

8 Steps to an Effective Career Plan

1. **Identify Your Career Options.** Develop a refined list of career options by examining your interests, skills, and values through self-assessment. Narrow your career options by reviewing career information, researching companies, and talking to professionals in the field. You can further narrow your list when you take part in experiences such as shadowing, volunteering, and internships.
2. **Prioritize.** It's not enough to list options. You have to prioritize. What are your top skills? What interests you the most? What's most important to you? Whether it's intellectually challenging work, family-friendly benefits, the right location or a big paycheck, it helps to know what matters to you and what's a deal-breaker.
3. **Make Comparisons.** Compare your most promising career options against your list of prioritized skills, interests and values.
4. **Consider Other Factors.** You should consider factors beyond personal preferences. What is the current demand for this field? If the demand is low or entry is difficult, are you comfortable with risk? What qualifications are required to enter the field? Will it require additional education or training? How will selecting this option affect you and others in your life? Gather advice from friends, colleagues, and family members. Consider potential outcomes and barriers for each of your final options.
5. **Make a Choice.** Choose the career paths that are best for you. How many paths you choose depends upon your situation and comfort level. If you're early in your planning, then identifying multiple options may be best. You may want several paths to increase the number of potential opportunities. Conversely, narrowing to one or two options may better focus your job search or graduate school applications.
6. Set "SMART" Goals. Now that you've identified your career options, develop an action plan to implement this decision. Identify specific, time-bound goals and steps to accomplish your plan. Set short-term goals (to be achieved in one year or less) and long-term goals (to be achieved in one to five years).
 - Specific -- Identify your goal clearly and specifically.
 - Measurable -- Include clear criteria to determine progress and accomplishment.
 - Attainable -- The goal should have a 50 percent or greater chance of success.
 - Relevant -- The goal is important and relevant to you.
 - Time bound -- Commit to a specific timeframe.
7. **Create Your Career Action Plan.** It's important to be realistic about expectations and timelines. Write down specific action steps to take to achieve your goals and help yourself stay organized. Check them off as you complete them, but feel free to amend your career action plan as needed. Your goals and priorities may change, and that's perfectly okay.
8. **Meet with a Career Consultant.** We are here to help you make effective career decisions. Make an appointment on Handshake to talk about your career options and concerns.