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## What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

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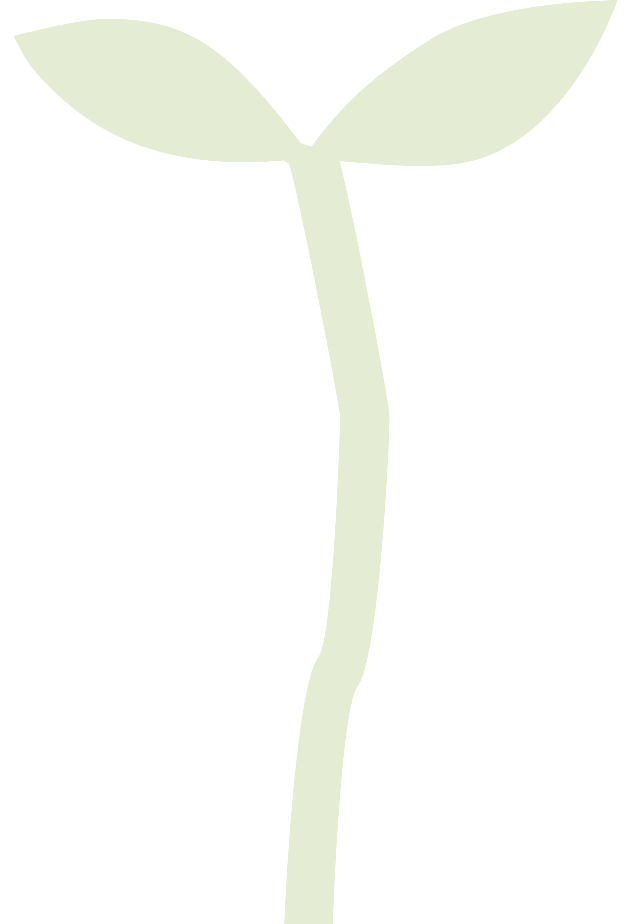
**WHAT  
DO YOU  
WANT  
TO BE  
WHEN  
YOU**



**GROW  
UP ?**

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Scavera, A., & Sowers, J. (2014). What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up? Portland, OR: Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University.



# What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

This is a question most of us heard more than once when we were kids and even more when we were in high school. When we got to be in our 20s the question may have changed to something like, “What are you going to do when you finish college?” or “Now that you are an adult what kind of job or career do you want to do?” After working as a barista, receptionist, and other minimum wage jobs, one young woman in the Career

Visions project said, “I am now trying to figure out my “Big Girl” job.” There is a lot of pressure from families and others on most youth and young adults to figure out their career path. Many young adults also put pressure on themselves – especially as they move toward the age of 30, which many perceive as when “real” adulthood begins. A few people are very clear about what they want to do for a living. However, for most of us it is not so obvious.

# Why is it important to know how to go about figuring out the type of job or career path that you want to take?

1. Studies have found that many young adults report that a key source of anxiety and depression is related to career indecision and uncertainty about what path they should take.
2. Research has also shown that how much people like their job impacts their emotional well-being.
3. Entry-level jobs can be fun and help pay for basic expenses, but young adults realize that it will be difficult to earn a salary and the benefits that they want and need from these jobs.
4. There are thousands of interesting jobs that most of us aren't even aware of. How many of us have heard of these jobs: Food Designer, Geographical Information Systems Technician, Biomedical Equipment Technician, Ophthalmic Technician, Amusement Park Designer, Professional Organizer, Summer Camp Planner, Animal Tracker and Surveyor,

Medical Informatician, Hazmat Worker, Bounty Hunter (yes, it's an actual profession!), Pearl Diver, Forest Fire Lookout, and Clean Room Technician. These are just a few jobs that many people don't know about. People often stumble into a job or career path – but lots of folks stumble into a job area in which they are not happy. They might have been happier if they had a better understanding of how to go through the career exploration process.

The Career Visions Project helps young adults learn and use career planning self-determination skills so that they can make their own choices about what kind of career or job they will be the most satisfied with and that matches their interests and talents. Career Visions project staff help young adults to learn and then use a set of steps that will help them to make informed and well thought out career decisions. One of the key phases of career planning is career exploration. Find out what works for you!



# Career Exploration Questions and Steps

Ask yourself these three questions and spend time answering them for yourself:

Question 1.

What are your interests, talents, and work preferences?

Question 2.

What are jobs or careers that might be a good match to your interests, talents, and work preferences?

Question 3.

How good a match are the job and career ideas to your interests, talents, and work preferences?

