.
- Examples of your work.
- Your professional interests.

Add Connections with “Warm” Contacts and Alumni. One of the most powerful features of LinkedIn is its ability to connect you with other people in your area(s) of professional interest. “Warm” contacts—professors, advisors, supervisors, as well as friends and family—are an excellent place to start, as are alumni.

Simply go to LinkedIn to search for the profiles of your “warm” contacts and/or alumni from the school. Then click on the “Connect” button near their name and photograph and ask to connect with the person. (Note: A box will appear encouraging you to “Add a note to your invitation.” Take a few minutes to do just that instead of sending out a generic, impersonal invitation. In doing so, you will stand out as someone who is thoughtful and purposeful—and therefore worth connecting with!)

Follow Relevant Professional Organizations, Groups, and Companies. Professional organizations, industry groups, and companies all offer LinkedIn groups for users who are interested in their offerings. Almost any topic or affiliation you can think of has some sort of group presence on LinkedIn. Use LinkedIn’s search tool to look for groups of interest, then join the ones that match your professional (or even personal) aspirations.

Research Companies, Industries, and Graduate/Professional Programs. Do you have your eye on working for a specific company, pursuing a specific industry, applying for a specific graduate/professional program? Search for it with LinkedIn’s search tool. Chances are it will have a LinkedIn presence, which you can use to learn more about the entity and follow its key news updates.

Search for Job Openings. LinkedIn has evolved over the years to offer job listings too. Just click on the “Jobs” link at the top of your profile page anytime, then search for open positions by keyword, location, or career interests. LinkedIn users often post job openings on their own news/sharing feeds as well.

If you need help building a compelling LinkedIn presence and making the most of the site’s offerings, talk to your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member. You can also visit university.linkedin.com/linkedin-for-students, where you’ll find a variety of informative tipsheets and videos.

STAFFING AGENCIES

Staffing agencies hire for temporary and permanent positions on behalf of other organizations. Many companies/organizations use these agencies—rather than their own internal recruiters—to fill open positions.

Staffing agencies typically offer temporary, contract, and direct-hire positions. And they generally fill professional positions as well as administrative jobs (although the offerings of various agencies do vary considerably, depending on their niche).

If you choose to work with an agency, do your research and ask questions to find the one that best fits your needs. **Be sure as well to work only with those agencies that do not charge you, the job seeker.** Staffing agency fees are typically paid by the **employers** who work with the agencies.

Working with a staffing agency has its own pros and cons. Among them:

PROS

- Most agencies offer an extremely personal approach and will help you with your résumé, interview preparation, and job fit.
- You can gain short-term professional experience, perhaps with a variety of organizations.
- An agency can help you secure a position quickly if you're moving to a new city without a job.

CONS

- Many temporary agency contracts offer no benefits.
- Immediate job openings may require you to start work right away.
- Though temporary positions may lead to full-time employment, there are no guarantees.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Of all the different strategies you can use to uncover potential job opportunities to pursue, which one(s) are you most likely to try, and why?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

1. Use the career center's job platform and/or a job search-related website to look up one job that interests you.
2. If you can, create a saved search on the site to receive notifications when similar opportunities are posted.



CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP



Watch Yourself Online—Because Hiring Managers Are Watching Too

Some 70 percent of employers use social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to screen job candidates, according to a 2018 nationwide study by job search website CareerBuilder.

Sixty-six percent of the more than 1,000 hiring managers surveyed said they use search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo! to research candidates as well. And more than half—57 percent—said they have uncovered content online that has compelled them not to hire a candidate.

JOB SEARCH COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Once you've developed a healthy list of job opportunities you'd like to pursue, you have to actually go ahead and pursue them! To do that in a way that maximizes your chances for success, you need compelling, convincing job search communication tools:

- Résumés
- Cover letters
- Recommendation letters
- Thank-you notes

You'll use all of these critical tools, as well as your LinkedIn profile (see page 63) and opportunities like interviews, to cultivate and communicate your personal brand (see page 50): the image you convey to the world.

RÉSUMÉS

The Purpose of Your Résumé

The purpose of your résumé is to help you quickly explain your skills and competencies, qualifications, and fit for a position. It serves as your introduction to prospective employers and can be used both as a marketing tool for landing interviews and to help you reflect on your experience and plan for future skill and competency development.

Your résumé is one of the primary tools you can use to showcase your career readiness in a tangible, compelling way. Remember: We define career readiness as developing—and then being able to convincingly demonstrate and articulate—the following Core Career Competencies:

- Analytical & Critical Thinking
- Applied Problem Solving
- Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making
- Innovation & Creativity
- Oral & Written Communication
- Teamwork & Leadership
- Engaging Diversity
- Active Citizenship & Community Engagement
- Digital Literacy
- Career Management

Keep these competencies at the forefront of your mind as you create your résumé. And if you haven't been doing so already, start:

- Carefully documenting all your experiences, in and out of the classroom.
- Pinpointing which Core Career Competencies your experiences have helped you develop.

(Note: Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you with this process.)

Remember: Ultimately, you need to be able to demonstrate your career readiness, on your résumé and elsewhere. You can't just say you're career ready; you have to **show** it. With that challenge always top of mind: Which experiences—academic, engagement, and career—can you highlight on your résumé to show prospective employers that you have, in fact, developed the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness?

CAREER FACT: What Is a Curriculum Vitae (CV)?

A CV presents a full history of your academic and professional credentials (including research projects, publications, professional development, and practical experience related to your field). It is commonly used when applying to graduate/professional programs, fellowships, and grants. The length of a CV is not limited to one page.

RÉSUMÉ CONTENT CHECKLIST

Heading

- ☐ Use a larger font for your name than for the rest of the text.
- ☐ Include all of your contact information: full name, mailing address, phone number, and email address.
- ☐ Spell out all abbreviated words (e.g., “Avenue” instead of “Ave.”).
- ☐ Include both a local and a permanent address if you’ll be moving during the application process.
- ☐ Use a professional email address (e.g., jdoe@gmail.com).
- ☐ Optional: Add your LinkedIn profile address or online portfolio address.

Summary (optional section, typically at the top of the document before the “Education” section)

- ☐ Use three to five bullet points to highlight the specific qualifications you have that match the ones emphasized in the job listing. Focus in particular on the Core Career Competencies.
- ☐ Provide concise, unique descriptions of your experiences.

Education

- ☐ Include all colleges/universities you’ve attended for more than one year.
- ☐ Include the college/university name, degree(s) you are pursuing, your major, your graduation date, and your GPA (if it’s above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale).
- ☐ Spell out abbreviations (e.g., “Bachelor of Arts” vs. “B.A.”).
- ☐ Include learning abroad and any other educational experiences.
- ☐ Consider “Relevant Coursework” as a subheading, if appropriate.
- ☐ List honors and awards (e.g., Dean’s List) as well as scholarships you’ve received.

Experience

- ☐ Document all the experiences you have that relate directly to the job you’re pursuing. Include paid and unpaid work, internships, research, volunteer activities, and leadership activities (for example, in student organizations). Use separate headings (e.g., “Work Experience,” “Internships,” “Research Experience”) for each of these if you’d like, or simply put all of the information under the Experience heading.
- ☐ Include organization name, city and state, position title, and dates of employment.
- ☐ Quantify your experiences wherever possible.
- ☐ State your skills compellingly using the following formula: Action Verb + Details + Outcome/Results.
- ☐ List your experiences in reverse chronological order.
- ☐ Right-align dates. Use the same format throughout your résumé (months/year or seasons/year).

Skills

- ☐ List any language, computer, or technical skills you have. It’s best to describe your skills in the context of your work experience. Consider including your level of proficiency. Examples:

Programs: Proficient in Excel, Matlab, Mathematica, Adobe Photoshop.

Languages: German (first language); French (basic).

Honors/Achievements

- ☐ List honors and awards you’ve received through experiences or leadership roles.
- ☐ Note: List academic honors and awards (including Dean’s List and scholarships) in the Education section.

Activities/Involvement

- ☐ List engagement activities you’ve been involved in that haven’t necessarily given you the chance to take on a leadership role. This includes student organizations and intramural sports. Note: You can list leadership activities in the Experience section.

A Few Things to Do Before Writing Your Résumé

- Research the specific organization you're targeting, as well as the specific position you're applying for, to find out what key skills, competencies, and experiences the employer is seeking.
- Brainstorm a list of experiences you've had that demonstrate you have the skills and competencies for the position you're pursuing. Be sure to include any unpaid/volunteer positions.
- Create a list of three or four of your strongest characteristics that make you a good candidate for the job. Make sure you think not only in terms of specific skills, but also in the context of the Core Career Competencies that employers consistently seek in college students and recent college graduates.
- Think of several accomplishments from your previous experiences that illustrate each key skill or competency.
- Outline the training and education you have that qualifies you for the job.

One other piece of critical advice: **Do not use a résumé template.** You can use one as a guide, but don't put your information into a pre-formatted template. Remember: Employers review hundreds if not thousands of résumés. So they've seen hundreds if not thousands of résumés that show up in the standard two or three template formats. They're not looking to see one more.

CAREER FACT: Your Résumé Will Get a Very Quick First Look

Employers spend as little as six seconds looking at your résumé. It's essential to write it well.

Résumé Formatting Tips

Visual Tips

- Balance text and whitespace on the page. Consider one-inch margins on the top, bottom, left, and right.

- Ensure that your résumé's headings stand out from the rest of the text, making items easy to find (through the modest use of **bold**, underline, indentation, ALL CAPS, • bullets, etc.).
- Keep the résumé to one page, and fill the entire page. Adjust the margins as needed to balance the page.
- Proofread! Ensure that your final document has absolutely no errors.
- Use 10- to 12-point body text in an easily read font (such as Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri).

