

# Planning a better future

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# Introduction and guidance

## Introduction and guidance

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*Planning a better future* is an introductory course for anyone considering changing jobs, wondering how to move up the ladder or return to work after a break, and those who might be looking to aspire to better things.

Each section of the course offers short, interactive quizzes to test your knowledge.

Successful completion of the course will enable you to achieve an online badge and a statement of participation. This course does not carry any formal academic credit.

However, it does provide a way to help you progress from informal to formal learning.

# Guidance for accessing alternative formats

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You can download this section of the course to study offline. The alternative formats offered that will best support offline study include Word, PDF and ebook/Kindle versions of the materials. The other alternative formats (SCORM, RSS, IMS, HTML and XML) are useful to those who want to export the course to host on another learning management system.

Although you can use the alternative formats offline for your own convenience, you do need to work through the online version of the course for full functionality (such as accessing links, using the audio and video materials, and completing the quizzes). Please use the downloads as convenient tools for studying the materials when away from the internet and return to the online version to ensure you can complete all activities that lead to earning the badge.

In order to access full functionality in the online course, we recommend that you use the latest internet browsers such as Internet Explorer 9 and above and Google Chrome version 49 and above.

If you have difficulties in streaming the audio-visual content, please make use of the available transcripts.

# Structure of the course

This course consists of three blocks, with each block focusing on a particular aspect of planning a better future:

1. [How did I get here?](#), which helps you to take stock of where you are by exploring the roles you play in life, reflecting on your experiences – both positive and negative – recognising your achievements and identifying your strengths, weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats you face.
2. [Where do I want to go?](#), which helps you to move forward by exploring the changes you want to make, enabling you to gather information, helping you to consider what options are available, make good decisions and to define and refine your goals.
3. [How do I get there?](#), which helps you to make sound decisions, set realistic goals and create feasible action plans. You will also receive useful advice on the recruitment process, and on how to complete job applications, write CVs and covering letters, and prepare for interviews and their aftermath.

You'll note from Figure 1 that the blocks can be thought of as a continuous process involving taking stock, exploring opportunities, setting goals and taking action.



**Figure 1** The process of planning for a better future

Together they amount to approximately 15 hours of study time. Each block has a mixture of reading, video clips, activities and quizzes that will help you to engage with the course content.

A further section, [Taking my learning further](#), will enable you to reflect upon what you have learned within this course. It also directs you to relevant websites and resources, which further relate to the development of your learning and career prospects.

Once you have studied a block, you will be asked to complete a short online quiz of no more than five questions per block. This helps to test and embed your learning.

*Planning a better future* is designed to allow you to dip in and out of the resources, so that you can study in small chunks to fit around your work and life commitments. If you choose to complete all blocks of *Planning a better future* and collect the badge, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your achievement. You may find this useful to show to your employer as evidence of your learning. For more information on how to obtain your badge, read [What is a badge?](#)

## Navigating the website

To find your way around this course, you simply click on the links. The home page has links to all the blocks, quizzes and relevant resources. When you are in a block, the left-hand menu has links to that block's topics and its associated quiz. The menu also has links to the other sections of *Planning a better future* and to the resources section.



If you feel unsure, practise hovering your mouse over a link in the menu and clicking on it. This is the easiest way to move from page to page. You can also click on the 'Next' link at the end of each page of text. Don't worry about breaking a link or damaging the web page – you won't. Have a go as soon as you can before you begin your study.

## Why study this course?

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Lynne Johnson, one of the contributors to this course, will now give you a bit of background into why you might like to study this course.

Video content is not available in this format.

The guided activities throughout this course will help you to reflect on your life-long and life-wide experiences to help you to plan for a better future. Throughout the course you will find activities that ask you to write down your thoughts and feelings based on the issues being discussed. There will be a few simple questions that encourage you to focus your thinking. It would be helpful for you to spend some time thinking about what you have learned within each section, and how it relates to your current situation and future goals. These activities are not there to test you, but designed to help you reflect in more detail upon what you have read. These activity spaces are entirely for your own use to help you recognise what you have learned. Nobody else will see what you write here. The aim is to help you become more reflective, by bringing together aspects of both your personal and work experiences so you can review and learn from them.

Here's an interview with Steven Donoghue about combining work and study.

Video content is not available in this format.

## Learning outcomes

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After completing this course you will be able to:

- reflect on where you are now and where you would like to be
- understand the impact of change for you and what options are open to you
- identify your goals and the actions that you can take next to reach them.

Finally, we hope that you will enjoy your study on the course as well as finding it useful when planning for a better future.

# Before you begin

Spend a few moments thinking about your current learning needs and opportunities by doing Activity 1 below.

## Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

Below is a link to a short questionnaire. It has been designed to get you thinking about:

- What are your current priorities for learning?
- How does studying a short online course fit into your everyday lifestyle?
- What goals are you hoping to achieve by studying this course?

[Questionnaire about your learning \(1\)](#)

Hopefully, by the end of the course you will be able to reflect on your answers.

[We hope you enjoy the course!](#)



# What is a badge?

## What is a badge?

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Badges are a means of recognising certain skills and achievements acquired through online courses. Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on a course.

While these badges do not carry any formal credit and are not subject to the same rigour as formal assessment, you can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn. You might like to include your badges or statement of participation on your CV as evidence of self-directed learning.

Badges are a great motivator, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that are needed for successful study. So, completing this course might encourage you to think about taking other courses.

There is one badge you can collect from this course:



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## What is a statement of participation?

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If you successfully achieve the badge, you will be able to access and download a statement of participation. This demonstrates your successful completion of the course, your interest in the subject and your commitment to your career. It also provides evidence of your continuing professional development. The statement of participation does not carry any formal credit towards a qualification as it is not subject to the same rigour as formal assessment.

You will be notified by email if you have received a statement of participation. Once it is available (as a PDF file), you will be able to see and download it from your OpenLearn Create profile.

It may take up to 24 hours for the statement of participation to be issued after you have completed the course.

If you experience any problems accessing your statement of participation, please contact [openlearncreate@open.ac.uk](mailto:openlearncreate@open.ac.uk).

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## What are the requirements?

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While studying *Planning a better future* you have the option to a digital badges by successfully completing the quiz at the end of each section. Quizzes can only be accessed while studying the course online.

To obtain your badge, you need to:

- enrol on the course
- achieve four out of five correct answers in each associated quiz (you do get more than one attempt).

Please be aware that quiz questions are based on course content. You are encouraged to engage with the content prior to taking the quizzes.

On successful completion you will receive email notification that your badge has been awarded and it will appear in your *My badges* area in your profile on OpenLearn Create. Please note it can take up to 24 hours for a badge to be issued.



## Enrol on the course to collect your badge

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To enrol on this course (and to ensure you can collect your badge) you will need to follow the simple steps below:

1. If you already have an OpenLearn Create account, just click on 'Sign in' to enrol and enter your user name and password.
2. If you don't have an Open University account (for OpenLearn, OpenLearn Create, or your Open University student or tutor account), [create your new account here](#).
3. Follow the instructions, and when you have finished registration by reaching the *My account* page, simply close the browser window or tab.
4. Refresh **this** page by clicking on the refresh button in your web browser – this usually looks like a recycling icon that features one arrow in a circle pointing to its tail, or two arrows in a circle pointing to each other. This will update your status so you can enrol.
5. The enrolment button is in the top right-hand corner.

You are now enrolled and ready to start the course!

## How do I access my badge?

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From within the course:

- Go to *My profile* and click on *My badges*.
- To view the details of the badge or to download it, click on the badge and you will be taken to the *Badge information* page.

You will need to download your digital badge to your computer if you wish to share them with your employers or to add them to CVs and social media. You can also add the badge to your [Mozilla Backpack](#), a software tool that allows you to collect your badges together in one place.

If you experience any problems accessing your badges, please contact [openlearncreate@open.ac.uk](mailto:openlearncreate@open.ac.uk).

## How do I access my statement of participation?

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When you have successfully passed all the quizzes and collected all the badges, you will receive an email containing details on how to download your statement of participation.

You will also find your successful completion of the course in your OpenLearn Create profile, including a link to *My statement*, where you can download the statement of participation or share it to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Now return to the [course homepage](#).





# How did I get here?

## Introduction

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How well do you really know yourself? This block will help you to develop your self-awareness and take stock of your life by helping you to review your experiences and identify what you have learned from them. Your past has shaped you through your family background, education and training, and work and leisure activities. You've gained knowledge and skills from your experiences – probably more than you think – and will have developed characteristics and capabilities that help you to cope with difficult situations and to respond to different challenges.

The activities that follow ask you to think about a series of questions to help you to review your current situation. They offer different ways of considering what you're like and what you can do. At intervals you'll be asked to note down your responses. The questions are as follows:

- Who am I?
- What roles do I play in life?
- What learning experiences have I had?
- What are my main achievements?
- What are my helping and hindering factors?
- What are my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

Doing these activities should give you a more realistic idea about what you know, what you can do, and what you are good at. In other words, you will learn more about your capabilities – your ability to do something. Capabilities are made up of your skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes. Hopefully, the things you learn about yourself will increase your confidence, as most people find that they have a lot more to offer than they originally thought. At this stage, focus on what you know and what you can do, rather than thinking about the knowledge and skills you lack. Remember that you may have potential in various areas that has not yet been developed for one reason or another. Here's Lynne Johnson introducing this block:

Video content is not available in this format.

