

# Exploring Careers

## Quick! What are you going to do for the rest of your life?

If you're not sure, that's okay. Here are a couple of important things to keep in mind as you think about your future career. First, you and the world in which you live will be constantly changing throughout your life. You will be a different person 20 years from now – different needs, interests, and priorities. Career options will be changing too. Just think, during the last 20 years, thousands of jobs in textiles and tobacco were lost in North Carolina. During the same period, thousands of jobs in medicine, technology, education and business were created. The next 20 years will bring many changes as well. In fact, you will probably change jobs and careers a number of times throughout your lifetime.



The second thing to keep in mind is that career preparation begins now! What you do today, impacts your options tomorrow. Yes, that means every English assignment, math problem, and science project is opening up more options for your future. Working hard in your courses is essential because if you are not academically prepared to go in a number of different directions, you will be locked into just a few options.

In addition to focusing on academics, now is also the time to explore and learn all you can about career options. Exploring career choices can help you learn about yourself, set goals, know how to prepare, and it can be a lot of fun! Let's take a look at some of the ways you can learn about the numerous career opportunities that are available in North Carolina and across the country.

## Ways to Explore Careers

### Career Inventories

Taking a career inventory can be a good way to begin exploring careers. Inventories often ask you questions about things such as your interests, preferences, and values. They may also ask about your abilities and talents, or even attempt to measure some of your skills.

One downfall of career inventories is high expectations. Many people take them expecting to get one specific answer such as, "You should be an architect." Instead, most inventories are designed to help you learn about yourself, think about the variations between careers, and narrow the field of options. For some people, career inventories don't narrow the list of options at all. Instead, you may discover a whole field with many more opportunities than you ever knew existed.

There are a number of career inventories available both on paper and online. The Career Key on CFNC.org is a career inventory that can help you begin exploration. After you create your free account on CFNC.org, go to "Career Center" and click on "Career Key." You may also want to try the Career Matching Assistant that allows you to search careers by entering criteria such as salary

range and education required. Your school counselor may suggest other career inventories that could be helpful.

### Web Research

The Internet has a wealth of career information for you to explore. In addition to the career section on [www.CFNC.org](http://www.CFNC.org), you may want to check out these sites:

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

Occupational Outlook Handbook Online

<http://online.onetcenter.org>

O\*NET Online – Occupational Information Network

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

America's Career InfoNet

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

North Carolina's Occupational Information Database

### Informational Interviews

There may be several careers in which you are interested. One of the challenges of exploring careers is that the descriptions you read on the Internet, or the impression you have in your mind, might not match what that career is like in real life. Consider scheduling some interviews with people who have jobs that you find interesting.

You'll need to call in advance and make an appointment. Explain that you are interested in asking some questions about their profession and ask for 20-30 minutes of their time. Be a few minutes early for your appointment and have your questions ready on a sheet of paper. Questions to consider:

- How did you prepare for this job? (education, experience)
- How would you suggest that someone entering this field prepare? (education, experience)
- What do you like most and least about your job?
- What type of person would do well in this career field? (personality traits, skills, preferences)
- What salary levels are common for this type of job? (starting salary, average salary)
- What is a "typical" day like for you? (schedule, working with people, projects)

### Career Tip:

**You can develop, store, and update your own personal career planning portfolio in the Career Portfolio section of [CFNC.org](http://CFNC.org)**

### Job Shadowing

Another helpful way to see what certain jobs are really like, is to job shadow someone. As the term implies, you simply find a person who would be willing to let you follow them around – typically for a half-day or a day. Maybe you're considering becoming an electrical engineer. Start by checking with a teacher, school counselor, or family member to see if they know of someone. You could also check on the Internet or in your local phone directory for professional associations of engineers or listings of local electrical engineers.

You'll want to get the advice of the person you are shadowing about what day would be a good sample for you. For instance, you may not want to job shadow on a day when they are in meetings for 7 hours if that is not typical. On the day you job shadow, make sure you are on time, dress appropriately, take a pen and notebook for note taking, and have a list of questions that you would like to ask. It might be a good idea to combine your job shadowing with an informational interview as mentioned above.

At the end of the day, share your experience with a family member, teacher, or school counselor. Did you find any surprises? Could you see yourself in this career? As a professional courtesy, be sure to write a thank you note to the person you shadowed.