Additional Tips

- Don't use personal pronouns, such as "I" or "my."
- Use the past tense to describe past experiences and the present tense to highlight current experiences.
- Consider leaving off "average" information, such as a not-so-great job experience or a GPA that is less than 3.0.
- Revise your résumé often, preferably for every position you pursue.
- Get a second opinion: Have your résumé reviewed by a career counselor, your advisor, a faculty member, and/or another trusted person in your life.

Develop Compelling Skills and Competencies Statements

The skills and competencies statements you write for your résumé need to:

- Follow this basic formula:

Action Verb + Details + Outcome/Results

- Effectively communicate your experiences.
- Demonstrate that you have what it takes to succeed, particularly when it comes to development of the Core Career Competencies.
- Stand out from those of other applicants.

Action Verbs

- Identify the specific needs of the employer. Look at the job description and the information you’ve researched about the organization. Identify the skills and Core Career Competencies that you think are necessary for this position.
- Use action verbs that address these needs (e.g., “developed,” “coordinated,” “analyzed”). (See pages 69-70.)
- Choose words that demonstrate responsibility (e.g., instead of “made up,” say “created” or “designed”).
- Vary your word choice. Doing so helps you make your skills and competencies sound more diverse and adds depth.

Details

- Ask yourself the following questions: Who/for whom? What? Where? When? Why? How?

- Find the balance between short and long. The majority of your bullet-point statements should be one line only.
- Most positions will have between two and five bullet points, with more emphasis on relevant positions.

Outcome/Results

- When possible, use numbers to quantify your skills and experiences. Think about these questions: How many? How much? How often?
- Expand your concept of “results” beyond a quantifiable figure. Numbers are not your only achievements.
- Ask what difference you’ve made: As a result of your action(s), what happened to you, your client/colleague/boss/customer, and/or others involved?

EXAMPLES OF COMPELLING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES STATEMENTS

BEFORE**AFTER**

Responsible for supervising employees.



Organized the training and supervision of 10 employees by conducting annual reviews to guarantee quality service.

Answered phones.



Responded to an average of 200 calls per day to solicit donations for a new charter school.

Customer relations.



Provided technical support for customers by using problem solving skills to alleviate their concerns.

Waited on tables.



Managed 10 tables, using interpersonal skills to ensure customer satisfaction through prompt, cordial service.

On the four pages that follow, you’ll find:

- A categorized listing of action verbs you can use on your résumé (and elsewhere—for example, in your cover letter, in interviews, and on your LinkedIn profile).
- Examples of two solid résumés so you can see how the energy you put into writing and designing your résumé pays off in an attractive, compelling final document.

ACTION VERBS FOR YOUR RÉSUMÉ

You can make your résumé more compelling and impactful by describing your experiences as actions—i.e., by using powerful action verbs. The underlined words are especially good for pointing out your accomplishments.

Management/Leadership Skills

achieved	directed	initiated	recommended
administered	eliminated	inspected	<u>reduced</u> (losses)
analyzed	enforced	<u>instituted</u>	<u>reorganized</u>
appointed	<u>enhanced</u>	led	replaced
assigned	<u>established</u>	managed	restored
attained	evaluated	merged	scheduled
authorized	executed	<u>motivated</u>	secured
chaired	<u>expanded</u>	organized	selected
considered	generated	originated	set goals
consolidated	handled	overhauled	spearheaded
contracted	headed	oversaw	streamlined
controlled	hired	<u>pioneered</u>	<u>strengthened</u>
converted	hosted	planned	supervised
coordinated	<u>improved</u>	presided	<u>surpassed</u>
decided	incorporated	prioritized	terminated
delegated	increased	produced	transformed

Communication/People Skills

addressed	defined	involved	reconciled
advertised	described	joined	recruited
arbitrated	directed	listened	referred
arranged	drafted	marketed	reinforced
articulated	edited	mediated	reported
authored	elicited	moderated	<u>resolved</u>
clarified	enlisted	negotiated	responded
collaborated	explained	observed	solicited
communicated	expressed	outlined	specified
composed	formulated	participated	suggested
condensed	furnished	persuaded	summarized
contacted	influenced	presented	synthesized
conveyed	interacted	promoted	translated
<u>convinced</u>	interpreted	proposed	wrote
corresponded	interviewed	publicized	

Organization/Detail Skills

approved	executed	operated	reviewed
arranged	filed	ordered	routed
catalogued	generated	organized	scheduled
categorized	<u>implemented</u>	prepared	screened
charted	incorporated	processed	set up
classified	indexed	provided	submitted
coded	inspected	purchased	supplied
collected	inventoried	recorded	<u>standardized</u>
compiled	logged	registered	systematized
corrected	<u>maintained</u>	reserved	<u>updated</u>
corresponded	monitored	responded	validated
distributed	obtained	retrieved	verified

Financial/Data Skills

adjusted	budgeted	forecasted	projected
allocated	calculated	<u>managed</u>	reconciled
analyzed	computed	marketed	reduced
appraised	conserved	measured	researched
assessed	corrected	planned	retrieved
audited	determined	prepared	saved
<u>balanced</u>	estimated	programmed	tutored

Creative Skills

acted	<u>designed</u>	formulated	originated
adapted	<u>directed</u>	<u>founded</u>	performed
composed	displayed	illustrated	photographed
conceptualized	drew	integrated	<u>revised</u>
condensed	entertained	<u>invented</u>	revitalized
<u>created</u>	<u>established</u>	modeled	shaped
customized	fashioned	modified	solved

Counseling Skills

adapted	demonstrated	furthered	referred
advocated	diagnosed	guided	rehabilitated
assessed	educated	intervened	represented
assisted	encouraged	mediated	resolved
cared for	ensured	mentored	simplified
clarified	<u>expedited</u>	motivated	supported
coached	<u>facilitated</u>	prevented	
counseled	familiarized	provided	

Development Skills

analyzed	created	<u>founded</u>	supported
applied	<u>designed</u>	influenced	surveyed
catalogued	<u>developed</u>	<u>implemented</u>	tabulated
compiled	established	initiated	updated
conceived	formulated	instituted	

Teaching Skills

adapted	critiqued	focused	simulated
advised	<u>developed</u>	guided	stimulated
clarified	enabled	informed	taught
coached	encouraged	instilled	tested
communicated	evaluated	<u>instructed</u>	<u>trained</u>
conducted	explained	<u>motivated</u>	transmitted
<u>coordinated</u>	<u>facilitated</u>	persuaded	

Technical Skills

<u>adapted</u>	<u>designed</u>	overhauled	restored
applied	determined	printed	<u>solved</u>
assembled	<u>developed</u>	<u>programmed</u>	specialized
built	<u>engineered</u>	rectified	<u>spearheaded</u>
calculated	fortified	regulated	standardized
computed	installed	remodeled	studied
constructed	maintained	repaired	<u>upgraded</u>
converted	operated	replaced	utilized
debugged			

FATIMA ABDI

123 Main Street
City, ST 12345
123-456-7890 | abdiooooo@school.edu

EDUCATION

Sample University
Bachelor of Arts, Physiology
City, ST
Anticipated May 2024

VOLUNTEER AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Sample University Medical Center
Hospital Volunteer
City, ST
May 2019 – Present

- Collect case information from patients to improve patient care procedure
- Manage over 100 patient records and assist patients and families to complete forms
- Restock supplies to ensure nurses are able to provide effective and timely care

Sample Store
Customer Associate
City, ST
May 2018 – August 2020

- Interacted with up to 300 customers daily, providing excellent customer service to maintain customer base
- Kept sales floor clear of debris; organized garments for a positive aesthetic appearance
- Met daily sales goals by marketing and promoting sales, recommending add-on products, and maintaining a friendly attitude

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Student Council, President
September 2019 – June 2020

- Led group of 30 members to set goals for the academic year; created a plan to accomplish goals and formed small groups to carry out projects
- Organized a food drive that collected 3,000 donations for local food shelves

National Honor Society, Member
October 2014 – June 2020

- Volunteered 250 hours through the City Library literacy program
- Tutored small groups of children on reading, writing, and storytelling skills

ACTIVITIES

Muslim Student Association, Member
Undergraduate Physiology Society, Member
September 2020 – Present
September 2020 – Present

MADELINE MILLER

123 Main Street
City, ST 12345
123-456-7890
mille023@school.edu

SUMMARY

- Five years of customer service experience, conducted within a wide variety of environments
- Strong background of team building, management, and supervision
- Proven ability to apply personal, professional, and academic knowledge to solve problems and create effective solutions for customers

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology City, ST
Sample College Anticipated Graduation: May 2021
GPA: 3.56

WORK EXPERIENCE

Advising Office City, ST
Student Volunteer June 2019 – Present

- Communicate in person and over the phone to schedule appointments and assist a diverse group of students within the College
- Maintain an up-to-date knowledge base on resources and events
- Initiate and complete time-sensitive projects to assist advisors when necessary

Sample Restaurant City, ST
Head Manager September 2016 – June 2018

- Obtained excellent leadership skills through training and supervising a team of five managers
- Managed staff to ensure efficient fulfillment of restaurant orders and strong customer service
- Performed necessary opening and closing duties, maintaining a clean and aesthetically pleasing store which met all required health and safety codes

Sample Store City, ST
Customer Associate September 2014 – September 2016

- Worked with little direction or supervision to ensure customer satisfaction
- Communicated with customers on the sales floor and at the cash register, answering questions and recommending products

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Sample College City, ST
Welcome Week Leader April 2017 – June 2018

- Introduced a group of 30 new students to Sample College, guiding them through their first transitional week into college
- Ensured all students followed a tight time schedule and attended all required events
- Led various team-building and introductory games to foster a community within a new group of students

Sample Elementary School City, ST
Teaching Assistant September 2015 – September 2017

- Assisted third-graders with subjects such as English and History
- Completed tasks as requested by the head teacher, such as the creation of 3 lesson plans per week targeted to diverse students of varying learning abilities

ACTIVITIES

- Psychology International Student Association Member May 2019 – Present
- Intramural Basketball Team Captain September 2019 – May 2020
- NCAA Men's Basketball Regional Promotions Volunteer March 2019

COVER LETTERS

Whenever you apply for a job or an internship, you **always** need to send a cover letter along with your résumé, whether it's required or not, unless a posting specifically tells you not to.