An important self-determination skill is to get input and help from others, but to do so on your terms – you decide what help and how much help you want. ***You are in charge!*** So ask for input and help from friends, family and others as you go through this process, but you decide what and how much help you want from them. Another hint in answering these questions is to actually write down your answers. Career Visions Project staff provide young adults with forms on which they can keep notes so that they have a record of their career exploration process. If you would like copies of the forms, please contact Jo-Ann Sowers at [sowersj@pdx.edu](mailto:sowersj@pdx.edu).





# 1

## What are your interests, talents, and work preferences?

Think about anything and everything that you enjoy doing during your free time. For example do you like to work with numbers, do physical things, help others, solve problems, keep things organized, make art, compose music, protect the environment,...? Think about what classes and jobs you liked and did well in. These are often things that make you happy, excited, relaxed, and so on.

Next, think about things that you are good at. Often, many of these are the same things

that you like to do and are interested in – most people like to do things that they are good at. For example, do friends come to you when they need support and help with problems in their lives, and do you get a lot of satisfaction from helping them? Are you one of those people who really get how computers and other electronics work – do friends and family ask you to set up their new devices and to fix problems they have with their computers? Are you great at writing, math, or other subjects in school?

Next, reflect on the general characteristics of a job that might be a good fit for you and the type of lifestyle that you might like to live. Are you the type of person who would rather work mostly inside or outside, with the public or not, during the day or at night, at a job that requires a lot of traveling or not, at a fast-paced job or one that is low-key? Taking the time to reflect on who you are as a person can help you to think deeply about the type of job and career that will be a good match for you and in which you will be happy and successful.

*One young man named Tim experiences Asperger's and some other mental health challenges. After graduating from an alternative high school for students with "behavioral challenges," he worked in a video store for a few years. What Tim really enjoyed, though, was creating Excel spreadsheets to keep track of things. Tim also liked working with computers, math, and science...*

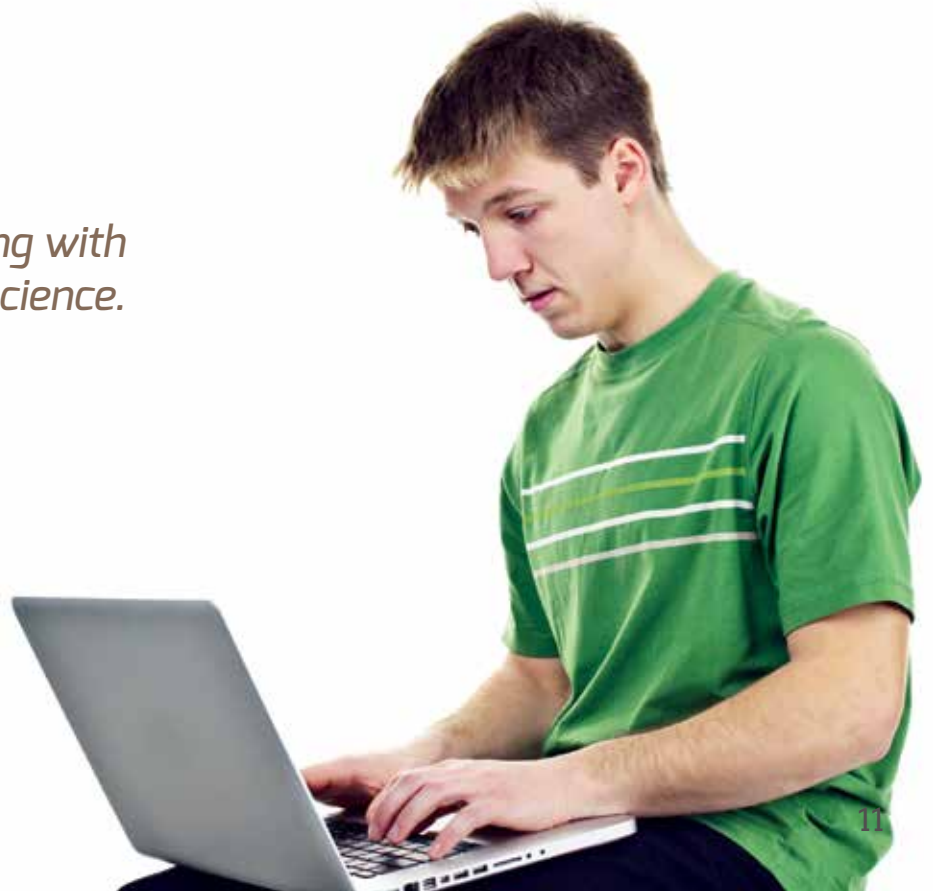
# 2

## What are jobs or careers that might be a good match to your interests, talents, and work preferences?

This is a great question to ask your friends and family and others who know you well. Make as long of a list as you can of jobs that might be a good fit for you. Show them your list of interests, talents, and work preferences and ask them to brainstorm ideas of jobs and careers that might be a fit.

