

CAREER EXPLORATION

- WORKBOOK
- A structured framework for discovering what kind of work fits your strengths, values, and life vision — whether you're starting out or redirecting mid-course.
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What's Inside

This workbook guides you through ten core areas of career exploration and planning. Each section combines frameworks, reflection exercises, and worksheets to help you make intentional career decisions.

Self-Assessment: Strengths, Interests & Values — Understanding what you bring and what matters to you

Career Research Methods — How to investigate industries, roles, and companies beyond job postings

Exploring Industries & Sectors — Evaluating different fields and where you might fit

Building Your Professional Network — Practical strategies for meaningful connections

Resume & Cover Letter Foundations — Translating your experience into compelling narratives

The Job Search Process — Where to look, how to track applications, and staying organized

Interview Skills & Preparation — Types of interviews, common questions, and the STAR method

Making Career Decisions — Comparing opportunities and frameworks for choosing your path

Starting Strong: Your First 90 Days — Onboarding, making a good impression, and establishing yourself

Long-Term Career Planning — Five-year vision, skill development, and intentional growth

01

- Self-Assessment: Strengths, Interests & Values

Career decisions start with clarity about who you are. Before you chase anyone else's definition of success, understand your own patterns: what you're naturally good at, what genuinely interests you, and what you value most in how you work and live.

Identifying Your Strengths

Strengths aren't just skills you've learned — they're things you do well with relative ease. They're often invisible to you because they feel natural. The questions below will help surface them.

What tasks do people consistently ask you for help with? What do they say you're "good at"?

What do you do that makes time disappear? When are you most in flow?

What have you accomplished that required you to stretch, but didn't feel impossible? List 2–3 examples.

Looking back at feedback from teachers, managers, or mentors, what comes up repeatedly?

Strengths Assessment Table

Map your key strengths across different domains. Rate each 1–5 based on how strong it is.

Strength	Rating (1–5)	Context/Evidence	Relevant to Which Types of Work?

Exploring Your Interests

Interests are different from strengths. You might be interested in something you're not yet skilled at, or skilled at something you don't actually enjoy. Both matter. Your interests tell you what kind of problems you want to solve.

<p>Interest vs. Passion</p> <p>You don't need to "follow your passion" to find meaningful work. But you should notice what draws your curiosity. What problems do you want to spend time thinking about? That's your interest signal.</p>

What topics do you read about or research on your own time?

What kind of problems do you want to solve in the world?

In an ideal role, what would you spend most of your time doing?

What excites or frustrates you about current events or your community?

Interest Categories

Circle or highlight the categories that spark your curiosity:

Category	Specific Interest	Why It Matters to You
Technology & Innovation		
Education & Learning		
Business & Entrepreneurship		
Health & Wellness		
Environment & Sustainability		
Arts & Culture		
Social Impact & Justice		
Science & Research		
Finance & Economics		

Values & Life Priorities

Your values drive what kind of career will actually satisfy you. Rate each value below on a scale of 1–10. Then identify your top 5.

Value	Rating (1–10)	What This Means to You
Financial security & stability		
Creative expression & autonomy		
Work-life balance & time flexibility		
Status, recognition & prestige		
Independence & decision-making power		
Helping others & social impact		
Intellectual challenge & learning		
Geographic flexibility & travel		
Job security & longevity		
Growth potential & advancement		
Community, belonging & collaboration		
Physical health & mental wellbeing		
Meaningful work that aligns with purpose		
Work in a specific field or industry		
Making a good income		

Identify your top 5 values from the list above. Do any conflict with each other?

Which values have shifted in the past 2–3 years? What caused the change?

If you could honor just one non-negotiable value in your next role, what would it be?

02

- Career Research Methods

Good career decisions are based on real information, not assumptions. Before you commit to a path, spend time investigating it. The best research happens by talking to people actually doing the work.

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a low-pressure conversation with someone working in a field you're curious about. You're not asking for a job — you're asking for perspective. Most people are happy to help if you approach them respectfully.

How to Request an Informational Interview

Identify 10–15 people working in roles or industries you're interested in. Start with your existing network: teachers, family friends, alumni, LinkedIn connections.