You'll want to write a different cover letter for each position you pursue. And you'll want to tailor your cover letter to the specific position you're seeking; don't use one generic cover letter for everything.

Why? Well, this is one of those occasions when your Analytical & Critical Thinking competency (as well as your Oral & Written Communication competency) goes beyond career readiness and plays a key role in your job/internship search as well.

Just for a moment, put yourself in the shoes of an employer. You're trying to fill an internship position or a job opening, and you're reading dozens of cover letters as you evaluate candidates. Which type of cover letter will truly grab your attention—one that is obviously generic, or one that is written specifically with **you** and **your** needs in mind?

The answer couldn't be more clear: The targeted, customized cover letter wins every time. So be sure to target and customize every cover letter you write and send.

Use your letter to succinctly present your qualifications, personality, and enthusiasm for the position. In most cases, your letter is the first extension of your personality that an employer will see. So it should not simply restate the information on your résumé. Instead, the two documents should work well together without being overtly repetitive.

CAREER FACT: Your Cover Letter Needs to Grab the Reader's Attention Quickly

On average, you'll have about 20 seconds to impress an employer with your cover letter. It's essential to write it well.

The Benefits of Cover Letters

Writing cover letters—especially targeted, customized letters that will actually grab an employer's interest—takes time and energy. Lots of it.

The investment is well worth it, though, because a compelling cover letter:

- Serves as a writing sample, as well as a true example of your overall communication competency in a situation that matters.
- Allows you to convey your motivation and your interest in the position and/or organization you're pursuing.
- Gives you the chance to describe aspects of your experience or identity more fully—you can elaborate on your values, for example, or demonstrate your personality.
- Helps you get started with interview preparation by developing relevant stories and examples to share.
- Lets you directly address any potential barriers you may be facing (e.g., gaps in employment, relocation, being unavailable during certain phases of the hiring process).

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Be Professional and Consistent

Use either a standard business letter format for your contact information or the same heading as your résumé so that your materials look consistent.

How to Structure Your Cover Letter

Here's a basic tutorial on what your cover letter should look like, in terms of both content and format:

Your Name
Your Address
Your City, State Zip Code

Current Date

Contact's Name
Contact's Job Title
Organization Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear [First Name and Last Name]:

If you don't know who to address your letter to, you can write: "Dear Hiring Manager." Otherwise, use gender-inclusive language (i.e., avoid assuming the recipient's gender and thus using "Mr." or "Ms."; instead, simply use the person's full name).

First paragraph

- Offer a brief, enthusiastic statement about your interest in the position and/or the organization, based on your research or on previous interactions with the recipient.
- If someone is referring you, mention that person's name here to share how you heard about the position and/or the organization.

Middle paragraph(s)

- Explain how your experience is a match for what the letter's recipient is seeking. This is the place to "sell" your skills and strengths, as well as your development of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness—though you won't be able to cover it all, obviously.
- Demonstrate evidence that you know a bit about the employer and his/her needs, based on the job description. Show that you know the industry through how you write your letter (i.e., in the degree of creativity or formality you show in your writing).
- Promote your top three skills/competencies, experiences, or qualities that make you a compelling candidate for the position, staying focused but offering a bit more detail than your résumé shows.
- Describe how you would make an impact through the position and how you would contribute to the organization's mission or purpose.

Closing paragraph

- Be sure your letter ends on a positive, courteous note.
- Politely thank the reader for his/her time and consideration.
- Use a professional closing, and sign your name, possibly inserting an electronic version of your signature. If you're submitting a printed copy of your letter, sign it with a high-quality, black-ink pen.

CAREER FACT: Connections Gain Attention

Referrals are one of the top ways people get invited to interviews. So share any connections you have with people your cover letter's recipient might know, provided those people are comfortable with you using their names. Referring to connections, or "name-dropping," is very common and is expected in U.S.-dominant business culture.

How to Submit Your Cover Letter

Save each cover letter file with your name and the document type—e.g., “Lastname,Firstname_CoverLetter.pdf.”

When you’re submitting your application materials via email:

- Save each document as a separate PDF file, attaching it to the email. (Note: Saving files as Word documents may be a better idea if you are uploading them to online recruiting sites.)
- In the body of the email, provide a brief, friendly, and somewhat formal and professional message, adhering to all the basics of good email communication (e.g., proper greeting, excellent grammar and spelling, proper salutation).
- Be sure to use a helpful subject line for your email message, such as:
 - “POSITION NAME application - FIRSTNAME LASTNAME”
 - “Public Policy Intern application - Firstname Lastname”

Avoid These Common Cover Letter Pitfalls

We’ve covered what to do when it comes to your cover letters. Here, conversely, are some of the more common mistakes college students and recent grads make where cover letters are concerned:

- **Not including a cover letter at all.** Unless a position description specifically states “no cover letters,” it’s always best to include a cover letter each time you apply for a job or an internship.
- **Ignoring directions from the employer.** Be sure that you carefully read the job description and follow the guidelines provided by the employer. Sometimes, for example, employers ask applicants to address specific things in

the cover letter. Make sure you follow such directions when you see them.

- **Exceeding one page.** Your cover letter should demonstrate concise, polished writing and should not exceed one page.
- **Submitting a cover letter with errors.** Proofread your letter carefully, reading it aloud to uncover spelling and grammar errors. You’d be amazed how often you catch things when you hear them vs. seeing them.
- **Overuse of “I” statements.** Vary your sentence structure so that you’re not starting each sentence with “I” statements, like “I was in charge of a very important project.” Instead, you could say: “Through my leadership, our team achieved our project goals on time and with great results.”
- **Using language that undermines your confidence.** Instead of writing “I believe I would be a great asset...” or “I think I will make a great team member,” simply delete the less-confident language and instead say “I will be a great asset...” or “I will make a great team member...”
- **Making it all about you.** It’s great to be energized about how the position you’re pursuing will help you. But remember: The employer is the one who is in the hiring position, and they want to know what you will do for them.
- **Using clichés.** Stay away from phrases like “As you can see on my résumé” (e.g., “As you can see on my résumé, I have excellent communication skills.”). If something is already obvious on your résumé, there’s no need to waste cover letter space saying so. Instead, focus on your key point and rewrite to something like: “My experience as a student organization leader helped me build excellent communication skills.”

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Bullet Points Offer Visual Appeal

It’s OK to use bullet points to highlight your experiences in the main body of your cover letter. A combination of paragraph format along with several bulleted items can be a compelling, visually appealing way of making your case.

Let's look at a high-quality cover letter so that you can see how the energy you put into writing one pays off in an attractive, compelling final document.

Be sure to include your name and contact information at the top of your letter, either mirroring your résumé header information or using professional business letter format.

March 3, 2022

Rachelle Williams
FoodWise Nonprofit
220 West Some Street, Suite 500
City, ST 55555

Dear Rachelle Williams:

I am writing to apply for the Community Outreach Internship with FoodWise Nonprofit, an organization I admire for its work to advocate for food justice in the community. I recently learned about this internship opportunity from Scott Draper, who I met when he was a panelist in one of my American studies classes last fall. Currently I am a sophomore at Sample University, majoring in American studies and sociology with a minor in leadership. My academic and involvement experiences make me a strong candidate for this position.

A successful Community Outreach Intern must possess strong writing, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills. Through my liberal arts education and through my role as Marketing Manager for the Sustainability Advocates student organization, I am developing excellent writing skills, both in academic settings and in marketing and promotional contexts. My American studies coursework has taught me to use my critical thinking skills to analyze historical events and movements to better understand how to advocate effectively in current times. When Scott Draper described the way you situate your work in the context of the history of our area, he sparked my curiosity and interest in this internship.

Finally, I bring excellent relationship-building skills that will help me connect with people in the community during the internship. For example, during my sophomore year I served as a Community Advisor in a residence hall on campus. In this role I built relationships with new students, enforced policies, and provided prompt and friendly customer service. I have also taken courses on human behavior and communication, which will be an asset to me in this role.

As a Community Outreach Intern I would bring together my writing, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills to help FoodWise Nonprofit deliver on the mission to raise awareness about food justice issues and help advocate for solutions that will bring more equity and access to healthy foods in all communities in our state.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my experiences and fit for this position. Thank you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at 123-456-7890 or via email at mille023@school.edu. I will look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Madeline Miller

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Some prospective employers will ask you to provide recommendation letters along with your other job search communication documents (i.e., résumés, cover letters).

A letter of recommendation should describe—and give examples of—your strongest qualities, your best skills/competencies and abilities, your commitment to a particular field, and your potential to contribute to the company/organization you're pursuing.

Who should write letters of recommendation for you? Here are some tips for picking the right people:

- Approach potential writers who will give you a strong, positive recommendation. Ask them directly if they would be willing to write a letter that is reflective of who you are and the good work you do.
- Focus on people who know you well academically or professionally: faculty members, supervisors, coworkers, or advisors. Family members are usually not appropriate.