# Learning Outcomes

By completing this block and the associated quiz, you will:

- reflect on where you are now and where you would like to be.

## 1 Who am I?

Activities 1 and 2 will help you to develop an overview of your life so far, and to consider how your early history contributed to it.

### Activity 1

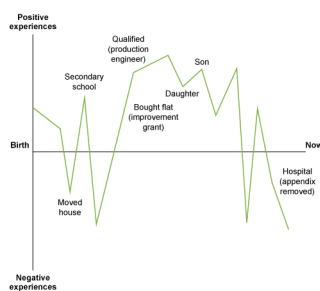
Allow about 20 minutes

#### Part 1

In this activity you're going to use [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) to draw a 'lifeline'. This lifeline can help you to:

- think about the pattern of your life
- gather insights that can influence your future choices
- discover aspects of yourself that you might want to develop or change.

Using Figure 1 as a guide, note down key life events such as education, work, interests, marriage, children and so on, to show the high and low points at different times of your life.



**Figure 1** An example of a lifeline

For some people, the lifeline exercise can result in a lot of emotions coming to the surface as you review your experiences. You may find it useful to talk through any difficult feelings that arise with someone you trust.

#### Part 2

When you've drawn a lifeline that reflects your key experiences, think about the feelings aroused by each experience and then answer these questions, noting down any thoughts or ideas that occur to you:

- What does the lifeline say about you and how you've lived your life?
- Are there recognisable themes that have run through your life?

- Is the pattern generally up or down? Is it steady or changeable? What sorts of incidents were associated with the highs and lows?
- Are the highs generally associated with your own choices and the lows with the unexpected? Are there some experiences you cope with easily and others that really throw you?
- Are there any lessons to be learned?

For example, this activity revealed to one person that all her high points were associated with praise from others and her low points with geographical moves. Another noted that all his positive job changes followed disappointments in his private life, and he saw that each disappointment motivated him towards a change that offered opportunities. A third recognised someone else as consistently acting as a mentor. Would someone who knows you well have drawn your lifeline differently? It might be an interesting exercise to ask at least one other person to draw your lifeline to compare their view with yours.

*Provide your answer...*

## Activity 2

Allow about 20 minutes

### Part 1

This activity seeks to spark some more detailed memories from your childhood and teenage years. Make notes in response to the prompts given below. The activity may make you want to amend or add to your lifeline, as you consider your experiences in more depth.

1. **Family influences:** if applicable, say something about any occupational influences on you. For instance, was one of your parents a mechanic or another a teacher?
2. **Early childhood:** what do you remember about your early childhood? For example, the area and house you lived in, family lifestyle, activities you participated in, experiences you had, what your parents expected of you, your role in the family.
3. **Schooling:** list the schools you went to, with dates, the subjects you were good at and enjoyed, how you got on with other children, how your teachers saw you, how you saw your teachers, and any school sports or activities you took part in.
4. **Teenage years:** what activities were you good at or did you enjoy? How did your friends see you? What were you like as a teenager? What did you want to be?
5. **Any further education or training:** what did you do? How did you choose it? How did you get on?

*Provide your answer...*

### Part 2



Now spend some time considering what your notes say about you – what you're like, and why, and how you arrived at where you are today. You may see themes appearing, such as strong aspects of your personality or particular talents and interests. Maybe you had various abilities but developed one rather than another – sporting ability rather than artistic talent, perhaps. Looking back, could you have made different choices? Make a note of any insights you've gained.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 1 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 2 What roles do I play in life?



Another way of identifying your capabilities is to consider the roles that you've played in your life. Imagine yourself as an actor in your own life, like a character in a movie. You probably play a lot of different roles. You might have roles as a parent, employee, friend or student, and each role you play demands different things of you.

For example, if you have previously been a student, you would have needed the skills of learning, time management and communicating in writing. Perhaps you enjoy DIY? If so, you have developed not only practical skills but also learned how to plan and organise as well. If you are a parent, you are likely to have developed a whole range of skills including budgeting, time management, organising, cooking, negotiating, dealing with admin, etc. If you chair meetings of a club, you will have developed your ability to deal with a variety of people, provide leadership and communicate effectively.

### Case study: Tom's roles in life

Look at Tom's list below. It shows some of the roles he plays and what these roles demand of him.

1. **Student representative:** attending meetings to give the views of my class to teachers and lecturers, communicating with people on the same course as me.
2. **Volunteer at Samaritans' helpline:** listening to people talk about their worries, planning my shifts to fit with other team members and my family.
3. **Head gardener:** teaching summer students the basics, operating machinery, planning seasonal jobs so they are shared out across the team.
4. **Son:** driving my elderly mother to see her friends, using the internet to do online shopping with her.
5. **Treasurer of pub darts team:** taking and banking membership fees, paying expenses, and giving reports.

Obviously, there are many more capabilities that could have been included here, but hopefully these will spark ideas about your own roles in life in this next activity.

### Activity 3

Allow about 30 minutes

#### Part 1

This activity will help you to identify the roles you have played in your life so far and provide you with an idea of the capabilities you have developed. First, note down the

roles you have played most frequently and one or two key activities associated with them.

*Provide your answer...*

### Comment

Your list might have a combination of roles – some to do with family or friends, others related to work you have done, or to hobbies or interests. Equally, your list might also include roles that you feel have been ‘given’ to you by others that you would prefer not to play. For example, are you expected to be the ‘organiser’ in your group of friends, even if you do not always feel like doing that? Note, though, that if you are nominated for a role by others, it may be because they view you as being good at it.

### Part 2

Now that you’ve identified your different roles and thought about the types of activity that you need to perform, consider which roles you find most satisfying and the ones you feel that you perform well. Use the following questions to trigger your thoughts and record any answers.

- Are you surprised by the range of things you do and take for granted?
- Were you able to identify the kinds of activities you carry out in each of these roles?
- Did they begin to suggest any knowledge, skills and characteristics that might be associated with performing different kinds of roles?
- Were you surprised at which roles you enjoyed and those you did not, and which you felt you performed well in, or not?
- Which roles might you want to continue and which, if any, might you want to stop playing?

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 2 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 3 What learning experiences have I had?

Most people would agree that work experience is very important when considering future career directions, but it's easy to take yourself for granted and not recognise the wide range of capabilities that you have developed throughout your life. For example, what hobbies do you have or have you had in the past? Not everyone can turn their hobby into a career – although a growing number of people are doing just that – but the activities you do in your spare time could help you to demonstrate capabilities that can be useful in the workplace.

Skills in verbal and written communication, numeracy, information technology, time management and fluency in a foreign language are all examples of skills (and you can probably think of many more) that can be developed through leisure activities or formal and informal study and then used in the workplace. These are usually called 'transferable skills' and are often acquired through experience. You don't necessarily need to have a formal qualification, just some evidence to demonstrate that you have them.

You will have learned a huge amount through your work (paid or unpaid), leisure and study experiences by noticing how you feel about different tasks, or how well you perform particular activities compared to other people. You may also have learned from others, either through formal appraisal and assessment or from informal comments and reactions.

The next activity helps you to focus on your work and non-work experience, and will be useful when writing a CV and preparing for interviews.

### Activity 4

Allow about 45 minutes

#### Part 1

1. List the jobs you've had, with dates. If you have limited or no experience of paid employment, make a similar list of unpaid or voluntary experience; for example, helping readers at school, delivering 'Meals on Wheels', fund-raising for a charity or involvement in a conservation project. You can also use formal or informal study experiences and hobbies in this activity.
2. For each job, note how it came about. Did you volunteer or were you directed into it? If you had some choice, what factors seemed important in deciding to take it up?
3. For each job, note the range of tasks or what you had to do.
4. Did you have to deal with any difficulties?
5. Which tasks or activities did you find most and least appealing, enjoyable, or rewarding? Why?
6. What did you (and others) view as your strengths and weaknesses?
7. What were your particular achievements and successes?
8. What did you view as failures, or things that you could have done better?
9. How did you get on with the other people?
10. What was your style of working?
11. Were you known for particular things?

12. What were you most proud of?

*Provide your answer...*

### Part 2

Look back at what you've written. Can you see particular patterns of strengths or weaknesses? Do you enjoy some things more than others? Do others turn to you for help with particular things? Can you identify particular capabilities? Do you recognise any specific skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes? Note down anything that you think is particularly important.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 3 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 4 What are my main achievements?

In Activity 4 you were asked to note down your particular achievements – things that you view as personal successes. These could be work-related, to do with relationships or things you do in your spare time. For example, passing all your exams first time may say that you're an excellent student; whereas passing your driving test on the fifth attempt may say a lot about your staying power and determination. Remember, this is about what you view as being a success, because you are best placed to understand your personal circumstances and the obstacles that you have had to overcome to reach a certain goal.