### Cooperative Education

In many schools there are programs that allow students to attend classes for part of the day and then work for the second part of the day. This arrangement is called cooperative education because the school and business cooperate to create the learning environment. Check with your counselor to see if your school offers a cooperative education program. If you decide to do cooperative education during high school, make sure the experience is truly relevant to what you want to do and that you are not omitting any academic courses that you need for college.

Cooperative education is more common in college, where students may alternate between semesters of courses and semesters of work. This is an excellent opportunity to see how the material you study is actually applied in the workplace, to begin building a resume and industry contacts, and sometimes to even get your first job offer.

### **Internships**

Internships are more commonly done by college students rather than middle or high school students, but they are good to keep in mind for the future. Internships come in a variety of forms, but they are usually linked to your college major. For instance, a rising college senior who is majoring in marketing might get a summer internship in Charlotte working in the marketing department of a large bank. Some internships are paid, others are not.

Oftentimes, internships are required to graduate from college with a particular major. For instance, aspiring teachers are required to do “student teaching” which is, in essence, an internship in a school. Some political science majors are required to do an internship in Washington, D.C. Internship programs are great for adding experience to your resume and for starting a network that can help when you begin job hunting.

### **Summer Programs**

Sure, the pool and TV may be tempting pastimes for the summer, but also consider using some of your time to participate in programs related to a career interest. Some North Carolina programs include:

- Summer Ventures in Science and Math
- Governor’s School
- Boy’s State
- Girl’s State
- North Carolina School of the Arts

Most programs range from one to five weeks in length and many provide the opportunity to stay on a college campus. Summer camps allow you to do everything from participate in a hands-on geology dig in the mountains, to perform in a state-of-the-art music center. Talk to your school counselor to learn more. Plan ahead, and apply early since many programs have limited enrollment.

### **Part-time Jobs**

Whether it’s a summer job or an after-school job during the year, part-time employment can be a good experience. Part-time jobs allow you to learn responsibility, discover more about your talents, see what employers expect, and, of course, to earn money for college. Many students find part-time jobs an incentive to go to college because they either discover a career they think they would enjoy, or they discover that they won’t find a job they enjoy unless they continue their education.

One of the most important things to remember if you take a part-time job while in high school is that school needs to be your first priority; don’t let the lure of money in the short-term keep you from building the foundations for long-term success.

### **Volunteering**

Maybe an organization or business is not able to offer you a paid job. Volunteering may help you gain experience that you would otherwise not be able to get. Thinking about becoming an attorney? You could volunteer to be a “gopher” for a law firm permitting you to have conversations with a number of lawyers and maybe get exposure to several types of specialties in law. It would enable you to see the work of attorneys over a longer period of time than just one day of job shadowing.

Volunteering also has other benefits. First, it allows you to assist charitable organizations and to help people in need. Secondly, even though you still need to be dependable, it often provides for more flexible scheduling around school work. Volunteer activities also look great on your college application because they show initiative and responsibility.



## Career FAQ

### **Do I have to know my major before I enter college?**

No, you don't always have to declare a major before entering college. If the program is a one or two-year diploma or degree, obviously, you'll need to decide quite soon. Those types of programs have few general education courses, so you'll start your major courses soon. Some four-year programs, such as music or education, may have major courses spread throughout the four years, therefore deciding early is very advantageous.

For many majors, however, you may not need to decide until you complete your first two years of general education coursework. And remember, just because you decide on a major, does not mean you are deciding on a career. While a major in accounting points you in a specific direction, other majors like English or psychology can lead in numerous directions.

### **I want to make a lot of money. What career should I pursue?**

Think carefully before you pursue a career only for the financial reward. If you don't enjoy a career or have strong talents in that field, you are not likely to do well in it. And money is little consolation if you hate going to work each day. First consider your own interests and abilities, then select career paths that have good long-term prospects for both demand and salary. The sites mentioned in the "Web Research" section of this publication are great resources for salary and job growth information.

### **The career I want is a "long shot." Should I go for it?**

This is a tough question that only you can answer. First, realistically look at the prospects. For instance, there are about 550,000 high school basketball players in the United States. Out of that number, about 50 make it to an NBA team. The odds of a high school basketball player making it to the pros at all – let alone having a career – are about 10,000 to 1.

Does that mean you can't be that "one" person? Certainly not! You may indeed have what it takes to be in the NBA, solo with the New York Philharmonic, or become an actor in Hollywood. Pursue your dreams, but keep a strong back-up plan. You might also consider related fields. For instance, sports management or sports medicine might be great options for you if you like athletics. Stay committed to your academics and to keeping your options open.



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