Remember, too, that your prospective letter writers have busy jobs, appointments, and possibly other students seeking recommendation letters as well. So do everything you can to make your request

simple for them. Give them everything you can from the following list:

- Relevant information about the position you're applying for and the company/organization offering it.
- Your thoughts on what you see as your strongest qualities and skills/competencies (especially in the context of the Core Career Competencies that signify your career readiness).
- A copy of your current résumé.
- A list noting which academic courses you've completed and how well you did in them.

A few other key tips:

- Be sure that all of your recommendation letters appear on letterhead.
- Give your letter writers an early deadline, occasionally check in with them, and offer them reminders as needed.
- Thank your letter writers; they're giving you a significant amount of their time and energy!
- Keep your letter writers informed about the application process.
- Stay organized by carefully tracking who your letter writers are, what application deadlines you're dealing with, and who you have followed up with or still need to follow up with.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Get to Know Your Professors Early

Make an effort to get to know your professors, especially if you see yourself asking them for a letter of recommendation someday. Attend office hours, ask questions in class, and/or conduct research with them.

Give Letter Writers Plenty of Time

The recommendation letter process can take a while. So ask for letters of recommendation long before you need them!

Often You'll Need to Supply Only Your References

Many employers, rather than asking you to provide letters of recommendation, will instead ask that you simply give them your references—a brief list (with contact information) of the people who have agreed to be contacted on your behalf.

THANKS-YOU NOTES

At some point, you will land an interview for one of the jobs/internships you're pursuing with the solid résumé(s) and cover letter(s) you've developed. After that interview (Note: we cover interviewing extensively next in this guide), you will need to send a thank-you note to your interviewer(s).

Why? Well, for starters, it's common courtesy. Your interviewer has spent time and energy with you and on you, and is spending additional time and energy evaluating you for the position. It only makes sense, then, to thank them for that consideration.

But a thank-you note benefits you, too, because it gives you the chance to reiterate your interest in the position you're pursuing, as well as your qualifications and fit for it. It's one last chance to make a compelling case for your candidacy—and to demonstrate your career readiness along the way.

Keep this little-known fact in mind too: Most job/internship applicants fail to send a thank-you note after their interviews. So when you do, you'll instantly stand out from the crowd and improve your chances of landing the position.

Some Key Tips on Thank-You Notes

- Plan to send your thank-you note within two days after your interview.
- Ask for the hiring manager's business card at the interview so that you have correct spellings and contact information.
- You can send a handwritten note card, an email, or a typed letter (printed out and mailed). A typed letter is the most formal. Handwritten notecards are more personal and can be shorter. Email is a good choice if your interviewer prefers email contact, or if you know a hiring decision will be made immediately.
- Proofread. Then proofread again. Check for typos, grammatical errors, and awkward sentences. One error can move you to the bottom of the candidate pool (which is true for résumés and cover letters, too). Have someone else proofread your note; a second set of eyes and a second brain are invaluable.
- If you were interviewed by multiple people, send an individual thank-you note to each person who interviewed you. Change each thank-you message somewhat. At a minimum, send a thank-you note to whomever seemed to be the leader in your interview.
- Keep track of whom you send thank-you notes to and when. Keep a copy of emails and letters, too.

Here's an example of a concise, but effective thank-you note:

Hello Elaine Blackstone,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you about the Marketing Assistant position, and for the tour of your wonderful new store.

I would be excited to use my marketing and retail experience, and my creativity, to help develop effective marketing campaigns. I would look forward to helping Hipster Clothing become an industry leader. The fast-paced energy and collaborative environment is exactly the type of culture in which I thrive.

Please contact me at 123-456-7890 or mont123@school.edu if you need any additional information.

Thank you again for your time.

Carlos Montgomery

INTERVIEWS

You've made your case on paper—specifically, on your résumé and in your cover letter—for a job or an internship that intrigues you (and you've effectively applied many of the Core Career Competencies in the process, by the way). Now, you've landed an interview. Congratulations! It's time to make your case **in person**—through an in-person interview and/or a virtual interview via video or phone. (The information in the pages ahead applies to interviews in general; we cover the key nuances of virtual interviewing below.)

We will walk along the path to interviewing success step by step: before the interview, during the interview, after the interview and—keeping our eye on the ultimate goal—at the offer stage.

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWING

More than half of employers now use video or phone interviewing as one of their college recruiting tools. In many ways, you'll prepare for these virtual interviews—and perform in them—just as you would for a face-to-face interview, following the advice in the pages ahead

But virtual interviewing is also its own art form—particularly when it comes to interviewing via video. Whether you're interacting with an employer on the phone, live on screen, or are instead recording your responses to a set of questions delivered asynchronously by a computer, you want to make sure your best self shines through!

Clarify Logistics. It's OK to do so! This information is likely to be shared when you are invited for an interview, but in case it isn't, do clarify logistics by asking what you can expect. For instance, will the employer be contacting you via phone or via video conferencing software? (Clarify who will be contacting whom.) How long is the interview? With whom will the interview be? What can you expect during the virtual interview?

Check Your Tech and Environment. Before and during the interview, make sure your technology works—Internet connection and phone reception. We recommend using your headphones. Next, think about where you will interview. Arrange a space that is comfortable, has little to no distractions, and offers good lighting. Lastly, communication is key. At the start of the interview, check in about how communication is going for you and the employer (i.e., audio, connection, volume). This is also a good time to discuss a backup plan in case technical issues come up. Provide the employer with a number to best reach you.

Eliminate Background Distractions. From both a visual and an audio standpoint, make sure the setting you pick is quiet and distraction-free. If you're interviewing from your residence, ask your roommate(s) to keep the noise down. If you're interviewing via video, make sure the room you're in is well lit so that the interviewer can see you clearly. You also want to make sure that nothing in the background reveals personally identifying information you would not want to share.

Dress the Part. Yes, even if you're not meeting in person; it will boost your confidence. You want to dress wisely, in a way that makes sense for both the job/employer itself as well as for your own personal identity. Experiment a bit beforehand, with the help of a friend, to get a sense of how you look best on camera.

Speak Clearly, into the Microphone. Be sure you talk loudly enough to be heard, but not so loudly as to be overbearing. Confirm as well that your computer's/phone's microphone is working properly, and that it is set to pick up your voice easily.

In Video Interviews, Look at the Camera, Not at Your Counterpart on the Screen. If you spend an entire video interview looking at your interviewer's face on your computer screen—and not instead at your computer's webcam—you will end up appearing to look down the whole time instead of looking the interviewer in the eye. Put your computer at eye level as you're sitting so that its webcam will be more or less at eye level as well. Nonverbal cues—such as smiling—can even be picked up via the intonation of your voice.

Adopt a “Yes, I’ll Practice” Mindset.

Television news anchors **learn** to perform well on camera; it looks easy because they have practiced. You'll need to practice communicating on camera and/or on the phone too. The more you do, the better you'll get—and the better your chances will be for interviewing well and landing the job.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

What to Know, What to Bring, and What to Wear

Here are some tips to keep in mind before your interview, particularly with respect to what you should know, what you should bring, and what you should wear:

- Know the details of the interview: date, time, length, location, number of interviewers, and who the interviewers are. If the organization doesn't provide this information, ask.
- Update your résumé and bring several copies with you.
- Bring a padfolio or notepad, pens, and a portfolio (if you have one). Taking notes is perfectly OK—and expected.

- Plan a professional outfit. Remember: It's better to be overdressed than underdressed! You don't need to spend a lot of money on an outfit; perhaps you have items in your wardrobe that are interview appropriate. If not, check department stores for discounts or look in thrift stores. Dress in a way that is authentic to you, comfortable, and showcases how you would like to be viewed in a professional setting.

Know Yourself

Before going into an interview, it's critical for you to know how your experiences, skills, and competencies (namely, the Core Career Competencies) relate to the position you're applying for. While you will not necessarily be asked the specific questions that follow, knowledge about yourself and how you fit with the position will help showcase your enthusiasm and integrate your skills/competencies into your interview responses:

- Who are you? What are your interests, passions, values, talents, and skills/competencies?
- What is your educational background? What classes have you taken? What certifications are you pursuing, and what research have you conducted?
- What do you know how to do? (You should be able to articulate the experience you've gained through jobs, internships, volunteer positions, learning abroad, student group activities, and class projects.)

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Get a (Quiet) Room

Do you have a video (or phone) interview coming up and need a quiet place on campus? Ask your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member to help you find a room/area you can use.

Remember too, once again, that you are more than your major. Don't forget that the list of the Core Career Competencies you've been developing came from extensive discussions with employers in particular. They are the ones looking for your Analytical & Critical Thinking, Innovation & Creativity, Oral & Written Communication, and Applied Problem Solving (among other Core Career Competencies) in real-world settings. Your liberal arts education is helping you develop these competencies. Now is the time to speak about them!

CAREER FACT: Skills and Competencies Matter Most

While the classes you've taken are important, 93% of employers report that they care more about your skills and competencies than your specific major (according to a study by the Association of American Colleges & Universities). So be sure to emphasize both in all your career-related interactions.

Know the Employer

The biggest mistake interviewees make, according to surveys of employers who hire new college graduates, is lacking knowledge about the organization they're interviewing with

You can avoid this fate by doing your research to learn more about the employer before your interview. Figure out its culture, philosophy, and career paths, as well as its history and structure. The more you know, the better prepared you will be—and the more impressive you will be as well. Follow these steps to guide your efforts:

Gather information on the employer from:

- People you know who work in the industry. Use any connections you have through family, friends, professors, or classmates.
- The company's/organization's website.
- External websites such as Glassdoor (glassdoor.com), LinkedIn (linkedin.com), and The Business Journals (bizjournals.com) for the geographic area where the organization is headquartered.