### Activity 5

Allow about 20 minutes

Looking back at the lifeline you created in Activity 1, the roles you've played and the experiences you've had, go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note down the achievements you're most proud of. Then think about the knowledge and abilities you applied in order to achieve what you did. Perhaps you had to learn a new technique, or used or developed a skill you already had?

Table 1 is an example of a completed table.

**Table 1 An example of your achievements and what they say about you**

What I achieved	Skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes used/required
Passed my driving test	Had to demonstrate that my driving skills met the required standard. Had to be confident in my ability to remain calm under pressure. Had to pass a test of my knowledge of the Highway Code.
Became a qualified youth football coach	Had to learn coaching skills (theory and practical). Have to be able to communicate with young people and their parents effectively. Gained a first aid qualification. Have to promote a positive attitude among team members and lead by example.
Parenthood	Had to learn about what babies and toddlers need to keep them happy and healthy. Developed knowledge about good nutrition for youngsters and how to handle common childhood illnesses. Needed to become more organised when planning outings, etc.
Raised £6000 for cancer charity by organising a charity auction	Had to arrange a venue. Promoted event and sold tickets. Had to use my network of family and friends to obtain items for the auction. Had to provide catering and entertainment for the evening. Had to manage the budget so that the event produced the target donation required. Used basic IT skills (Word, Excel and the internet) to organise the various aspects of the event. Had to be very motivated and determined to make a success of the event and demonstrate good interpersonal skills to persuade people to become involved in helping me out.

Got a place at college

Made redundant from dead-end job and decided I needed to change my career direction. Got some careers information, advice and guidance from the job centre, my local library, and careers service. Decided I wanted to be involved in the sports and leisure industry, and to make a career of it. Learned that I would need some qualifications to get in at the right level, so researched relevant courses locally and applied. Had to attend an interview and persuade the interviewer that I was really committed to the course (my youth football coaching experience helped me here). Needed to show confidence in my ability to do the course and demonstrate good communications skills during the application and interview process.

Which of the skills or qualities you've listed could be used in a work situation? The chances are that you've highlighted some 'transferable skills' (such as administrative/organisational and communication skills) and qualities that would be useful in many kinds of work.

## How do I provide evidence of my achievements?

Now that you have identified your capabilities it would be useful to think about what evidence you can give in support of these. On an application form you are often asked to give an example of a time when you effectively used a particular skill or to demonstrate knowledge in a particular area. If you claim to have certain capabilities, you are expected to provide supporting evidence.

When thinking about evidence it can help to think of using a variety of sources, including your studies, work (paid or unpaid) and hobbies. In order to structure what you write in an application form, you could use the STAR method (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ctions, **R**esult).

### Activity 6

Allow about 20 minutes

Here are two examples, using a couple of the achievements identified in Table 1, showing how you could use the STAR method if you were asked about your administrative/organisational and communication skills when applying for a job:

- **Administrative/organisational:** While involved in raising money for a cancer charity (**situation**), I organised a successful charity auction (**task**): hiring the venue, creating a schedule for the event, securing donations for the auction from friends, family and local businesses, and managing the budget and ticket sales (**actions**). The event raised more than £6000 against a target of £5000 (**result**).
- **Communication:** In my role as youth football coach (**situation**), I have to communicate effectively with different groups of people; players, parents and officials (**task**). It is essential that I am clear with the players about what is expected of them in terms of tactics and behaviour before, during and after the game. I also have to deal sensitively with arguments that sometimes break out among parents in the heat of the moment and calm down situations. I communicate with officials in a professional way and make sure that they are treated with respect (**actions**). My effective communications skills mean that

games are played in the right spirit and the fact that my team won the fair play trophy last season provides evidence of that (**result**).

Now it's your turn. Look back at your list of achievements and associated capabilities. Think about how you could present your achievements in an application form or at an interview using the STAR method if you were asked to present evidence of transferable skills such as effective communication. Write a paragraph using the examples given above as a model.

Remember that recognising and providing evidence of the capabilities you have to offer is key in being able to market yourself to an employer.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 4 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.



## 5 What are my helping and hindering factors?

As a result of all the work that you have done so far in Block 1, you should now have a good idea about your capabilities, the roles you play and your likes and dislikes. If not, take a step back and review the evidence that you have collected so far. Think again about what you know, what you can do and what you enjoy doing or are good at.

The next step is to put the information that you have gathered so far together with what is happening in your life now. You can make a start on this by making a list of positive and negative factors that may either help or hinder your plans. The next activity will give you further advice and guidance on how to do this.

### Activity 7

Allow about 15 minutes

Make a list of the good and bad points about your home and work situations. We're not asking you to make judgements here, just to note as many points as you can under the headings of 'Positive' and 'Negative' for both home and work.

It's up to you to decide which points to include, and whether they are positive or negative. For example, I used to work with someone who lived 30 miles away from work, while I lived within walking distance. He refused to live nearer because he hated the idea of work being on the doorstep, while I hated the idea of spending so much of my day sitting in traffic. Neither of us could understand the other's decision, so something that would be a positive for me was a negative for him and vice versa.

If you already have some idea of what you want to do in the future, this can help you to decide whether or not the factors you identify are positive or negative in relation to your plans. However, even if you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do, just thinking about and listing factors that seem important to you in your work or home life can help you to understand what may help or hinder as you plan for the future.

#### Positive

*Provide your answer...*

#### Negative

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 5 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.



## 6 What are my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

So far in Block 1 you have gathered together information about yourself and your capabilities. You have been encouraged to think about your strengths and weaknesses, and considered the helpful and hindering factors in your domestic and work situation that may provide you with opportunities or pose threats to your future plans. You can summarise and analyse this information using a SWOT (**s**trengths, **w**eaknesses, **o**pportunities and **t**hreats) analysis, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 An example of a SWOT analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good interpersonal skills	Try to do too much at once
Motivated	Find uncertainty quite difficult to manage
Good teamworker	Can be too single-minded
Organised – meet targets	
Leadership skills	
Opportunities	Threats
Good position at work	Balancing work and home life
Commitment to further study	Uncertain commercial market, especially in IT
Support from work for further training	What are the priorities?
Supportive family	

The basic SWOT analysis framework helps you to organise and prioritise factors that are related to the subject being analysed, in this case your personal and career development. As you will see by doing the next activity, you can plan to build on your strengths and deal with your weaknesses, which will put you in a better position to take advantage of any opportunities and counter any threats.

### Activity 8

Allow about 30 minutes

#### Part 1

Look at the example in Table 2 and then fill in [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) to organise your thoughts and explore what you do well, the areas you need to work on, the possibilities that are open to you and the things that might cause difficulties.

- **Strengths:** what do you do well? What do other people see as your strengths?
- **Weaknesses:** what areas need development? What should you avoid?
- **Opportunities:** what possibilities are open to you? What resources do you have? Who can help you?

- **Threats:** what might cause you difficulties? What responsibilities do you have? What might restrict you?

This technique can help you to focus on the main issues you need to consider and to aim for a specific goal that is achievable. Once you've used it to identify what is feasible, you can start to prioritise and decide what you want to achieve first.

You might discover that your strengths are grouped in some areas rather than others. It's useful to know this, as it enables you to recognise the talents you have and also to see whether there are gaps you want to work on. It's also useful as evidence when you're completing a CV or attending an interview.

### Part 2

As you may be discovering, it's helpful to reflect on your past as you approach a decision that will significantly affect your life. Having worked your way through Block 1 of *Planning a better future*, you may have begun to gain more insights about yourself. Your discoveries might be to do with your skills and abilities or your attitudes, ambitions, needs and values. You may have learned more about your personality, temperament or way of dealing with the world.

Take a few minutes to think about what have you learned and note down your thoughts. It may also be helpful to talk about your findings with someone you trust to give an honest opinion to see if they agree with your own self-image.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 6 – well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## What you have learned in this block

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- In this block you have sought to recognise your current capabilities by looking at your work and non-work experiences, identifying helpful and hindering factors and analysing your strengths and weaknesses in relation to the opportunities and threats that you see around you.

## Block 1 quiz

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Well done; you have now reached the end of Block 1 of *Planning a better future*, and it is time to attempt the assessment questions. This is designed to be a fun activity to help consolidate your learning.

There are only five questions, and if you get at least four correct answers you will pass the quiz.

- I would like to try the [Block 1 quiz](#).

If you are studying this course using one of the alternative formats, please note that you will need to go online to take this quiz.

### I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to Block 2, [Where do I want to go?](#), or to [one of the other blocks](#).

If you feel that you've now got what you need from the course and don't wish to attempt the quiz, please visit the [Taking my learning further](#) section. There you can reflect on what you have learned and find suggestions of further learning opportunities.

We would love to know what you thought of the course and how you plan to use what you have learned. Your feedback is anonymous and will help us to improve the courses that we offer.

- Take our [Open University end-of-course survey](#).



# Where do I want to go?

## Introduction



The SWOT analysis that you completed at the end of Block 1 should have helped you to take stock of your current position. However, it is important for you to understand that the SWOT analysis is a 'living document'. You should revisit it regularly to see what, if anything, has changed.