Reach out via email or LinkedIn with a personalized message. Keep it short and reference how you found them.

Be specific: "I'd love to learn about your path into [role] and what a typical week looks like."

Suggest 15–20 minutes. Offer flexibility on timing and format (video, phone, coffee).

Come prepared with 5–8 thoughtful questions. Don't ask things you could easily Google.

Follow up with a thank-you note and let them know what you learned.

Key Questions for Informational Interviews

Question	Why It Matters
How did you end up in this role?	Understand different pathways and how careers unfold.
What does a typical day/week look like?	Get a sense of what you'd actually spend time doing.
What skills matter most in this role?	Learn what you'd need to develop to succeed here.
What surprised you most about this work?	Hear what's different from outsider expectations.
What are the biggest challenges?	Understand what aspects are hardest or most frustrating.
What's most rewarding about this work?	Hear why someone stays engaged and what keeps them motivated.
What does the job market look like?	Learn how competitive this field is and what companies seek.
What would you do differently if starting over?	Get wisdom from someone who's been in the field for years.

Other Research Methods

Beyond interviews, use these strategies:

Job Shadowing & Site Visits

Ask if you can observe someone at work. This gives you texture that interviews alone can't provide. Notice both the appealing and unappealing aspects.

Online Research

Read company websites, annual reports, and leadership bios. Search industry publications. Look at Glassdoor and employee reviews. Follow industry leaders on LinkedIn.

Volunteer or Intern Experience

Get temporary experience in a field you're considering. A summer internship teaches you more in 10 weeks than months of research. You don't need the perfect role — even entry-level work gives valuable insight.

Identify 3 specific roles or industries you want to learn more about. Plan your research approach for each.

03

- Exploring Industries & Sectors

Not all industries are the same, even when the job title is identical. Understanding industry context helps you find the right fit.

Evaluating an Industry

Question	Why It Matters
Is this industry growing or shrinking?	Long-term stability and demand for people in this field.
How cyclical is it?	Are there predictable ups and downs, or high volatility?
How is technology changing the field?	Are jobs being automated? Are new roles emerging?
What's the geographic distribution?	Are most jobs in one city, or spread across the country?

Work Culture & Daily Experience

Question	What to Assess
Typical work hours & flexibility?	9–5 or routine overtime? Remote options?
How collaborative is the work?	Team-based or independent?
What's the typical pace?	High-pressure, steady, or variable?
Who do you work with?	Diversity of background? Age range?

Compensation & Benefits

Question	Where to Find It
What's the salary range for entry-level?	Glassdoor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, industry surveys.
How quickly does compensation grow?	Typical salary arc over 5–10 years?
What benefits are standard?	Health insurance, retirement, paid time off, learning opportunities?
What's the total rewards picture?	Beyond salary: bonuses, stock, flexibility, learning?

Entry Points & Career Paths

Question	Why It Matters
What are typical starting roles?	Do you need specific degrees or certifications?
How do people typically advance?	What does the career ladder look like?
Are there lateral moves available?	Can you move between roles without going backwards?
What skills get you hired?	What matters most to employers in this field?

Select 3–4 industries you're considering. For each, research and document: typical roles, growth outlook, culture, compensation range, and entry requirements.

04

- Building Your Professional Network

Your network is one of the most valuable assets in your career. It opens doors, provides perspective, and creates opportunities that don't exist in job postings. Building a real network takes intention, but the payoff is enormous.

Why Networking Matters

<p>Network as Insurance & Opportunity</p> <p>Your network creates options: people who know your work, who can give you perspective, who might hire you or recommend you. It's not transactional. It's about genuine relationships with people who are also growing and learning.</p>
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Where to Build Your Network

Professional associations and industry groups

Alumni networks from your school or university

Online communities and LinkedIn groups

Conferences, workshops, and industry events

Volunteer work and community involvement

Mentorship relationships (formal and informal)

Previous colleagues, classmates, and friends who work in fields you care about

How to Network Authentically

Networking isn't about collecting contacts. It's about building real relationships. Here's how:

Start with genuine interest. Ask people about their work, their challenges, their path. Listen more than you talk.