Prepare questions to ask the interviewer(s):

- Don't ask questions that could easily be answered by visiting the employer's website. Instead, use the information you find in your research to create thoughtful questions that go a bit deeper.
- Don't ask about salary or benefits unless and until you have a formal job offer to consider. Sometimes employers will ask you about your salary requirements before they offer you a job. When they ask, be ready to give an answer based on the research you've done.
- Possible general questions that are appropriate to ask:
 - What is a typical day like for this position?
 - Who is your ideal candidate?
 - What is the supervision structure?
 - What are the next steps in the interview process?

Know Your Fit

After you've thought about your background and you've done extensive research on the organization, your fit for the position will start to emerge. While the interview is a place for the employer to find the best person for their open position, it is also an opportunity for you to figure out if you are a fit for that job and that organization. Throughout your interview, it's critical to be able to convey to the employer why you're a good fit.

So go through each line of the job description and think of an example from your academic, engagement, or work experience that demonstrates the associated skill/competency or quality the employer is seeking. This exercise will help you decide if you're a good fit for the position **and** help you prepare for the interview itself. You can even make yourself a quick chart:

THEIR SKILL/ COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS	MY EXPERIENCE
Team player	Elected to the position of secretary of the Business Club; worked with other officers to plan the schedule and recruit new members
Ability to problem solve	During internship at publishing house, created a method of organizing book proposals by date to ensure we didn't miss a great new talent
Communication skills (oral and written)	As vice president of recruitment for a sorority, developed a plan for rush that involved all members; presented the ideas in an engaging manner that got the group excited to begin the rush process
Organizational skills and attention to detail	For final project in Psychology, conducted a literature review of _____, including working with faculty and reviewing more than 140 journal articles; kept notes and tracked progress

Practice Answering Interview Questions

It's impossible to know exactly what an employer will ask you in an interview. But the position description offers you a pretty good guide to what skills/competencies the employer is seeking.

So determine what those key skills/competencies are, always keeping in mind that the Core Career Competencies will certainly be among them. Then write down and practice describing examples of how you have developed these skills/competencies.

The more you practice, the more comfortable and natural you'll feel during the interview. You can even record yourself so that you can study how you're coming across to others. You can also do a practice interview with a career counselor, your advisor, a faculty member, and/or a volunteer employer.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Use Glassdoor to Learn About Interviewing at Different Companies

Glassdoor is a database featuring peer reviews of questions asked during interviews, as well as information on the overall application process at various companies—all from prospective and current employees of those companies. Visit [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) to learn more.

Here are a few of the most prevalent types of questions you should be ready for:

Tell me about yourself

- This is a very common way for an interview to begin. The key here is to keep your answer relevant to the position you're seeking. The interviewer doesn't need to know your entire life story; only the parts that make you a good fit for the position. So think about what brought you to this interview. Why did you apply for the position, and why are you qualified? You may want to talk about your educational background and the experiences you've had in college that are relevant, such as internships and student group involvement. This is also an excellent time to specifically mention your strongest of the Core Career Competencies that signify career readiness, perhaps doing so in terms of how others see you (e.g., "The people who know me best say I'm an excellent writer and a collaborative leader.")
- Bring up pre-college experiences only if they are particularly important to why you are applying for the position. Perhaps, for instance, you had early exposure to the organization through a family member, or you took a key class in high school that sparked your interest in the industry.
- Keep your response to this question concise. That's why preparation and practice are so important. Time yourself, making sure your response is no more than two minutes long.

What are your strengths? weaknesses?

- Think of three strengths you have (especially in the framework of the Core Career Competencies) that are relevant to the position, and come up with specific examples of when you've used these strengths to accomplish something that matters. For example, you might say that your top three strengths are:
 - Written communication, as evidenced by the concise memo you wrote for your internship supervisor, summarizing a recent book proposal.
 - Organization, as shown by your ability to maintain a 3.8 GPA in a busy semester of 18 credits, a 15-hours-per-week internship, and a leadership position in a student organization.
 - Problem solving, which was apparent when you led the development of a process for attracting and recruiting new students in collaboration with your fellow sorority members.
- When you're asked to give a weakness, the best way to respond is to focus on something you're trying to improve. Pick a skill versus a personality trait, and talk specifically about what you're doing to get better at it. For example:

While I'm confident in my ability to present to a group, I'm not as skilled in different presentation tools. I am currently challenging myself to not use PowerPoint for my next three presentations, and to instead use newer tools such as Prezi, or rely on different visual aids.

One cautionary note: Make sure the skill you decide to talk about as a weakness is not one that is essential to the position you're seeking! That said, employers know you're human, and that as humans, we make mistakes and have weaknesses. Showing self-awareness of the areas you need to improve is a great sign of maturity. Therefore, it's OK to be honest about those things, and then discuss how you have learned from your past experiences.

Behavioral-based questions

Employers are relying on behavioral-based questions more and more, thanks in large part to the underlying assumption behind them: "The past predicts the future." Specifically, the thinking goes, how you've performed on something in the past will give the interviewer some pretty good insight into how you might respond to similar situations in the future.

Behavioral-based interview questions usually start with a phrase like “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of when...” Because you won’t know in advance the exact questions you’ll be asked, you’ll need to study the job description closely to see what specific skills the employer is seeking, particularly in the context of the Core Career Competencies that define career readiness. Then, simply think of examples of times when you demonstrated these skills/competencies, pulling from a variety of situations (not all from your classes, for instance, or an internship, or a student group activity).

Then practice—and practice some more—responding to each anticipated question using what we call the STAR format: Situation-Task-Action-Result.

Let’s break this STAR concept down a bit further:

- **Situation:** Briefly set up the situation you were facing by describing the context of your example (the who, what, where, when, why, and how).
- **Task:** Explain the task you (not the group) had to complete, or the problem you had to solve.
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to complete the task or solve the problem.
- **Result:** Close by explaining the result of your efforts. Quantify the outcome if possible.

Situation	Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?
Task	Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?
Action	Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?
Result	Explain the result: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.

Here’s an example so you can see exactly how the STAR technique works:

Question: Describe a project for which you faced multiple deadlines, and talk about how you handled it.

Answer:

Situation: Last fall, I took the initiative to apply for grants to fund a professional speaker for a campus event. It’s often difficult to get grants for event funding, and it’s important to meet various grant deadlines.

Task: I researched grant options and found several possibilities. Each had a different deadline and a different window of time when the money could be used.

Action: The varying timelines required me to create a small database, which I organized by grant deadlines, purposes, and the windows of time they could be used. I used this database to help me apply for the appropriate grants at the appropriate times.

Result: The primary grant came through, but a smaller grant did not. So I quickly helped find a last-minute event sponsor, then helped to update the PR materials and budget accordingly. In the end, the event was successful on multiple levels. We expected about 50 students to attend; 60 showed up. Also, we were able to provide honorariums to additional speakers. It was a fun project—one that required me to organize, problem solve, and make decisions.

As you get better at answering interview questions this way, you will find that the STAR approach is actually quite empowering. It gives you a specific method for responding, which boosts your confidence and improves your performance.

No, you may not know exactly what questions you will face in an interview. But you can make some pretty educated guesses, and the STAR technique offers you a proven way to prepare and deliver compelling responses.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Once the big day arrives and your interview begins, you are on the proverbial hot seat. It's a tough place to be: under inevitable pressure, in the spotlight, with only educated guesses about what you'll face. Here are some tips that will help you to not only survive, but thrive:

- Arrive 10 minutes before the start time of your interview. Why put even more pressure on yourself by forcing yourself to rush?
- Assume the interview starts the moment you arrive in the building, or even in the parking lot. Hiring decisions can be influenced by the people you interact with other than your interviewer(s)—for example, the front desk staff, or the parking lot attendant. So be polite to everyone.
- Follow the interviewer's lead, because every interview will vary based on the industry, the organization, and the person:
 - Some interviews are conversational in tone, while others are more structured. The key is to match the interviewer's style.
 - Typically in American business culture, making eye contact and shaking hands is expected. But perhaps this isn't the norm at the organization, or it might not be culturally appropriate. So be adaptable to the situation. Similarly, if shaking hands and making eye contact aren't culturally appropriate for you, you may want to let the interviewer know in advance or plan for how you'll approach this issue at the interview.
- Be yourself and show confidence. Don't worry about giving the "right" answer to each question, because there often isn't one. The interviewer simply wants to understand who you are and why you're a good fit for the position and the organization.
- Demonstrate how your experiences and skills (especially your development of the Core Career Competencies) make you a good fit. Tell detailed stories and provide lots of examples. Share your knowledge of the organization and your interest in the position. State how excited you are about the opportunity!
- If you're ever confused by what the interviewer is asking, simply ask for clarification; it's OK.
- If you're asked about something and you don't have an answer that comes immediately to mind, take time to pause and collect your thoughts. You can even say something like, "I need to think about that for a moment."
- Sometimes you'll be in front of a panel of interviewers. Be sure to address the whole panel during your responses, as opposed to focusing only on the person who asked you the question.
- Ask the thoughtful questions you've prepared for your interviewer, both to show that you've done your research and to determine whether this is a place you could see yourself working someday.
- As the interview is wrapping up, be sure to summarize your qualifications and interest once again, and thank the interviewer(s) for his/her/their time. Ask about the hiring timeline and next steps. And if you don't already have contact information for your interviewer(s), ask for his/her/their business card(s) so you can follow up with a thank-you note.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Once your interview is over, well ... it isn't really over! Sure, you're out of the hot seat and back in your comfort zone. But you still have some interview-related work to do:

- Assess the interview and your interest in the position and organization. If you're no longer interested in the opportunity, contact the organization immediately to withdraw from the process.
- Send thank-you notes to everyone who interviewed you (see the section on thank-you notes earlier in this guide on page 78). In the note, restate your interest and qualifications, and be as specific as you can about what you enjoyed during the interview. It's appropriate and professional to send either handwritten or email thank-you notes. If the interviewer(s) indicates that the hiring process is moving quickly, then choose the email option so that your thank-you note arrives before any final decisions are made.
- If you haven't heard back from the employer within the designated timeframe, send a follow-up email to check on where things are in the hiring process—and to indicate that you're still interested in the opportunity. It can be as simple as something like this:

Dear Maria Blaise,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Volunteer Coordinator position at the City Museum. I really enjoyed learning more about the Museum and how vital the volunteers are to the success of the organization.