The next step is to focus more on the future, recognise what's important to you and what you want from life as a whole. In this block you'll look at your values, identify the kind of work that might interest you and learn how to explore your options, refine your ideas and make choices. This doesn't mean that you can achieve everything you wish for, as restrictions of one kind or another will limit everyone's range of choice. At this stage, however, it is important not to focus too much on restrictions that may narrow the scope of your ambitions. You'll get some advice on making decisions and setting realistic goals in Block 3.

Here's a video to introduce this block:

Video content is not available in this format.

### Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

There are a couple of reasons why you may want to take another look at your SWOT results. It may be some time since you completed the SWOT analysis at the end of Block 1, and lots of things may have changed. For example, you may have addressed some of your weaknesses, or some of the threats might have disappeared. If anything has changed, amend your SWOT results to reflect the current position.

However, even if you have recently completed your SWOT analysis and it's still fresh in your mind, just take a few minutes to review it before you start Block 2. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Is there anything in the results that I'd like to change?
- What are my priorities in terms of addressing weaknesses and dealing with threats?
- What are my priorities in terms of building on my strengths and seizing opportunities?



Once you are happy with the results of your SWOT and have noted down any priorities, you have a sound basis on which to move forward.

## Learning Outcomes

By completing this block and the associated quiz, you will:

- understand the impact of change for you and what options are open to you.

### 1 What do I really want from work?

Activity 2 is designed to get you thinking about your values as a basis for helping you to decide what kind of work you would like to do. (You should complete this activity even if you have already got an idea of the area you'd like to work, as it may help you to confirm or discard it.)

Thinking about your values means deciding what is important to you in life. For example, it might be that you have a particular religious faith, which provides you with certain spiritual values and guidance on how to live your life. You might value education as being particularly important, or spending time with your family as being something to strive for. Some people value being part of a team that involves lots of collaborative working, while others focus more on competition and individual achievement.

The problem is that most people, most of the time, don't really think through what is important to them and then set their course accordingly. All too often people just drift along and end up in situations that conflict with their basic values. That's why it is important to take a step back from time to time and focus on what your values are and whether or not you are living your life according to them. If you aren't, this can lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness with life and work. To some extent this may be because you simply haven't spent enough time consciously identifying what's really important to you. On the other hand, sometimes people know that they aren't living according to their values, but end up feeling trapped by circumstances and can't see a way out.

#### Activity 2

Allow about 20 minutes

Take the [work values test](#) to help you to decide what you really want from work. Don't forget to save or email the permanent link to your results, which you'll find at the bottom of the results page.

#### Comment

What did you think of the results? Did anything come as a surprise or were they much as you expected? Does this exercise make it any clearer to you what's most important to you in terms of work? For example, does it suggest the kind of work you like to do or the type of organisation you feel most comfortable working for?

Clearly, in some kinds of work, values such as caring (nursing), being creative (graphic design), taking risks (trading), etc., are of major importance. In the same way, a

manufacturing company, a charity, a newspaper office, a local authority, a financial institution and so on will each have a different 'feel' as a place to work. Try to think through which would suit you best and how different types of work would fit in with the rest of your life. What's the best 'fit' for you, given your values and circumstances?

Remember, though, that it's your own values that are important here, so feel free to add to or ignore any of the statements and to change the order of importance.

You've now completed Section 1 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 2 What kind of work would I like to do?



Considering your interests, and things that you find appealing or enjoyable, is a good way of thinking about the type of work that you'd like to do. The next activity will help you to do this.

### Activity 3

Allow about 30 minutes

Take the [career test](#) to get an idea of the kind of work that might suit you. Don't forget to save or email the permanent link to your results, which you'll find at the bottom of the results page.

#### Comment

What did you think of the results? Did you agree with your personality type? Were you surprised at some of the occupations that were suggested – or about others that weren't? You will probably have a bit of experience or knowledge of some of the occupations listed, but try to imagine whether or not you'd like doing the others that you are not so familiar with. It's not a question of your ability or qualifications at this stage – only your own preferences – so assume that you could do the job if you really wanted to. Make a note of any occupations that you found particularly appealing.

You've now completed Section 2 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 3 How satisfied am I with my current circumstances?

Activity 4 focuses on your current circumstances and asks you to gauge how satisfied you are with your work in a number of areas. If you aren't currently in paid employment, think about your life as a whole.

### Activity 4

Allow about 20 minutes

#### Part 1

Go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and look through the list of factors, circling or highlighting the level that applies to your present circumstances.

#### Part 2

Now write a paragraph based on the selections that you made above, excluding all the items that you thought were 'About right' or 'Adequate'. Of the remaining items, can you say which are the most important to you and why?

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

Hopefully, Activities 2–4 have:

- suggested what you value most in your life and work
- helped you to identify areas of work that match your interests
- clarified sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with your current situation.

Your answers may begin to suggest either the kind of work you'd like to do or the kind of organisation you'd like to work for, as well as indicating the amount of work you would ideally want to do. You'll get a better idea of where you stand on this last point in the next activity.

You've now completed Section 3 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 4 How important is work in my life as a whole?



In Activity 4, the final area you considered was 'work–life balance'. In this activity you'll look at this in more depth because, before considering what you want to do, you need to be clear about how important work is to you. This is something that varies from person to person. You might be highly ambitious (even a 'workaholic'), or you might avoid positions that regularly eat into your leisure time. You may have found yourself in a job that takes over and leaves little time for family life, or you may prefer something that can give you a better balance between work and home life.

Activity 5 can help you to think about this. If you don't have much experience of paid work, think about your approach to other activities or projects you are involved with.

### Activity 5

Allow about 15 minutes

Go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and rate each statement. Try to avoid choosing rating 3 'Neither true nor untrue', if possible. Then add up your scores in both the odd-numbered and even-numbered questions. Take the 'even' score away from the 'odd' score, even if it produces a minus number.

What did you score?

#### Comment

If you have a plus (+) score, the higher your score, the stronger your ambition. If you scored +20, for example, you would always put work first and aim high in your achievements. You might even be seen as a 'workaholic'.

If you have a minus (–) score, you don't see work as the most important aspect of your life. At the lower end of the scale (for example, if you scored –20), you would put your social life before work, have little concern about progressing your career and might be seen as 'laid-back'.

If you have a more central score, you keep a balance between work and leisure. You have some concern about doing well and making progress, but you don't let work rule your life.

Has completing this activity altered the rating you gave to your 'work–life balance' in Activity 4? Is it about right for you, or would you like to change this aspect of your life?

You've now completed Section 4 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your

learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 5 Review

Looking back over your SWOT results and the notes you've made on the activities completed in this block, you should now have a much clearer picture about your:

- capabilities
- values
- interests
- work preferences
- current circumstances.

Summarise what you have learned using the prompts below.

### Activity 6

Allow about 30 minutes

#### What am I good at?

Write down the capabilities that you'd most like to use.

*Provide your answer...*

#### What are my main values?

Write down the values you'd like to fulfil.

*Provide your answer...*

#### What would I like to do?

Write down the occupations or job areas you'd like to work in.

*Provide your answer...*

#### How would I like to work with people? What kind of environment?

Write down the kind of contact you'd like to have with people, and the kind of environment you'd like.

*Provide your answer...*

#### What other aspects are important to me?

Write down any other factors that are important to you, such as location, travel, organisational structure, etc.

*Provide your answer...*

What changes would I like to make?

Write down some changes you would like to make in your life and work.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 5 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.



## 6 What options are available to me?



Whatever your personal starting point, the extent to which you can reach your goals depends, in part, on being able to identify and take advantage of the opportunities open to you.

You will now focus on exploring new opportunities and/or looking to take advantage of ones that already exist. Whether you are interested in paid or voluntary work (or both) you need to be able to map out the options available and evaluate which might suit you best.

### 6.1 Exploring opportunities

How clear do you need to be about the kind of work you want before you start exploring opportunities? One way of thinking about this is to use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'I have no idea what I want to do' and 10 is 'I know exactly what I want to do'. You will have the opportunity to try out this approach, but sometimes thinking about another person's situation can be a good way to start thinking about your own. The case study below offers a brief example, which might spark your own thoughts.

#### Case study: Christopher

Christopher is 35 and has been unemployed for 12 months; his last job was as a pizza delivery driver for a small local company that closed down. He has since lost his driving licence due to a succession of speeding fines.

Christopher gave himself a '3' on the 'clear about work' scale. His notes explained his thinking as follows:

I am saying '3' because really I would like to go back to driving, but I do not think I can in the short term. I might have wanted to do taxi work. I know what I do not want to do – work in construction or in a shop – and that is all that seems to be on offer in my local job centre. I have thought about working as a car mechanic, because I am pretty handy at that kind of thing, but I do not know if you have to have qualifications. Perhaps I need to ask around and find out about what I need to be a mechanic. I am not an exams kind of person so that might rule me out, if you need to do that.