Be helpful before you ask for help. Offer introductions, share articles, send a relevant opportunity. Build goodwill.

Follow up and stay in touch. After you meet someone, don't disappear. Check in every 6–12 months.

Show up consistently. Attend events regularly. Join a professional group. Be someone people see and come to know.

List 10–15 people in your network already. Who could you reconnect with? Who would you like to build a deeper relationship with?

Identify 5 professional associations, groups, or communities related to your interests. Which ones will you join or engage with?

What value can you offer to others in your network right now? How can you be helpful?

05

- Resume & Cover Letter Foundations

Your resume and cover letter translate your experience into narratives that employers can understand and act on. They're not autobiography — they're strategic documents designed to show why you're a fit for a specific role.

Resume Foundations

Your resume should tell a story about what you've accomplished, not just list what you've done. Every bullet point should answer: "What did you do, and why does it matter for this role?"

Structure for Impact

Contact information (email, phone, LinkedIn URL, location)

Professional summary or headline (optional, but powerful if done well)

Work experience (most recent first, with 3–5 impact-focused bullets per role)

Education (degree, school, graduation date)

Skills and certifications (only if relevant to the roles you're targeting)

Volunteer work or projects (if they add relevant experience)

Writing Bullets That Get Attention

Weak: "Responsible for social media management"

Strong: "Grew Instagram following from 500 to 5,000 in 6 months by implementing a consistent storytelling strategy and community engagement plan."

Use the format: Action verb + What you did + Business impact (numbers when possible)

Cover Letter Strategy

A cover letter is your chance to show you understand the role and company, and that you're genuinely interested — not just applying to everything. Three paragraphs, three goals:

Paragraph 1: Show you've done research. Reference something specific about the company or role that excites you.

Paragraph 2: Connect your experience to what they're looking for. Use language from the job description. Show you can do what they need.

Paragraph 3: Express genuine interest and call to action. Make it easy for them to move forward.

Draft the opening paragraph of your resume professional summary. Show what type of work energizes you and what problems you solve.

For a role you're interested in, identify 3 accomplishments from your experience that directly relate to the job requirements. Write them as impact-focused bullets.

Draft the opening paragraph of a cover letter for a specific role. Show research and genuine interest.

- The Job Search Process

Job searching can feel chaotic without a system. Being organized, strategic, and persistent makes the difference between a scattered search and one that yields results.

Where to Look for Opportunities

Don't rely on just one source. Cast a wide net across multiple channels:

Channel	Why Use It
LinkedIn Jobs	Broad coverage, good filter options, most recruiters are here.
Indeed	Largest volume, includes smaller companies.
FlexJobs	Curated positions, focused on legitimate quality roles.
AngelList	Startup jobs and early-stage culture.
Idealist.org	Nonprofit and social impact roles.
Trade Association Job Boards	Industry-specific, often less competitive.
Company Career Pages	Posted directly, before they hit job boards.
Networking & Referrals	Often get preference, more informed about role.

Organizing Your Search

Keep track of every application using a spreadsheet with these columns:

Company	Position	Applied	Contact Person	Follow-up Date	Status	Notes

Why this matters: You'll submit many applications. A tracking system ensures you follow up at the right time and don't lose momentum.

Application Strategy

Quality over quantity. A tailored application to 15 roles will get better results than generic applications to 100.

Customize your resume for each role (at minimum, reorder bullet points to highlight the most relevant experience)

Write a unique cover letter for each application

Use specific language from the job description

Apply early: many employers review applications in order received

Aim to apply to 5–10 targeted roles per week, not 50 generic ones

Following Up

One week after applying, if you haven't heard anything, send a brief follow-up email:

- "I applied for [role] on [date] and remain very interested. I'd welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience in [specific skill] matches what you're looking for. I'm happy to answer any questions."

On Ghosting

Many employers won't respond to every application or send rejections. That's poor practice on their part, not a reflection on you. Don't take it personally. Keep moving.

What types of roles are you targeting? Be specific — not just "a job," but what kind?

List 10–15 companies you'd like to work for. Which have open roles right now?