After the interview, I am even more excited about the possibility of working for your organization, as my communication studies degree, experience volunteering at several nonprofits, and attention to detail make me a great fit for the position.

Thank you for considering me, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Isabella Perez

OFFERS

If an interview goes well and you outperform the other candidates for the position, you will receive an offer. Congratulations!

Now what?

Just when you get the very result you've been looking for, you have another set of questions to answer. Here's how you can proceed, methodically and wisely:

- Don't accept a job/internship offer on the spot. Instead, thank the interviewer immediately to express your gratitude. Then ask what kind of timeline would be appropriate to get back to them with your response. Be sure to follow up with any questions you have about the offer before accepting it (or rejecting it, as the case may be).
- When you're reviewing an offer—particularly an offer for a full-time, permanent job—look at it holistically: your fit with the organization, your fit with the position, the salary, and the benefits (health insurance, 401(k), life insurance, vacation days, etc.). Here are a few tools you can use to determine the cost of living and salary ranges based on location, industry, and position:
 - Salary.com
 - Payscale.com
 - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov)
 - National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey (look for the periodic news releases summarizing the survey results at naceweb.org/about-us/press)

- If you're still interviewing with other organizations you'd like to work for, contact them and let them know you've received an offer. Then inquire about their timelines so that you can make an informed decision.
- Once you accept a position, contact any organizations you've interviewed with to withdraw from their hiring processes. Don't ever accept a position and then go back later and decline it.
- A career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member can help you navigate the sometimes complicated process of deciding whether or not to accept a position.

Negotiating a Job Offer

Job offers are frequently negotiable, even at the entry level. So even if you are given an offer that meets—or perhaps exceeds—your expectations, particularly in terms of salary, know that you can often negotiate other elements of the offer.

Be sure to review benefits like health care coverage, vacation time, sick time, and parental leave policies, as well as typical starting salaries for people in the type of position you're being offered. That way you'll be better prepared to advocate for what you want during negotiation.

Some other key tips on negotiation:

- Remain professional, friendly, and open. Use language that demonstrates that you're simply having a conversation—and that you are asking, not assuming (or, worse, demanding).
- Cite specific reasons for why you're asking for something more, and have some research ready to back up your statements.
- Always give a salary range, not a firm number.

Here's an example of what your approach might sound like:

Dear Maria Blaise,

I'm so excited about this opportunity. Thank you for your offer, and for your willingness to discuss my salary and benefits. I did some research on the average salary for this role in our area, and I was wondering if you would consider a salary in the range of \$38,000-\$41,000. I am very open to discussing this.

Thank you again for your time.

Isabella Perez

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

It's OK to Negotiate

People from underrepresented populations, as well as women, are less likely to negotiate their salary. Although it can be intimidating for you to ask, employers are prepared for these conversations. In fact, they often expect it.

Remember: Once you receive an offer, the employer wants you! They've invested lots of time and energy to find the best candidate, and as long as you remain polite and professional, they are not going to revoke their offer just because you asked to negotiate the terms.

Keep in mind, too, that by not negotiating your starting salary, you could unintentionally lessen your earning potential over your working lifetime.

Declining a Job Offer

What if it turns out that you don't want the job/internship you've been offered? That's OK—you have your reasons. You just have to be professional and gracious in declining the offer.

Here's how:

- Let the organization know as soon as possible, because the people there are waiting for an answer from you before they can move forward.
- Be polite and sincere when you decline. Be sure to thank the people involved for considering you, and let them know your reason(s) for not accepting the offer.

One final, but critically important, note: Do not decline an offer after you have already accepted it. Employers/recruiters have a word for this aggravating practice—*reneging*—and it happens to them more than you might think. They make a job/internship offer to a college student, and the student accepts it. Then the student comes back a day or a week or even a month later and says, essentially: “I’ve changed my mind: Thanks, but no thanks.” Suddenly the employer’s hiring problem has returned, unexpectedly.

If you're the student who has reneged, don't expect to receive any more consideration from this organization. But it gets worse, potentially: Employers know each other, and word may spread that you are someone who will renege on a job/internship offer. Moreover, your fellow students—including the many who don't even know you—could be somewhat tainted as well. The employer might think: “I’m not going to hire any more students from _____” or “I’m not going to consider any more students from the _____ department at Sample College.”

So don't accept an offer unless you're really accepting it. Don't accept one and then continue looking for a better job/internship opportunity. If you're going to decline an offer, decline it outright.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

How prepared do you feel for the interviews you will eventually have? What aspects of interviewing do you see yourself really needing to work on, and why?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

How do you plan to practice your interviewing skills? Will you work with a career counselor? attend a career fair? participate in an on-campus event hosted by an employer? Plan which approach you will pursue and make a date for when you hope to complete it.

PURSuing AN INDEPENDENT/ ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER

Maybe the whole idea of one day pursuing a “job,” in the traditional sense, just doesn’t quite resonate with you. Perhaps you have a more independent/entrepreneurial career path in mind—starting a small business (either a solo operation or a larger enterprise), freelancing, doing contract work, launching a nonprofit organization, performing, running for political office, or doing something even more tailored to you and your unique blend of interests, values, and strengths.

Or maybe you’d actually prefer to choose “d) all of the above” on the career front: You’d like to pursue a job in the traditional sense **and also** pursue something more independent/entrepreneurial as a “side-hustle” and be part of the *gig economy*.

Then again, maybe you see yourself mixing together several different types of freelance/contract opportunities to create your own blended *portfolio career*.

Or maybe you’d like to **start out** your career working for someone else, **then** transition later to somehow working for yourself.

Whatever your specific independent/entrepreneurial vision, know that you are far from alone, especially these days:

- A 2018 NPR/Marist Poll showed that “a notable proportion of American workers”—20 percent—are contract workers.
- A 2019 study by freelancing website Upwork and independent workforce association Freelancers Union found that 35 percent of the U.S. workforce are freelancers. Of those, 28 percent freelance full time.
- Many alumni have taken the independent/entrepreneurial path after graduation. (Note: Your advisor, a career counselor, and/or a faculty member can help you identify them and find a way to contact them.)

As a liberal arts student, you are well-suited to the independent/entrepreneurial path. You can deal with ambiguity. You can think critically. You can spot opportunity. You can envision and create and execute. And you can present yourself, your strengths, and your ideas compellingly, pulling all the while from the Core Career Competencies that you have been developing throughout your college experience.

But you still might feel like a fish out of water—like you’re the only liberal arts student who has ever wanted to pursue an independent/entrepreneurial career path (either full-time or part-), and that you are therefore on your own when it comes to making it a reality.

You’re not. And you’re not.

Guidance for the Independent/ Entrepreneurial Path

The individual nature of the independent/entrepreneurial career path makes it virtually impossible to adequately cover in a guide like this one. But we want to stress once again that going your own way is a valid, worthy, realistic, and viable pursuit—and that we can help you pursue it.

Here are some key tips to consider:

Talk to a Career Counselor, Your Advisor, and/or a Faculty Member. This is a time when you need someone who will listen closely—to your entrepreneurial aspirations, fears, and everything in between—and help you process them and start doing something about them. Every person's situation is different and complicated; yours will be too. All the more reason to work with someone who can help you directly and, just as importantly, guide you to other resources (people and informational) that can help you as well.

Talk to Your Professors Who Have Independent/Entrepreneurial Connections and Experiences. Many professors have their own personal experience with independent/entrepreneurial activities (current or past), and many more keep in touch with former students who have gone on to pursue independent/entrepreneurial career paths. The very best way to discover how to do something is to talk to people who have already done it. If they share a connection with you, that's even better.

Talk to Alumni Who Have Independent/Entrepreneurial Connections and Experiences. Search for alumni profiles and groups on career networking website LinkedIn ([linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)). You could begin your discussions with an alum via email and then perhaps talk on the phone or even meet to learn more.

Talk to Others in Your Life Who Have Independent/Entrepreneurial Connections and Experiences. Family members, friends, fellow students, work colleagues, old teachers, neighbors—some of them are either doing what you want to do or know someone who is.

The independent/entrepreneurial career path isn't an easy one. But as many liberal arts students before you have discovered, it can certainly be a rewarding one—and an impactful, exciting way to leverage your liberal arts advantage.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What sorts of independent/entrepreneurial pursuits are you considering right now? What are some ways you can find out more about them, and connect with other people (particularly alumni) who are pursuing them?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

What fears and concerns do you have about pursuing an independent/entrepreneurial path? Who could you talk to about them? Set up a 30-minute meeting with that person to talk about all of this and more.

PURSuing EDUCATION

PLANNING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Maybe you've been thinking about graduate school for years. Or maybe it's a brand new idea. Either way, you need to ask yourself one key question before you invest all the time, energy, and money involved, both in applying for graduate school and in succeeding once you get there: *Is graduate school right for me?*

DECIDING IF GRAD SCHOOL IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Before deciding if graduate school is right for you, you need to know that there are two types of graduate school programs. One type is professional and focused on giving you the skills and qualifications necessary to succeed in a profession; think of an MBA program or graduate degrees from medical or law schools. These programs are usually very structured and career focused. Other programs, typically those that end in a Ph.D., are more academically focused and aim mainly to prepare future professors and researchers. These programs are typically less structured and build around your own academic interests.