### Activity 7

Allow about 5 minutes

What do you notice about Christopher's case? Are Christopher's thoughts clear? Note down a few points.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

Perhaps the first thing you noticed is that Christopher's career was disrupted when the company he worked for closed down. That's something he had no control over.

However, you might think Christopher did have control over getting the speeding fines, which led to the loss of his driving licence. Although you might feel differently if you discovered that most of those fines were incurred doing the delivery job where he was under pressure to make deliveries on time.

You might also notice that Christopher considers, but dismisses, other types of driving work – at least for now. Instead, he identifies something different, but related. He thinks he might be interested in, and suited to, working as a mechanic. However, he has gaps in his knowledge and is able to identify a key question he needs to try to answer before he can assess if it is a viable opportunity for him.

Now think in a similar way about your own situation.

### Activity 8

Allow about 15 minutes

This activity helps you to decide how clear you are about what you want to do, using a scale of 1 to 10, and to sort out what questions you might need to ask. On the scale, 1 represents feeling very confused about what work you want to find and 10 represents absolute certainty. Try to choose the number that best represents how you feel at the moment.

Now you have made this judgement, answer these points below to help you see why you might have rated your level of clarity in the way you did:

1. Why did you choose the number you did?
2. What do you now know about the kind of work you want to do?
3. What would you like to find out about work opportunities?

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

Hopefully, you found that you had some ideas about the kind of work you would like to do based on your work on the course so far. If you found yourself saying that you have no idea at all, be cautious. Is it really that you do not know? Or are you ruling yourself out of some things that might appeal to you?

Whether you are absolutely clear about what you want to do, or just have a vague idea with lots of doubts, you need to do some testing of what opportunities are available and

what they might demand of you before you can start to pursue the career of your choice.

Remember, at this stage, you are not committing yourself to anything – you are just exploring the options, and can afford a bit of uncertainty. You can also afford to change your mind if your research shows that your initial ideas are not the best ones to pursue. Now that you've got some ideas to work on, your next task is to refine these further.

## 6.2 Finding out how to refine your ideas

However clear you feel about your preferred work options, it is useful to bear in mind how well they match you as a person, your current circumstances and your life plans. In this section, you are invited to find out more about one type of work and what it would demand of you.

This will work best if you can identify a particular type of work or specific career path as one that interests you. For instance, you might have identified a career in the retail sector as something you feel would suit you. Alternatively, you might be interested in voluntary work and feel that working at a food bank, or another charity that helps people, would be rewarding. Whatever your thoughts, you need to do a bit of research on what the opportunities for this type of work are in practice.

To do this you need to know where to look, and help may not always come from the most obvious place. Table 1 lists the possible people or organisations that you could use, and what information you could find out from them.

**Table 1 Finding out information**

Source	Description of information
Business columns of newspapers	May include features forecasting which employment sectors will be recruiting or are in decline.
Your local contacts	May hear of local jobs and, if they know you are looking, mention it to you.
National Careers Service website	A government website that includes information about training and apprenticeship opportunities.
Jobcentre Plus	As well as paid job vacancies, they have information on volunteer work and your rights in relation to seeking work.
Friends and family	They may have direct knowledge of the type of work you want to do, know if their organisations are recruiting or making people redundant in some areas, or may have good contacts that they can introduce you to.
Jobs pages of local newspapers	Give a good idea of what employers are looking for in certain types of work, and a sense of how frequently those jobs are advertised.
Professional institute magazines	Advertise jobs specific to their profession and this can give you a good idea of specialisms within the field.
Professional institute websites	Explain the knowledge and skills requirements for the type of work and the training available.
Organisation's own websites	Many have a 'careers' or 'working with us' section that tells you what kind of work environment they offer and the types of job for which they recruit.

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Office of National Statistics	Provides information on jobs in the public and private sectors, and gives an analysis of the UK workforce jobs by sector. It also looks at industry changes.
Social media networks	A new and developing source of information about jobs and organisations.
Radio programmes	Local programmes might report on new businesses starting up in the area.
Community notice boards	They will occasionally carry job advertisements for local jobs, such as acting as clerk to the council.
Local Chamber of Commerce	Meeting people through this network may mean that you hear of jobs that are not advertised. This is true of many professional networks.

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### Activity 9

Allow about 10 minutes

In this activity you will need to select three of these potential sources of information that you can use now. This will vary depending on where you are located, but may mean that you are limited currently to searching on the internet. You can explore other useful sources at another time.

Spend a few moments thinking about which three sources you want to consult and why. Then note down your thoughts in the box below. For instance, you might be interested in a retail career and decide to look at supermarket or department store websites. You might also want to check if there is a specialist magazine for the retail sector and visit your local library to look at a few copies.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

As you completed this activity, you may have found that your reason for choosing certain sources was simple curiosity because they directly relate to the type of work you are interested in, or they are easy or practical, or enjoyable for you in some way. Before going to your sources for information it is vital to start out knowing what you want to find out. You'll be helped with how to organise your thoughts on this next.

## 6.3 Questions to ask



If you don't know what you want to know, you will have no way of starting your research into different job opportunities – you just won't have a clue where to begin! So the next

activity is designed to help you identify a few questions that you want answered. At this stage, these sorts of questions might be useful:

- What is the availability of a particular kind of work?
- What is the nature of a particular kind of work?
- Is the work associated with a specific type of organisation?
- What are the practicalities, such as pay, working patterns or location?

Which of these questions are most important to you right now? Your answer might depend on how clear you are about the type of work you want, your motivations for pursuing the work and the time frames you have in mind. For example, if you are already in work but short of money, you might want to look for additional work that fits around your existing job. In this case you would be more concerned with the availability of work and with the practicalities, such as weekend or evening working options. If, however, you are already on a career path but considering a different employment sector, you might have questions about organisation types and availability in your area.

To help you decide what questions to ask, in the next activity you're going to look again at Christopher's situation.

### Activity 10

Allow about 15 minutes

Christopher has decided that he wants to pursue the idea of becoming a car mechanic. Consider what questions you think he needs to ask, which are related to:

- availability of the work
- nature of the work
- types of organisation
- practicalities of the work.

#### Comment

This is not a full set of the questions that could be asked, but it illustrates how using the different question categories can help you to identify useful questions to explore.

- How many garages are there in my town? (Availability)
- How many advertisements for mechanics are there at the moment/have there been over the past six months? (Availability)
- What qualifications do you need to be a mechanic? (Practicalities)
- What does a car mechanic spend most time doing? (Nature of the work)
- Does a car mechanic spend all their time fixing cars or are there other tasks they have to do? (Nature of the work)
- Is there a difference between working for a chain of garages (such as Kwik Fit) and an independent garage? (Organisation type)
- How much could I expect to earn as a mechanic? (Practicalities)
- How long would it take me to train as a mechanic? (Practicalities)

Use these ideas for questions when you think about your own situation in the next activity.

## Activity 11

Allow about 25 minutes

Remind yourself of the three sources of information you chose in [Activity 9](#), and identify three questions you think it might be helpful for you to answer. Use the types of question listed above to prompt your thinking. For example, you might have listed 'National Office of Statistics' as one of the sources you will consider. If so, your questions could be as follows:

- What is the trend for software developers in the UK – are the numbers of employed workers going up or down?
- In which industry sectors do most software developers tend to be employed?
- How up to date are the figures on the current website? Do I need to check elsewhere too?

You will see that the questions here are largely about availability. However, the type of question you ask will be related to the source that you are consulting – consider this carefully when constructing your own questions.

Now go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note down the information sources you chose and the questions you think will guide your research. The table below provides an example of how to organise your thoughts.

**Table 2 An example of some questions**

Information source	My three questions
Food bank website	Are there any food banks close to my home? Is it possible to get to them by bus? What sort of work do they ask volunteers to do?

### Comment

You are refining your ideas as you work through this process. At this point you should feel pleased with your progress. You already have:

- an idea of the work you want look into
- three information sources you are going to consult
- some questions to guide you as you go to the information sources.

Now you have a list of questions, you can start to research what you want to know.

## 6.4 Finding your answers

The next step is to find the answers to your questions. In other words, do your research. This is the kind of activity that, before you know it, you've spent a few hours on. That's fine if you have the time to spare; if not, keep an eye on the clock and try to spend no more than half an hour on your research. If you don't manage to get answers to all your questions now, come back to the activity at another time to finish it off. You will have plenty of time in Block 3 to look over what you have done, and to decide whether there is anything more you could do that would strengthen your action plan.

## Activity 12

Allow about 30 minutes

This activity is designed to give you practical experience in finding the information you need, and in evaluating how well your work aspirations match what is available.

First, look for answers to the questions you identified in [Activity 11](#). Spend the same amount of time on the three information sources you identified as useful. Note down any information you find, as well as the source of the information (in case you want to find it again).

When you've done this, use [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) to organise the information under the following categories:

- availability of the work
- nature of the work
- types of organisation
- practicalities of the work.

### Comment

If any of the four categories are empty, this might be an indication of the information you still need to seek so make a note of these too. You can return to the questions later.

Now you've had a chance to do some research into one type of work you are interested in, bear these processes in mind for any other work opportunities you have identified, to consider in the future. It's time to think more about the information that you uncovered.