What's your application goal? (Example: 5 applications per week for the next 8 weeks)

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- Interview Skills & Preparation

Interviews are conversations where the employer assesses if you can do the job and fit the team. Your job is to show that you can, and to also evaluate whether this role is right for you.

Types of Interviews You'll Encounter

Interview Type	What to Expect
Phone Screen	20–30 min with recruiter or hiring manager. Basic qualification. Expect questions about background and interest.
Video Interview	Recorded or live. Behave as you would in person: professional setup, good lighting, no distractions.
Behavioral Interview	Questions about past experiences: "Tell me about a time when..." Tests how you've handled situations you'll face.
Technical Interview	For role-specific skills. Expect problem-solving on whiteboard, coding challenge, or case analysis.
Panel Interview	Multiple interviewers at once. More intimidating, but same content. Eye contact with whoever is speaking.
Case Interview	Common in consulting and tech. You're given a scenario and asked to solve it. No single right answer.

The STAR Method

When an interviewer asks a behavioral question, use the STAR method to structure your answer:

Element	What to Include
Situation	Briefly set the scene. What was the context? What was the challenge?
Task	What was your responsibility? What were you trying to accomplish?
Action	What specifically did you do? Be concrete. This is the longest part.
Result	What happened? What did you learn? Use numbers if possible.

Example:

• "When I was managing social media for a nonprofit, engagement was flat. I analyzed which types of content got the most interaction, shifted our strategy to focus on storytelling, and trained volunteers to source and edit community submissions. Over 6 months, engagement increased 300%, and we gained 500 new followers."

Common Interview Questions

Prepare answers to these. Write them out; practice saying them aloud until they feel natural.

Tell Me About Yourself

This is your 90-second pitch. Include: your background, what you've done, what you're looking for next. Keep it relevant to the role.

Write your 30-second version (for networking or first meeting):

Write your 90-second version (for an interview):

Why Are You Interested in This Role/Company?

Show you've done research. Reference something specific about their mission, recent news, a product, or a problem they solve that matters to you.

For a specific role you're targeting, why are you genuinely interested?

What Are Your Strengths?

Give 2–3 strengths directly relevant to the role. Use STAR to back them up with examples.

What 2–3 strengths matter most for the roles you're targeting?

What Is Your Greatest Weakness?

Answer honestly but strategically. Pick something real, but not central to the role. Example: "I can be a perfectionist, which sometimes slows progress. I've learned to set deadlines and ask for feedback earlier in the process."

What's an honest weakness and what have you done to address it?

Preparation Checklist

Research the company: mission, recent news, key products, competitors, leadership

Research the interviewer: LinkedIn profile, their role, their background

Know the job description by heart: key responsibilities and requirements

Prepare 3–5 STAR examples you can use (from work, school, volunteering, projects)

Have questions ready for them: about the day-to-day, team, challenges, success metrics

Confirm logistics: when/where, how you're getting there (leave 15 min early), test tech if virtual

Plan appearance: dress one level more formal than the job requires

Print copies of your resume and references

During the Interview

Arrive/log in 5 minutes early. Rushing creates stress.

Handshake: firm but not aggressive. Smile. Make eye contact.

Listen more than you talk. Answer the question asked.

Use examples. Abstract answers don't stick with interviewers.

Don't badmouth previous employers. Always be professional.

Take notes: jot down names, key facts.

At the end, ask: "What are the next steps and timeline?"

After the Interview

Send a thank-you email within 24 hours. Reference something specific from your conversation.

If very interested, reiterate it: "After learning more, I'm even more excited about this opportunity."

If interviewer mentioned next steps or timeline, follow up if you don't hear back.

Note what went well and what you'd do differently next time.

Identify 3 STAR examples you can use in interviews. Write them out:

What are 5 smart questions you could ask an interviewer to show genuine interest?

You've researched, interviewed, and hopefully you now have options. The question becomes: how do you choose? This section offers frameworks for comparing opportunities and making decisions you feel confident about.

The Opportunity Evaluation Matrix

When you have multiple opportunities, use a structured comparison. Rate each on factors that matter to you (1–5 scale, where 5 is excellent fit).

Step 1: Identify Your Decision Criteria

What factors matter most? Pick 8–10. Examples: type of work, team/culture, growth potential, location, compensation, mission alignment, stability, learning opportunity.