Here are a few questions that will help you make an informed decision about your potential graduate or professional school pursuits. You'll be able to answer some of them yourself, quite easily. For others, you'll need to do some research and perhaps even talk to graduate program staff members or faculty.

Start with this essential question: *Why am I interested in graduate school?*

Weak Answers

- I want to take a break from a tough job market.

- I want to figure out a new career path or find career direction. (There are cheaper ways to do that!)
- I don't know what else to do.

Strong Answers

- I'm genuinely interested in my field and passionate about pursuing new knowledge and expertise in a very specific area.
- My career goals require a graduate degree.
- I have the resources I need (time, academic record, money, energy) to be successful in a graduate program.

If you do ultimately decide that you'd like to go to graduate school, the next question to ask yourself is: *When is the right time?* You could go right away, or you could wait:

Reasons Why You Might Want to Go to Graduate School Right Away

- You have momentum and a desire to continue being a student.
- You may have more flexibility, with fewer family, work, or financial commitments.
- The degree might be necessary to help you get the job you want, or it could help speed career advancement in your chosen field.
- You currently meet the requirements for admission (i.e., the program doesn't require extensive work experience before you apply, and your GPA/test scores fit within the program's criteria).
- You are willing and able to make the financial investment now.



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



The More You Plan, the Less Stressed You Will Be

"Create a detailed plan of the steps you need to complete in the process of applying to graduate school so that you can maintain your stress levels."

Reasons Why You Might Want to Wait to Go to Graduate School

- You need more time to be sure of your career goals.
- You currently do not meet the requirements for admission (i.e., the program you're targeting requires more work experience than you have, or higher GPA/test scores than you have).
- You don't yet have the financial resources to invest in another degree.
- You can save money by waiting, or you may find an employer who would help you pay for your program.
- You find value in taking a gap year(s) to gain experience that may help strengthen your graduate school application.
- A break might boost your motivation for further study.

Graduate School Application Timeline

Once you've decided that you will in fact go to graduate school, keep in mind that you should begin the application process at least one year before you plan to start your chosen program.

Here's a planning chart with approximate timelines. Deadlines for specific programs can vary greatly, so be sure to look them up well in advance.

Spring of Junior Year, or 15 to 18 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Reflect on your personal and professional goals to determine if graduate school is right for you.

- Discuss your plans and options with trusted mentors, advisors, instructors, family members, alumni, etc.
- Identify the key considerations you'll be looking for in a graduate program (e.g., location, cost, program offerings, faculty, ranking, financial aid availability).
- Begin researching and evaluating graduate programs.

Summer Before Senior Year, or 12 to 15 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Contact admissions officers, faculty members, and students/alumni from your programs of interest to get more information, determine potential fit, and build relationships.
- Get organized! Learn about the admissions criteria and timelines of your applications, and keep track of your deadlines.
- Begin narrowing down your list of potential programs (select two to five that range in competitiveness).
- Study and register for entrance exams, if necessary.
- Write drafts of your personal statement and résumé/CV (curriculum vitae).

Fall of Senior Year, or 10 to 12 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Take required entrance exams, if necessary.
- Order your official transcripts.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Pursuing an Academic Career as a Professor or Researcher? Talk to Faculty for Help!

If you want to pursue an academic career as a professor or conduct research in an academic setting, talk directly to faculty here on campus who are in (or are familiar with) the field you want to go into! They are best positioned to help you understand which Ph.D. programs may fit your needs, and they can advise you on the process of pursuing your unique educational goals.

Research Various Funding Possibilities

Graduate assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, grants, and loans are excellent funding resources for graduate school. You can find more information about these opportunities by looking at the websites of the programs you're considering or talking with admissions.

- Start gathering necessary application materials, and get constructive feedback on your personal statement and CV (curriculum vitae)/résumé—early!
- Ask for letters of recommendation (from faculty members, instructors, advisors, and supervisors) at least four weeks before you need them.
- Learn about the funding/financial aid opportunities for the different graduate programs you're exploring.
- Submit your application(s) and supporting materials by the deadline(s)!

Winter/Spring of Senior Year, or 6 to 10 Months Prior to Enrollment

- Send thank-you notes to the people who wrote recommendations for you.
- Prepare for and complete interviews.
- Patiently await admissions decisions.
- Contact schools about the possibility of visiting. A personal visit can often improve your chances of being accepted. Departments/programs will sometimes help with travel expenses, so ask about that possibility.
- Consider multiple options and decide.

RESEARCHING AND EVALUATING GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Reflect

Before you select a graduate program, reflect on what you're really looking for in one. Common considerations might include location, class size, ranking, programs, faculty, research opportunities, financial support, access to professionals, internship possibilities, and licensure.

Talk with People!

You can usually contact a graduate school's admissions office for answers to your basic questions, and they will often give you contact information for graduate program faculty and/or students as well.

However, graduate programs vary considerably, and not all schools have admissions staff. Some graduate programs will instead offer a faculty member or a graduate coordinator as your primary contact. These key people can help you plan a visit to the campus. While you're there, you can arrange to sit in on classes and labs, if possible, and meet program faculty, staff, and students.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What motivates you to apply for graduate or professional school? What factors have you considered when making this decision?

How would taking a gap year help you continue developing the Core Career Competencies? Which ones will it help you develop the most, and why?

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Researching Graduate Programs? Be Thorough

Research your graduate school options by tapping resources like Petersons.com, GradSchools.com, *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (usnews.com/education), professional organization websites, and graduate program admission pages. While rankings might be an important part of your decision, do not rely on rankings alone as you consider what school to apply to or attend; these rankings cannot and do not take into account your needs as an individual.

When you ask questions about grad schools and programs, be open to different viewpoints and listen for common themes that come up. Take notes. And if you arrange a program visit, prepare in advance the questions you'd like to ask while you're there.

Graduate School Programs: What Questions to Ask

Questions About Admissions

- What application deadlines should I be aware of?
- What is the undergraduate GPA range and preference for this program (sometimes referred to as the middle 50%)?
- If an entrance exam is required, what is the preferred test score (for standardized tests such as the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, or MCAT)?
- What percentage of students who applied last year were admitted?
- What additional factors have the most impact on acceptance into this program?
- What previous experience/knowledge (if any) is preferred for this program?

Questions About the Program

- Are there prerequisite courses I need to complete before I start this program?
- What are the degree requirements? How many required and elective classes are there?
- How long do students typically take to complete this program?
- What areas of concentration are available?

- How does the program's department evaluate student progress?
- What kind of thesis and examinations are required?
- What practical experience are students expected to complete?
- What professional development opportunities exist for students?
- What kind of licensure/certification will I be eligible for after completing the program?
- What support is provided to help students fulfill the experiential components of the program?
- What kind of job search support is provided by faculty members?
- What types of careers do alumni go into with this degree?
- Can I sit in on a class to observe the program in action?

Questions for Program Faculty

- What is most important to you in an advisee?
- When and how is an advisor selected? How difficult is it to switch advisors once you're into your program?
- How many full- and part-time faculty members teach in this department?
- What diversity exists within the faculty?
- What experiences have the faculty members had outside academia?
- What opportunities exist to work with faculty on their research or do research on my own?
- What are the research priorities of the faculty?

Considering Law School? Know What to Expect—and How to Prepare

If you're considering law school, be sure to visit the "Pre-Law" section of the American Bar Association's website (americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law).

You'll learn how to prepare for law school from an academic standpoint, how to select a law school, the key skills you'll need to succeed there (many of which coincide with the Core Career Competencies!), and more.

Questions for Students Enrolled in the Program

- How available is your advisor?
- How would you characterize the departmental culture?
- What is the actual time commitment for a teaching assistant or research assistant position?
- Is the funding/stipend provided by the department enough to live on?
- How do students interact with each other inside and outside the classroom?
- What are some of the politics or current issues within the department?
- What diversity exists within the student body?
- How much support do students receive in developing their own approach to the field?
- How often do students present their work at professional conferences?
- What are the courses like?
- Are there opportunities to engage in research?

Questions About Finances and Resources

- How available are teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or fellowships?
- What other helpful resources are available for students (e.g., graduate student housing, medical insurance, child care, fitness facilities)?
- Are students guaranteed funding throughout their time in the program, or is it awarded on a yearly basis?

Narrow Your Options

Use the information you've gathered to narrow the list of programs you'd like to apply to. Often, students will end up applying to three to five programs, but your own number may be higher or lower. Whatever you decide, be sure you apply to a balanced list of programs that range in their competitiveness; target some programs that are well within your admission and financial reach, as well as alternative options that may be more competitive.

APPLICATION MATERIALS

When you're applying to graduate or professional school, be sure to contact each program directly to find out its specific application procedures. Visit each institution's website for detailed information about the application process.

Most schools and programs require applicants to complete multiple applications, forms, or essays. So be sure to thoroughly review all of the application instructions.

Among the items you'll commonly need to submit with your graduate school applications:

- Entrance exam results (often reported by an official service).
- Letters of recommendation.
- A personal statement.
- An official transcript.
- Résumé/CV (curriculum vitae).
- Completed application form.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

Why are you considering the specific graduate or professional school programs you're investigating? What made you choose them?

----- ACTION STEPS -----

How are you evaluating the specific graduate or professional programs you're considering? Who might you talk to about your choice, and what questions could you ask to determine which programs might be a good fit? Set up a 30-minute meeting with that person to talk about all of this and more.

Entrance Exams

Many graduate and professional schools require applicants to take some type of entrance exam. So as you research graduate schools and programs, be sure to pay close attention to which test(s), if any, is required.

Testing centers often have wait times of two to four weeks for the popular exams, so plan accordingly. The Educational Testing Service website (ets.org) is an excellent resource for general information.