## 6.5 Broader options

It is common, when thinking about a job, to associate it with a full-time commitment to one organisation over a sustained period of time. Increasingly, this is not the only way of working, and one way of thinking flexibly about the kind of work you want to do is to consider different work patterns. Some of these might combine well with your existing commitments. Others might be a stepping stone towards the work you want.

The list below contains different types of work patterns. As you look through it, ask yourself if any of these options might work for you. Some of the terms used are legal or technical ones, which are important to understand, so these are described for you.

1. **Part-time work** involves working for fewer hours a week than the equivalent full-time job. Such jobs normally have a set working pattern, such as every morning, or three specified days of the week. Part-time work has many advantages but can be particularly useful in enabling you to continue to build skills and experience while fulfilling other commitments.
2. **Temporary and contract work** is most often a job that has an end date, unlike a permanent job with an open-ended contract. It can give you experience and valuable contacts in a variety of environments, as well as being a valuable opportunity to 'taste' a range of jobs and help you to be clearer on what work best suits you. Another benefit of this is that you get a foot in the door of an organisation that interests you. It might then be possible to apply for permanent roles.

3. **Zero hours contract work** is a contract between an employer and a worker where the employer does not guarantee minimum working hours and the employee does not have to accept any work offered. The employee is still entitled to statutory employment rights. This type of contract obviously provides flexibility for both parties, which can sometimes suit an employee – depending on their circumstances.
4. **A home-based employee** is someone employed by an organisation but works from home for all or part of their working week.
5. **Self-employment** means working as a freelancer, for yourself, or running your own business, rather than working for an employer. Self-employment presents both opportunities and risks. It is an increasingly common form of work, and one that may or may not suit you.
6. **Flexible working** is something you can apply for if you are already in employment and have worked for your employer continuously for the last 26 weeks (this is correct at the time of writing, but check the current legislation that applies where you work). It can take different forms, but can mean:
  - flexitime – choosing when to start and end work within agreed limits
  - annualised hours – working a certain number of hours over a year but having some flexibility about when you work.
7. **Portfolio working** usually refers to work that involves earning your income from a variety of sources. For example, you might work on freelance contracts or as a part-time employee for several organisations and, perhaps, also run a business.
8. **Working in another country** can be a very attractive option if you are at a stage in your life when you feel free to live and work away from your home country. Perhaps you have the travel bug and would like to see as many different countries as you can? It could be that you think that work experience abroad will help you to obtain your chosen job when you return, or that improving your language skills might be important to your long-term plans.

Having learned about the potential work options, you need now to think about which ones might work for you, and the next section focuses on this.

## 6.6 Making choices and keeping going

At this point you may, understandably, be feeling overwhelmed by all the potential work options. The work and thinking you are doing on this course can feel challenging at times. You may think that there are just too many options, which may be making you feel unsettled. Although uncomfortable, these feelings are not necessarily a bad thing, as they can be a sign that you are making progress with the changes you want to make.

So, if you find yourself feeling daunted or lacking motivation to continue with exploring the options, some of the following tips might help:

- Prioritise only the options that you think you could make happen within the next three to six months.
- Do a ratings exercise on the options – give them 3 points if they feel really attractive, 2 points if they have some attraction and only 1 point if they do not appeal to you. Then concentrate your thinking only on the one or two top-scoring options.



## 6.7 Matching you and the work

Your work in Block 2 may have uncovered practical issues that you could face if you want to do a specific kind of work. For example, your preferred work options may not be widely available in your area, or you may have discovered that the type of volunteer work that you want to do is restricted to the organisation's head office, which is too far away for you.

### Activity 13

Allow about 20 minutes

Before you let issues like these dominate your thinking, consider your timescales for finding your preferred type of work. Ask yourself these questions and note down the answers:

- How long are you prepared to work to develop your career and get the job you want?
- Do you have a time limit for entry into the job of your choice?
- Have you got time to study for any necessary qualifications?
- Do you have any other options?
- Are there other ways into the job?

*Provide your answer...*

### Comment

You may not feel the need to answer these questions now, and that's fine. Alternatively, if you have concerns, you might want to note down your immediate thoughts. This allows you to 'park' the problems for now and move on. You can always return to these questions and your reflections later.

Earlier you considered your preferences based on your capabilities, values, interests and personal circumstances. It is usually only when you start to look at what is available that you discover that it might not be so easy to find job opportunities that match your preferences. Try not to become despondent. You may be able to retrain or find similar jobs that you can apply for. You may just need to think more flexibly, to take advantage of what is available.

Before moving on to Activity 14, remind yourself of how much you have already achieved. Focus only on the things you have done, not the things you might have left to one side. Whatever you are able to do on this course is great, as it still takes you forward. Remember that you will have your notes to return to at any stage in the future. You can pick up any loose threads when you feel ready and able to do that.

### Activity 14

Allow approximately 20 minutes

First, read back through your notes and identify the type of work you want to find. Next, think about whether any of [the eight options in Section 6.5](#) open up ways of working that you had not previously considered. For example, can you combine two forms of

part-time work? Could you set up a small business from home, alongside your existing job if necessary? Would it be practical for you to do temporary work, as a way of finding out more about the types of work and employer that appeal to you?

Make some notes in answer to the following questions:

1. What work pattern options had you not previously considered?
2. Do any of them appeal to you? If so, why?
3. Do any of them seem to have the potential to provide a 'bridge' or 'stepping stone' to the work you want?
4. What research question(s) does this raise for you? What might you need to find out to test the viability of your new ideas?

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

As with many of the activities in the course, your answer will be personal to you. Whatever these are, they represent real progress in the career planning process – so well done!

## 6.8 Networking

You may have noticed that several of the information sources listed in [Table 1](#) involve networks – a group of interconnected people who have something in common; for example, local contacts, friends and family, and social media websites and apps.

There are different types of network, all of which can help you to explore options and achieve your career goals.

### Personal networks

Your personal network is likely to be made up of members from different areas of your life:

- your family
- friends
- educational contacts
- hobby or interest groups
- people in a similar situation or with similar perspectives.

As well as helping you to seek work, such networks can provide more general support. Sometimes you may just need encouragement to feel positive about your aspirations and achievements, or you may benefit from hearing the experiences of people in similar situations to you.

## Organisational networks

Most organisations will have a number of informal networks of people with similar values, who trust and help each other to get things done. If you rely only on formal structures, you are missing opportunities, so it is useful for you to engage with or develop more informal networks. Three types of organisational networks have been identified:

- The 'advice' network – the key people that others turn to for advice.
- The 'trust' network – in which people have common interests and enough trust to support each other in times of crisis.
- The 'communication' network (often known as the 'grapevine') – where people talk to others about work issues on a regular basis.

You can also think about wider organisational networks, which include customers, suppliers, competitors, partners, government bodies, trade unions or professional associations.

## Occupation-specific networks

Professional networks operate outside of organisations. For example, if you have membership of a professional institution, such as the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering, then you have access to other people in your profession whether or not you work with them.

Not all occupational networks are attached to professional institutes. For example, a slimming club leader might be part of a regional network of leaders who meet for training or product updates.

For the self-employed, there are networks for local businesses who meet for mutual support. People who perform similar voluntary work sometimes meet formally or informally to share ideas.

Now you've learned about different types of traditional networks, it's time to start thinking about your own networks.

### Activity 15

Allow about 20 minutes

In this course you should concentrate on contacts that you think may be helpful with your career development – otherwise your network could become unusable due to its size. Be careful who you omit though, because it may not be immediately obvious that a contact will be useful. Think about what you know about them and what they do before dismissing them.

Note down lists of people under the following headings:

- personal networks
- your family
- friends
- educational contacts
- hobby or interest groups
- people in a similar situation or with similar perspectives

- organisational networks
- occupation-specific networks.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

Whether you have written a long or short list under the different categories – or even no list at all – is not important. This will entirely depend on what point you have reached in your life. What matters is that you have begun to think about mapping your networks.

It is important not to forget about online networks. This will be more or less prominent in your life depending on how you use the internet and how you feel about sharing information online. Whatever your situation, the next section will still give you a flavour of what is out there.

## 6.9 Social media networking

Social media networking involves online interaction with other people. These might be friends or total strangers, and often the interaction is through specific groups or communities who share similar interests. It can be a helpful way to expand your knowledge and contacts, or exchange mutual support. It is also becoming one of the ways in which employers recruit people. It is becoming increasingly important to engage with these networks if you are serious about finding work.

Now you'll learn a little more about the types of social media that can be relevant to your career development.

### Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn



At the time of writing this course, the three main platforms which may be of use in shaping your work or life are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (pronounced as 'linked in'). You may already be using one or more of these, but for those who aren't familiar with them, here's a brief overview of each:

- **Facebook** allows you to link up with friends, and even friends of those friends. It provides a place to share your news, views and items of interest. For recruitment, Facebook can bring together recruiters and job seekers, and you can use it to gather information on potential employers with Facebook pages.
- **Twitter** is mainly used on mobile phones and enables short messages of 140 characters or fewer to be sent to all the people who 'follow' an account. It may be used by recruiters to get messages out to many potential employees very quickly and

so can be a very good way of keeping track of opportunities. Top tip: include your career interests in your Twitter profile. Make it a micro-pitch for work.