My top 8–10 decision criteria (in rough order of importance):

Step 2: Build Your Comparison Matrix

Criterion	Opportunity A	Opportunity B	Opportunity C
TOTAL SCORE			

The Reversibility Test

Some decisions feel bigger than they actually are. Ask yourself:

If I choose this and it doesn't work out, can I go back to my current situation? If not, what would I do?

What's the worst realistic outcome (not catastrophic fantasy)? How long would it take to recover?

If I don't choose this, what's the cost? What do I miss by saying no?

The 10-10-10 Test

This technique separates temporary emotion from real preference. For each option, ask:

How will I feel about this choice in 10 days?

How will I feel about it in 10 months?

How will I feel about it in 10 years?

The 10-year perspective is revealing. If you can't imagine being proud of this choice in a decade, it's probably not right.

Gut Check: Fear vs. Intuition

Fear	Intuition
Says: "What if I fail? What will people think? I'm not ready."	Says: "Something feels off about this."
Spikes in moments. Temporary.	Steady and persistent, even when anxiety settles.
Intensifies when you sit with it. Fades with time.	Doesn't go away even when you try to ignore it.

As you think about your options, which voice is loudest? What is it telling you?

The Advisor Test

If your best friend were in your exact situation, what would you tell them? Why?

If you knew with certainty you couldn't fail at any of these options, which would you choose? What does that tell you?

Making the Decision

Which opportunity am I choosing and why? (State it clearly, grounded in your values and goals)

What could I be wrong about? What might I discover in the first few months that changes my view?

09

- Starting Strong: Your First 90 Days

Your first three months in a new role set the tone for everything that follows. Ramp up smartly: be eager to learn, establish credibility, build relationships, and understand the culture before you make big moves or recommendations.

Week 1: Orientation & Listening

Your first week is about listening, not proving yourself. Your job is to understand the landscape.

Complete Logistics

IT setup, credentials, access

Meet your immediate team and manager

Get the org chart and understand reporting lines

Find the bathrooms, where to get coffee, where people eat lunch

Ask Good Questions

What does success look like in my role in the first 30 days? In a year?

What are the biggest challenges the team is facing right now?

Who are the key people I should understand and build relationships with?

What's one thing about this team's culture I should know?

What did the person before me do well? What could they have done better?

Take Notes

You'll meet many people and hear a lot of information. Write down names, what they do, key facts about them. You can't remember everything.

Weeks 2–4: Ramp Up & Relationship Building

You're now integrating. Start adding value, but still in learning mode.

Build Relationships Intentionally

Schedule 1-on-1 coffee or lunch with people on your team and adjacent teams

Pay attention to who has influence and who gets things done

Notice team dynamics: who talks in meetings? Who makes decisions?

Be friendly and genuinely interested in people. Your team will want to help you succeed.

Get Oriented to Systems & Processes

How are decisions made?

What does success look like for this team?

What are the most common problems or bottlenecks?

How does the team measure progress?

What are the informal communication channels (Slack, email, in-person)?

Small Wins

Look for small tasks you can complete quickly and well. This shows you deliver.

Ask your manager what would be most helpful. Don't assume.

Don't try to reinvent the wheel or fix everything in week two.

Good: "I noticed X process takes a long time. What would be helpful to optimize it?"

Bad: "I've already redesigned our whole system."

Month 2: Contributing & Credibility

You understand the landscape now. Start contributing more substantively.

Clarify Expectations

By the end of month one, meet with your manager and clarify what they expect from you in month two and beyond

What are your primary responsibilities?

What metrics matter for your role?

How often will you check in?

Deliver Solid Work

Whatever you take on, do well. Finish it. Don't over-commit.

Ask for feedback. Show you're coachable.

Own your mistakes. Fix them and move on.

Give credit generously. You're building trust.

Learn the Culture

Observe how people communicate in meetings, emails, and casual conversation

Notice what's valued: speed, precision, collaboration, innovation?

See what gets rewarded and what gets overlooked

Adapt your style to fit, while staying authentic

Month 3: Settling In & Looking Forward

By month three, you should feel comfortable. You know how things work. You've built real relationships.