There are many ways you can prepare for entrance exams. First, consider your learning style, financial means, resources, and timeline. Then, of course, study! Here are some ways you can do so:

- **Review the actual exam.** Go over an old copy of the exam to familiarize yourself with the skills it assesses and the types of questions it asks. You can usually find old copies of the exam in the test's registration manual, on the test company's website, or in study guides. Once you're familiar with the actual exam, you'll be better prepared to choose your study techniques and priorities.
- **Form a study group.** Ask friends or classmates to study with you. Quizzing each other will help you learn from each other and make the process a little more fun.

- **Use study-guide books.** Any good bookstore will have study guides covering the major graduate/professional school admissions tests.
- **Take advantage of test prep resources.** Companies like The Princeton Review (princetonreview.com) and Kaplan (kaplan.com) offer prep classes for the most common entrance exams, such as the GRE. One cautionary note, though: These courses can be expensive. And while some students really like them and find them helpful, others think they're unnecessary. Before spending money (to say nothing of time and energy) on a test preparation course, thoroughly research it along with the outcomes you can expect from it. Ask your advisor, a career counselor, or a faculty member to help you.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are a key part of the application process for graduate and professional school programs. These letters should describe—and give examples of—your strongest qualities, your best skills/competencies and abilities, your commitment to a particular field, and your potential to contribute to the target program's field of study and related careers.

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Get to Know Your Professors

Make an effort to get to know your professors, especially if you see yourself asking them for a letter of recommendation someday. Attend office hours, ask questions in class, and/or conduct research with them. If you're asking your advisor for a letter of recommendation, set up multiple appointments with them to discuss your goals and skills.

Give Letter Writers Plenty of Time

The recommendation letter process can take a while. So be sure to allow lots of time for it! Ask for letters of recommendation four to six weeks before you need them.

When It Comes to Letters, Quality Beats Quantity

Three detailed, compelling letters of recommendation will beat five or six vague, weak letters every time. Admissions committees notice the difference between strong praise and mediocre praise.

Who should write letters of recommendation for you? Here are some tips for picking the right people:

- Approach potential writers who will give you a solid recommendation. Ask them directly if they would be willing to write a letter that is reflective of who you are and the good work you do.
- Focus on people who know you well academically or professionally: faculty members, supervisors, coworkers, or advisors. Family members are usually not appropriate.

Remember, too, that your prospective letter writers have busy jobs, appointments, and possibly other students seeking recommendations as well. So do everything you can to make your request simple for them. Give them everything you can from the following list:

- Relevant information about the school(s) or graduate program(s) you're applying to.
- Your thoughts on what you see as your strongest qualities and skills/competencies (especially in the context of the Core Career Competencies that signify your career readiness).
- A copy of your résumé/CV, and/or a printed summary of your involvement in student organizations and groups.
- A list noting which academic courses you've completed and how well you've done in them.
- A sample of your personal statement, if you wrote one for your graduate school applications.
- Pre-addressed envelopes for each school/program you're pursuing.

A few other key tips:

- Be sure that all of your recommendation letters appear on letterhead.
- Give your letter writers an early deadline, occasionally check in with them, and offer them reminders as needed.
- Thank your letter writers; they're giving you a significant amount of their time and energy!
- Keep your letter writers informed about the application process.
- Stay organized by carefully tracking who your letter writers are, what application deadlines you're dealing with, and who you have followed up with or still need to follow up with.

Personal Statements

For most graduate school applications, you'll be required to write a *personal statement* (also known as a *statement of purpose*). This is simply an essay in which you explain why you want to pursue a particular graduate program and why you'd be a good fit for it. (The piece also offers the program faculty a sample of your writing.)

As you prepare to write your personal statement, think carefully about questions like these:

- What are your motivations for pursuing graduate school?
- What are your interests, skills/competencies (particularly in the context of the Core Career Competencies), and goals? How do they relate to the graduate program(s) you're pursuing?
- How do your personal goals match with the institution(s) or program(s) you're considering?

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Have Your Personal Statement Evaluated

Your personal statement can be a major factor in the admissions decision. It will be evaluated for quality of writing and clarity of professional goals. For help with it, connect with a career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member.

- What makes you a strong candidate for the graduate program(s) you're targeting?
- What makes this particular kind of program a good fit for you? (For example, why law school instead of public policy?)
- How should you assess different graduate programs/schools? What are the criteria for acceptance? What are the values of each program and institution? What themes are expressed by students and staff from these programs/institutions?

Once you've answered these questions thoroughly, you can begin writing your statement. Use the information you've gathered through self-reflection and research, and thoughtfully explain how the program you're targeting fits you and your long-term goals. These tips will help:

Follow the Directions on Each Specific Application

- Read the instructions very carefully. Follow the required format, as well as the required word count or page limit.
- Read each question closely, and be sure to answer each one.
- If the school/program application offers no specific questions to address in your personal statement, focus on the experiences, motivations, and goals you have that relate to the program.
- If you're creating personal statements for multiple schools/programs, customize each one to reflect your research and interest in a particular program.
- Avoid writing vague or generic-sounding personal statements. They're ineffective.

Mention the Research You've Done on the Program or School

- You view this program as a good match for you. Explain why.
- What opportunities does this program offer? What is it known for? Discuss why it matters to you.

- What faculty members do you hope to work with, and why?
- Use anecdotes from your life to tell the admissions committee who you are. Share stories about yourself, and relate them to the program and your long-term career plans.
- Emphasize what's unique about you—for example, classes you've taken, professors you've worked with, or events you've attended. You can also highlight projects, volunteer positions, jobs, or internships that relate to your goals.
- Demonstrate that you have a realistic sense of the field and the training required for it. Provide examples of how you've prepared yourself for this field (for example, how you did research, performed volunteer work, or pursued related experiences).
- Don't explain the field or program. The reader(s) of your personal statement will already be an expert.
- Use your statement to highlight information that isn't covered in other parts of your application.
- Draw the reader in with a strong opening statement and compelling first paragraph. Your application is one of many, and a solid start will help you stand out in the applicant pool.
- Discuss what the program will gain by accepting you.
- Keep your tone positive. This is not the place to make excuses for shortcomings in your background or application, or for poor grades. It is OK, though, to show how you've grown from your experiences. Doing so will showcase your self-awareness and maturity in overcoming any obstacles you may have faced.
- If there was a short period of time when you did poorly in school or withdrew from classes, and it was due to extenuating life circumstances (e.g., you were ill, there was a death in your family), you can address the issue in an *addendum*. Make an appointment with a career counselor, your advisor, or a

faculty member for guidance on writing an addendum.

- Come across as genuine, realistic, unique, and excited.
- Avoid romanticizing your plans. Talk about realistic ways you expect to contribute to the field.
- Balance your enthusiasm, anecdotes, and self-marketing with practical information.
- Avoid clichés like “I’ve always wanted to...” or “I like to help people.” They’re meaningless.

Don’t Stop Once You Have a Draft Ready

- Edit and proofread your statement as it stands so far. Are you communicating exactly what you want to say?
- Does the statement look professional, and is it well written? Look at grammar, font size, aesthetics, spelling, and format.
- Include your name as a header on each page.

- Have a career counselor, your advisor, and/or a faculty member review the statement.

Done? Almost.

Before you submit your finalized personal statement with your other application materials, proofread it one last time! Have someone else proofread it too. (Note: Read your statement aloud; you’ll catch more errors that way, and you’ll uncover more awkward words and phrases, too.)

Then send it off—and congratulate yourself!



ADVICE FROM LIBERAL ARTS GRADS



Use All Your Resources to Discover the Path That’s Best for You

“Use your resources, start imagining your post-graduation career, how you can use your education and experience. Look at job postings, speak with current people who work in your field, discover what further education/experience is needed to pursue your career post-graduation. Get involved in internships or volunteer experiences that are related to your intended field.

Most of all, take your time in deciding what field is best for you. Experiment as needed in different interests. Don’t let outside or internal pressure force you into a job that is less than what you hoped for.

You have time to discover what path is best for you. Good luck!”

MAKING A DECISION

You submitted all of your graduate/professional school application materials weeks or months ago, and now you've been notified about a decision by the admissions committee. Maybe you've received acceptance to your top choice, or an alternate choice. Perhaps you've been put on a waitlist. Or maybe you received a rejection letter.

Whatever the outcome, you still have your own decision to make. So reflect back on your reasons for applying to graduate school in the first place, as well as your needs and priorities:

- If you've received a rejection and you'd like to reapply in the future, speak with an admissions representative from your target school/program to learn how you can strengthen your application next time.
- If you've been put on a waitlist, consider how long you're willing to wait before pursuing other options.
- If you've received an acceptance, congratulations! Now, make sure to consider factors like cost, financial aid, location, opportunity, and personal fit to weigh the pros/cons of accepting the offer. If you decide to go ahead, pat yourself on the back for a job well done! You're on your way.

REFLECTION AND DECISION MAKING

What sort of help might you need in preparing your graduate/professional school entrance exam and application materials—particularly your personal statement? How do you plan to get that help?

What will you do if your graduate or professional school pursuits don't turn out the way you want them to, at least at first? What if you aren't accepted into your chosen program at all? What if you're waitlisted?

If you've been accepted into a graduate or professional school program, what criteria will you use to decide whether to pursue it ... or not? What questions do you still have?

◀◀ CAREER MANAGEMENT TIP ▶▶

Return Often to the “Reflection and Decision Making” Questions in This Guide

One of the many purposes of the “Reflection and Decision Making” questions in this guide is to help you understand yourself better, both now and as you continue exploring options, gaining experience, and preparing to excel after graduation.

So be sure to return often to these questions. They will help you solidify what you know about yourself, what you want, and what you can contribute—so that you can communicate it clearly and compellingly.

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