*...Tim was unsure about what jobs would be interesting and a good match for him. After learning about his interests and talents, a Career Visions Project Guide suggested that he look into Geographic Information Systems (GIS). He had never heard of the field before but was very interested in finding out more information...*

*Tim liked working with computers, math, and science.*



# 3

## How good of a match are the jobs and careers on your list with your interests, talents, and work preferences?

You are now going to become a detective (just not as a career...unless that's what you want to be!). To answer this question you need to find out more information about the jobs and careers on your list. If you came up with a long list of job ideas when answering Question 2, then you may want to pick out a few that you are most interested in learning more about. You will find out things like what people in these jobs actually do most

days when they go to work and what their work environment is like. You will also learn about the skills, education, and training that are needed to get the job and to do well in it. Knowing this information will help you decide how well each job matches who you are and will tell you if you need additional education and training to get and do well in that job.



# Career Research

There are two great ways to do career research in order to find out more about jobs and careers and how good of a match they are to your interests, talents, and preferences. The first way is to check out career exploration sites on the internet. The second way is to do what is called an informational interview.

## Internet career research

Internet search engines can be very useful in doing career research. We have listed some of these websites on page 21 of this document. Online career research sites will usually tell you things like how many job openings there are now and how many there might be in the future, how much they usually pay, and the education and experience that is needed. Exploring these

sites can also help you to learn about additional jobs and careers which you may not have known about.

## Informational interview

After you have spent time researching jobs on the internet and found a few jobs which you would like to know even more about it is time to do some informational interviews. Informational interviews are

incredibly helpful in really getting a good picture of what a person does when working in a particular job or career. You can also learn from the people that you interview why they chose that career path, what they did to get their job, and what things they like and dislike about the job. Informational interviews are also a great place to ask for and get advice about your career path and plans.

*...Tim did an informational interview with a GIS specialist at an architect's office. After gathering information on GIS technicians, Tim realized he would need to take some college classes to become certified as a GIS technician. He then registered for a class at a community college. He asked his Vocational Rehabilitation counselor to pay the cost of the one class so he could see if he liked it and could do the work. His VR counselor agreed because Tim had shown her all the research he had done about the GIS field which assured her that there were lots of jobs for people trained in GIS and that these jobs are well paid...*



## Getting an informational interview

The first step in doing informational interviews is to find someone who works in a job area in which you are interested who might be willing to meet with you. Ask people you know (friends, family, professionals) if they know of anyone who works in the job area you interested are in. Next, look on Craigslist or similar sites with job listings for job openings at businesses in the area in which you are interested. You can then contact the business – not to apply for a job – but to ask to do an informational interview. Another strategy for finding people to interview is to simply search on the web for the type of businesses in your community where that type of job is done.

You can also interview faculty or staff at colleges and training programs in the area in which you are interested. They will have lots of good information about the local job market in that area and what is involved in doing and preparing for the jobs in which you are interested.

The next step in the informational interview process is to actually make the request for an informational interview. Asking for an informational interview is the hardest step for lots of us. *Hint – most people you will ask like to talk about their job and how they got to where they are in their career. So, although it may be nerve-wracking to*

*get the courage to ask, it is likely that the person will be happy to meet with you.*

Start off by sending an email to someone at a company in which you are interested. It is easier for most people to explain that they are asking to do an informational interview in an email than on the phone. You might write something like, "Dear Mr. Jones, I am a young person who is exploring careers in order to choose a career path and to plan for it. I am interested in learning more about careers in the [name of career field] and would greatly appreciate it if you would be willing to meet with me. I understand how busy you are and I will only take about



30 minutes of your time.” Make sure that your email address is business appropriate. A business appropriate email is one that contains some part of your real name and does not include unneeded descriptors such as your hobbies, likes, or interests. For example, *mountainbiker89@domain.com* is not business appropriate whereas *firstnamelastname@domain.com* is. If you do not yet have a business appropriate email, create a free email account which you will use for communicating with businesses. In your email, provide the person with your phone number and invite them to respond to you by email or phone in order to arrange a date and time for meeting.

If you do not receive a response to your

email in 2 or 3 days, and if you have the person’s phone number, it is a good idea to call her or him. If you are able to get the person on the phone or if you have to leave a message, share your name and that you are following up with the email that you sent. Share again that you are exploring careers and would like to learn more about his or her career, and are hoping that he or she would be able and willing to spend a small amount of time with you in order to share information about his or her job. Most people will respond to your email or phone message. Be persistent! Send at least two emails and leave at least two voicemails before deciding that the person is not going to respond. You have an appointment? Fantastic!