- **LinkedIn** is used primarily for 'work' networking. When you set up a profile, the system automatically links you with people you might know, initially using your own education and work experiences. You can also make contact with organisations and individuals who may be able to offer you work, or help you to find it. There are different levels of membership but the most basic (and free) level is more than adequate for most people.

## Getting started with social media

Social media can be very useful for widening your existing networks and therefore career opportunities. Even though you may feel wary about using them, it is worth considering giving them a go if you're not already doing so.

Here are some tips to help you:

- Limit the amount of time you use it.
- Choose social media sites just for career development purposes.
- Log in to social media sites and just observe what's going on. It's fine to watch from the wings before making your appearance.

If you do take the plunge, these tips will help you to use the sites wisely:

- Be careful about what information you share and who you share it with.
- Don't accept new friends, followers or contacts without asking appropriate questions to establish who they are.
- Project yourself in a way that does not undermine your credibility at work.
- Avoid responding to negative comments about colleagues past or present, and people who have interviewed you.
- Think about the tone you use in your communications.

### Activity 16

Allow about 15 minutes

Note down the networks that you are involved in and think about how each of them could help you to move forward with your career plans.

*Provide your answer...*

### Comment

Hopefully, you now feel better informed about the potential that networks have to help you with your career development; by helping you to explore your options, access information about opportunities and also to apply for jobs.

You've now completed Section 6 – well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at

the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

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## What you have learned in this block

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- In Block 2 you've had the chance to look further into the work that interests you and to consider how various areas and options might align with your values and your current circumstances.
- You may well find that instead of having fewer questions, you now have more. This is to be expected when you start exploring your future options, so see this as a positive step in your career planning process.

In Block 3 you'll learn how to take decisions, set realistic goals and receive some practical advice and guidance on how to apply for jobs and succeed at interviews.

## Block 2 quiz

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Well done; you have now reached the end of Block 2 of *Planning a better future*, and it is time to attempt the assessment questions. This is designed to be a fun activity to help consolidate your learning.

There are only five questions, and if you get at least four correct you will pass the quiz.

- I would like to try the [Block 2 quiz](#).

## I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to Block 3, [How do I get there?](#), or to [one of the other blocks](#).

If you feel that you've now got what you need from the course and don't wish to attempt the quiz, please visit the [Taking my learning further](#) section. There you can reflect on what you have learned and find suggestions of further learning opportunities.

We would love to know what you thought of the course and how you plan to use what you have learned. Your feedback is anonymous and will help us to improve the courses that we offer.

- Take our [Open University end-of-course survey](#).





# How do I get there?

## Introduction



In Blocks 1 and 2 you've carried out some activities that should have increased your self-awareness, and you have been guided to explore opportunities. You've probably put a lot of time into analysing your life and career, and you should have considered your strengths, skills and experience, and researched the occupational areas that interest you. This block is designed to help you to take decisions and develop a plan detailing how to put them into action. The advice, guidance and activities below will help you to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different decisions, find sources of help and plan for action.

Here's a video to introduce this block, followed by an activity designed to get you to consider whether your SWOT analysis needs updating.

Video content is not available in this format.

### Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

There are a couple of reasons why you may want to take another look at your SWOT results. It may be some time since you completed the SWOT analysis at the end of Block 2, and lots of things may have changed. For example, you may have addressed some of your weaknesses, or some of the threats might have disappeared. If anything has changed, amend your SWOT results to reflect the current position.

However, even if you have recently completed your SWOT analysis and it's still fresh in your mind, just take a few minutes to review it before you start Block 3. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Is there anything in the results that I'd like to change?
- What are my priorities in terms of addressing weaknesses and dealing with threats?
- What are my priorities in terms of building on my strengths and seizing opportunities?

Once you are happy with your SWOT and have noted down any priorities, you have a sound basis on which to move forward.

# Learning Outcomes

By completing this block and the associated quiz, you will:

- identify your goals and the actions that you can take next to reach them.

## 1 Making decisions

Obviously, you have to be realistic about what is possible, because life imposes restrictions on us all, but many people don't achieve all that they're capable of because they're not clear about what they want to do and how to make decisions. It's important to aim for what you want, while being aware of what's actually achievable. One way to consider the range of options is to look at your goals alongside your personal restrictions and resources.

### Managing your situation

Whenever you're in a situation you're not happy with, you have four basic options. It can be useful to think about the short, medium and long term when you consider them.

For example, you may be clear that you want to change jobs in the long term, but in the short term you might be able to 'change yourself' to make things easier, while embarking on some training that will provide you with a relevant qualification in the medium term.

- **Work for change:** try to change the situation to make it closer to what you want it to be. If you've tried to do this and have been unsuccessful, you're left with the other three options.
- **Change yourself:** examine your own attitudes, behaviour, ambitions, skills, lifestyle and so on, and consider how your situation might improve if you changed any of those.
- **Live with it:** this means much more than 'putting up with it'. You need a strategy to minimise the aspects of the situation that you don't like and maximise those you do. For example, you might put more energy into activities outside your job if you're dissatisfied at work, change the way you work so that it reduces your contact with troublesome elements, or spend more time doing the things you enjoy and cutting down those you don't.
- **Leave:** find a constructive way to move on or out of the situation, job, relationship or problem.

#### Activity 2

Allow about 15 minutes

Consider the four options listed above. Note down how each of them may help you to move on from your current undesirable situation in the short, medium and long term.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 1 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 2 Goals, restrictions and resources

Whatever your decision about the four options listed on the previous page, you need a goal and a plan to get to where you want to go. We are now going to look at your goals and then examine the restrictions and resources that may affect how you reach them.

### 2.1 Goals



What is a goal?

- Goals are what you want to get out of life.
- You may use other words to describe your goals, such as 'results', 'outcomes', 'aims' or 'ambitions'.
- Whether short or long term, goals should be realistic but challenging.
- Remember that your goals may change over time.

#### Activity 3

Allow about 15 minutes

What are your goals? You may not have identified them fully yet, but note them down in the space below in as much detail as you can – you can add to them later as you define them more clearly.

*Provide your answer...*

### 2.2 Restrictions and resources

We're all affected by our own restrictions and resources. Sometimes the same thing can be both a restriction and a resource. If you're buying a house on a mortgage, it's both a liability and an asset; a friend or relative might need support but might also be a source of support to you.

#### Activity 4

Allow about 20 minutes

What are your restrictions and resources?

Think about your resources – the things, people and attitudes that could help you. Then think about your restrictions – the things you need to take into account, or that may be problems.

Go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note them down. An example is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Resources	Restrictions
Money	Responsibilities
Financial resources	
Equipment, tools, premises	I haven't got ...
I have ...	
People, family, contacts	Who needs my help or support?
Who can help me?	
Health	Bad points
Good points	
Beliefs, outlooks	Negatives
Positives	

#### Comment

Consider your answers in the table you filled in.

- How will they affect the kind of opportunities open to you?
- Are there other things you need to consider? For example, do you need to work near your home?
- Could you move to a new area?
- Could you work from home?
- Have you caring responsibilities, or do you need care yourself?

## 2.3 Balancing helpful resources against restrictions

Now look again at the restrictions and resources you listed in Activity 4. You probably noted some factors that would help you to move in the direction that you want to take and others that you need to find a way round. You now need to consider each of your goals in terms of all the resources that could be helpful or restrictions that might hinder you. The next activity will help with this.

### Activity 5

Allow about 30 minutes

Look first at the example in Table 2. It was produced by someone who wanted to apply for a promotion. Each restriction is set against a helping resource, giving a balanced picture of the situation.

**Table 2**

Resources	Restrictions
Line manager's support	Colleagues' reactions
Personal ambition/determined	Limited mobility
Prepared to take responsibility	Little experience of managing people
Project management experience	No experience of managing budgets

Now return to the template and balance the resources and restrictions for the goal(s) you listed for Activity 3. Which of the goals are the most important? Highlight them.

What actions would help you to make the most of the resources you listed? And what would help you to reduce the effects of the restrictions?

You've listed the actions you can take towards your goals. You should now bring actions and resources together, listing the resources that can help you to carry out each step. Look at the example in Table 3, where 'no experience of managing budgets' was listed as a problem.

**Table 3**

Actions	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Attend course on finance for non-managers at work</li><li>Attend outside course in the evenings</li><li>Find out about the budget process</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Internal training courses</li><li>Local college has course</li><li>Line manager's support</li><li>Family support</li></ul>

Now do this for each of the actions you listed in [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#).

**Comment**

You should now have a clear picture of what you really want and what ideas you want to develop. You should also be clear about the main helping forces and problems you need to deal with.

You've now completed Section 2 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 3 Forming a plan of action

The next stage is to bring everything together into a detailed plan of action. This means you will need to:

- set out your goals (in the long, medium and short term)
- decide which actions you need to take
- identify your restrictions and resources
- work out a realistic timescale to achieve each step.