60-Day Check-In

Meet with your manager around day 60 to assess: how are you doing? What's going well? What needs adjusting?

Ask for specific feedback. What impressions have you made? What should you focus on?

Discuss your development and what you want to learn in this role

Begin Adding Your Perspective

You now have enough context to offer ideas. Start sharing observations and suggestions.

Frame them as questions, not criticism: "Have you considered...?" or "What if we tried...?"

Some ideas will land. Others won't. Both are fine.

You're establishing yourself as someone who thinks and contributes.

Plan Your Growth

What skills do you want to develop?

Who can mentor you?

What courses, conferences, or projects would help you grow?

Share this with your manager. They can help create opportunities.

What have you learned about your role, team, and company that surprised you?

What's one thing you've done well in your first 90 days? What could you improve?

Who are the key people you've built strong relationships with? Who should you invest more in?

What are your goals for the next 3–6 months? What skills will you focus on?

10

- Long-Term Career Planning

A single job is just one chapter of your career. The most successful people think in terms of skills and trajectory, not just titles. They deliberately build capabilities and seek experiences that compound over time.

Defining Your 5-Year Vision

This isn't about predicting the future. It's about deciding what direction you want to move in.

In five years, what kind of work do you want to be doing? What kind of person will you have become? Be specific about the day-to-day, not just the title.

What is success to you at that point? (Think beyond money: impact, freedom, mastery, relationships, etc.)

What will be true about your skills, experience, and network that's not true now?

Building Skills Intentionally

Successful careers are built on accumulating valuable skills. Identify what matters most for your trajectory.

Skills Audit

Skill	Current Level (1–5)	Importance for Your 5-Year Goal	How You'll Develop It

Ways to Build Skills

On-the-job: Ask for projects that stretch you. Volunteer for things just beyond your current comfort.

Structured learning: Courses, certifications, bootcamps. Pick something specific and complete it.

Learning from others: Find mentors and peers further along. Ask them to teach you.

Reading and research: Stay current in your field. Follow leaders and thinkers.

Side projects: Build something outside work. Practice skills in low-stakes environments.

Teaching others: Explaining concepts to others forces clarity and deepens your understanding.

Building Network & Reputation

Your network and reputation become your currency. Invest in them consistently.

Staying Visible

Contribute to open source, write articles, speak at events, or share insights publicly

Help others generously. Referrals and introductions compound over time.

Attend conferences and industry events. Build relationships with peers.

Maintain your LinkedIn profile and update it regularly.

Don't disappear between jobs. Stay connected to people you've worked with.

Career Transitions

Most careers aren't straight lines. You'll make lateral moves, take on new roles, maybe change industries. That's normal. The key is to build skills that are transferable.

Are there skills or experiences you want that your current role doesn't provide? How will you get them?

What kind of transitions do you want to avoid? What kind might you make?

Evaluating Your Progress

Every 12–18 months, step back and assess. Are you on track toward your five-year vision? Are you learning and growing?

Question	Assessment
Am I learning and stretching in my current role?	
Do I feel like I'm moving toward my 5-year goal?	
Am I building skills that matter for what's next?	
Do I have a mentor or peer group I learn from?	
Is my network growing? Am I adding value to it?	
Am I making the impact I want to make?	
What's working well? What's not?	

When to Make a Move

You should consider a new role when:

You've mastered your current role and aren't growing anymore

You've learned what you needed to learn and are ready for the next challenge

Your values and the company's culture or mission have diverged

The role is no longer a stepping stone toward where you want to be

You can articulate what you'll get from the new role that you won't get staying

You should probably stay when:

You're still learning and growing

You're building important relationships and networks

The role is directly advancing your five-year goal

You're only leaving because of temporary frustration

You don't have a clear sense of what's next

My vision for 5 years from now:

Key skills I need to develop:

Experiences or roles I want before then:

How I'll stay connected to my network:

How I'll measure progress:

NEXT STEPS

- Schedule a 90-day career check-in to assess your progress
- Identify a mentor or peer group for ongoing learning and accountability
- Update your skills plan as your goals evolve
- Revisit your five-year vision annually; refine it as you learn more