## Conducting an informational interview

Now that you have a meeting set-up, you will want to do a number of things to make sure that you get most out of it:

1. Do some more web searches about the company/ agency where you are going to meet the person in order to find out as much about it and the work that they do as possible. You can share with the person that you have done this research and share something with them that you learned that you think is particularly interesting. Doing so will show the person that you are serious about your career exploration.
2. Prepare the questions you want to ask and write them down. Some great questions include: What is a typical day at work like for you? How did you



decide to go into this line of work? What do you like most about your job? What are your least favorite things about your job? Do you have advice for me if I decide to pursue this career? Practice what you are going to say and do. It's totally normal to feel nervous and practicing can help you feel more confident and prepared.

3. Of course, wear clean and neat clothes. Even though you are not looking for a job at this interview, it is important to make a good impression.
4. Bring something to write with and on. Taking notes during the interview shows that you are listening and interested. It can also help you remember information that might help you in the future.

5. Most importantly, be on time! Arrive early if possible. This is not only expected but may reduce stress when you know you are where you need to be at the right time.

Take as much time as you can to do as many informational interviews as possible. These should include interviewing people in a number of different job or career areas and a number of different people who work in the one or two job areas in which you are the most interested. Hopefully, as you go through the process of interviewing different people in different jobs it will become clear which career area is the one for you. After you are pretty confident that you have identified your career goal you can then figure out the steps that you want

to take to achieve it. Do you want and need to get more education and training? If so, where do you want to go to school? How will you pay for it? Asking and answering these and other questions will help you to prepare a well thought out plan that you will follow in order to reach your goal.

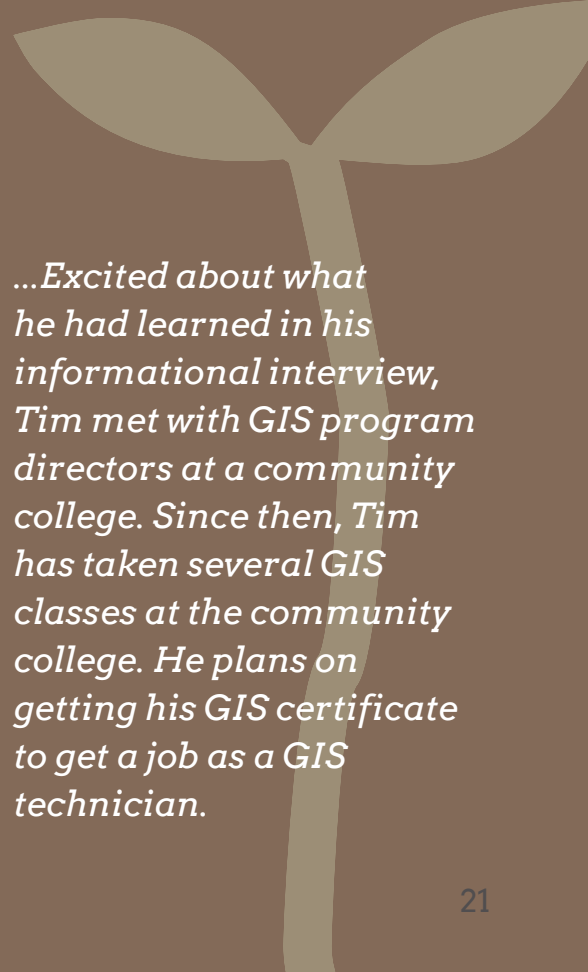
## Career Research Resources

[www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)

[www.bls.gov/k12](http://www.bls.gov/k12)

[www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org)

[www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)



*...Excited about what he had learned in his informational interview, Tim met with GIS program directors at a community college. Since then, Tim has taken several GIS classes at the community college. He plans on getting his GIS certificate to get a job as a GIS technician.*

# Career Decision Myths BUSTED!

Myth: If you make a “bad” career choice, you will be stuck forever.

No career choice is permanent. If you are unhappy with the choice(s) you have made, you can make changes. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the average worker will change careers five times during their work life. People change jobs even more times!

Myth: You are the only one your age who is undecided about career choices.

Sometimes it feels like everyone but you has a plan. It is very common for young adults to still be figuring out what they would like to do or be.

Myth: Career assessments are always right.

Some career assessments aren't very accurate. They may be useful in suggesting career paths, but it is up to you to decide what you want to do.

Myth: There is a perfect career for you.

While there may be many careers that will match your interests, skills, and preferences, there is no "perfect" career. Making informed decisions involves weighing the pros and cons of a job or career.

Myth: You already know everything you need to know about [insert career here].

The job market is constantly changing, and it is a good idea to keep educating yourself about the career of your choice.



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