If you monitor your progress by checking your plan from time to time, you can identify what you have achieved and then revise your targets if necessary. And of course if you change your mind about your end goal, then you can go back to your original plan to make necessary adjustments.

When drawing up your action plan you should consider:

- what you need to do
- how you are going to take action
- which resources could help you (e.g. finance, information, friends)
- when you will achieve your targets
- how you will know when you have achieved your goal.

One way to deal with this is to break each activity down into small steps and keep it manageable. Action plans need to be SMART (**s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**ealistic, **t**ime-based). Using a structure like this helps you to break big tasks down into smaller, more manageable ones so that you stay in control and have the confidence that you can manage them.

### Having a back-up plan

You should always try to have a back-up plan, so keep an eye on progress and adapt your plan if necessary. If you don't manage to meet your goals, it may be that your first plan wasn't good enough. You may need to improve it or change it completely. If, after doing that, you still find that you're unable to reach your goal, you might have to reconsider it. Ask yourself, 'Is it realistic?' If it isn't, you'll have to revise it.

#### Activity 6

Allow about 30 minutes

To achieve what you want, it might be necessary to go through several stages. You might need to gain experience or qualifications, gather information, or get access to a particular resource.

You may have to cope with setbacks and frustrations, but you're setting out on a potentially exciting journey, taking the first steps towards a new life. Set aside time at regular intervals to review your goals and see how you are progressing.

Look at the example in Table 4 and then fill in [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#).



**Table 4**

<b>My long-term goal</b>	<b>Short and medium-term goals</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Constraints</b>	<b>Resources – who or what can help me</b>	<b>Target date</b>
Retail management	Secure intermediate-level apprenticeship in retail environment  Secure full-time job with further training and/or prospects at the (successful!) end of the intermediate apprenticeship	May need to improve my GCSE Maths grade for an intermediate apprenticeship  Need to explore opportunities in the local area  Will need to get practice at my application and interview techniques	Have to wait for an opportunity to resit the Maths GCSE  Reliant on public transport, which limits employment opportunities	Teachers and family	Next August

You've now completed Section 3 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 4 Getting the job

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### 4.1 What do employers look for when recruiting?

In its 2011 report, *Building for Growth*, The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) identified seven core employability skills that most employers value:

1. Self-management:
  - readiness to accept responsibility
  - flexibility
  - resilience
  - self-starting
  - appropriate assertiveness
  - time management
  - readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.
2. Team working:
  - respecting others
  - cooperating
  - negotiating and persuading
  - contributing to discussions
  - an awareness of interdependence with others.
3. Problem solving:
  - analysing facts and situations
  - creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
4. Communication and literacy:
  - producing clear, structured written work
  - oral literacy
  - listening and questioning.
5. Numeracy:
  - manipulating numbers
  - general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts.
6. Application of information technology:
  - basic IT skills
  - familiarity with commonly used IT programmes.
7. Business and customer awareness:
  - understanding the key drivers for business success
  - innovating
  - taking calculated risks
  - providing customer satisfaction
  - building customer loyalty.

According to the report, four out of five employers value these skills. Underpinning them all is a positive attitude and enthusiasm. We have categorised them into four broad areas:

1. self-reliance skills
2. people skills
3. general employment skills
4. specialist skills.

Table 5 shows the skills that employers want and how they can be developed.

**Table 5**

Type of skill	Examples of how the skills can be developed through interests, work and education
<b>Self-reliance skills</b>	
Self-awareness: purposeful, focused, self-belief, realistic, assessing your own performance	Study: carrying out self-directed projects Roles within work
Pro-active: resourceful, drive, self-reliant	Involvement in community groups or charities
Willingness to learn: inquisitive, motivated, enthusiastic	Roles within the home: planning, coordinating others
Self-promotion: positive, persistent, ambitious, accepting responsibility	
Networking: initiator, relationship-builder, resourceful	
Problem solving: how you approach problems, finding and implementing solutions	
Planning action: decision-maker, planner, able to prioritise, identifying areas for improvement	
<b>People skills</b>	
Team working: supportive, organised, coordinator, deliverer, reliability, adaptability	Caring responsibilities Work responsibilities in a team
Interpersonal skills: listener, adviser, cooperative, assertive	Fund-raising for charity
Oral communication: communicator, presenter, influencer	Voluntary work Member of orchestra or drama group
Leadership: motivator, energetic, visionary	Sport
Customer orientation: friendly, caring, diplomatic, respect	Guide/Scout leader
Foreign language: specific language skills	Travel
<b>General employment skills</b>	
Problem solving: practical, logical, results orientated	Roles within the home: budgeting Roles within work: use of IT, work experience
Flexibility: versatile, willing, multi-skilled	Project work through study

Business acumen: entrepreneurial, competitive, risk taker, customer service

Membership of local clubs, committees and societies

IT/computer literacy: office skills, keyboard skills, software packages

Self-employment

Numeracy: accurate, quick thinker, methodical, dealing with data

Commitment: dedicated, trustworthy, conscientious

### Specialist skills

Specific occupational skills: specialist relevant knowledge, e.g. languages, IT

Study

Technical skills: journalism, engineering, accounting, sales

European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)

Language skills

Web design skills: use of programming or coding languages

Using social media tools

First aid at work qualification

NVQ qualification

The requirements that an employer sets out in a job advertisement are likely to be much more specific, but it's worth bearing in mind that candidates who apply for jobs are also expected to demonstrate at least some of these skills.

## 4.2 Matching vacancies

You've seen a vacancy advertised that you'd like to apply for. Now you want to make sure you have a 'match'. So, before finding out more about the position, analyse the information you already have. Even a brief advertisement can reveal a great deal of useful information if you read between the lines. Look at the advertisement and analyse it under these headings:

- **Style and language:** what's the general style of the advertisement? Is it formal, low-key, flamboyant or attention-seeking? What does this tell you about the organisation?  
What vocabulary is used to describe the organisation? How does the organisation see itself and what image does it want to project? Do you feel comfortable with its choice of words? Will your personality fit the organisation? Are your values similar?
- **Brief job description:** does the work genuinely interest you? Does it match your needs? What are the key tasks? What skills are needed? Can you produce evidence of your ability to deal successfully with each task? How will you demonstrate your potential for coping with tasks you haven't handled before? Is there anything that seems unclear?
- **Qualifications:** are qualifications preferred or essential? For example, do you need a driving licence or other specified qualification?
- **Experience:** is experience preferred or essential? Will you be ruled out? What experience can you offer from any aspect of your life that demonstrates close or transferable skills?

- **Qualities:** note the language used to describe the ideal applicant. Analyse each noun and adjective for its implications. For example, 'committed self-starter' could imply that there'll be little supervision, but may also mean that no training is provided. You may have to motivate yourself with little support or encouragement, or even in the face of resistance. Find out what this will mean in practice, and be honest about whether your personality and needs match what the employer wants.
- **Location and geographical mobility:** how far would you travel each day? Would you consider moving house? If you need to travel around, how much of a problem would this be for you?
- **Prospects:** what opportunities are there for advancement in this job? The employer may be looking for evidence of your willingness and ability to progress. If the opportunities seem limited, it's important to see how you can use it to develop your skills and experience.
- **Salary:** usually a good guide to the level of qualifications and experience required, but you have to be aware of the going rate for that occupation. What are you looking for, especially if there isn't a specified salary?
- **Named contact:** is a name given to contact for further information? It's a good idea to follow up such offers, but be prepared when you do, as the contact will form an impression of you from the very beginning. Rehearse your introduction and be prepared for the question, 'What would you like to know about us?'. Be ready to highlight your suitability for the post.

## 4.3 Matching the requirements

Once you've analysed your advertisement, decide if it interests you, and then request further details, such as the job description and person specification. You need to try to match yourself to the requirements of the job to judge whether or not you want to apply for it.

The job description and person specification are usually set out under headings such as 'Experience', 'Qualifications' and 'Personal qualities'. They should specify what the employer is looking for, so you need to consider how you can show that you meet the requirements.

Look at the example in Table 6, where the vacancy is for a fund-raiser for Scottish Wildlife Preservation Society. Here the key experience requirements are listed, and the second column shows how a candidate would provide evidence of having the necessary experience. This is a useful way of approaching any job advert, as it helps you to focus on the important aspects as you complete your application form or prepare a CV.

**Table 6**

Key experience requirements	My evidence
Numeracy	Drew up budget bids or plans within agreed guidelines and procedures for submission to internal and external bodies.  Responsible for assessing potential expenditure in terms of value for money and taking appropriate action to ensure this is achieved.
Keyboard skills	Self-taught packages in order to produce a dissertation for my degree.

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	Worked in Windows-based environment for numerous holiday jobs.
Marketing knowledge	Temporary job (with full induction and training) over two summer holidays as a market research interviewer.  Marketing module completed as part of my degree studies (12 months) identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.
Ability to work on own	As a part-time student I have worked within a 32-week study calendar and managed a weekly workload of reading, assignments, tutorials and revision alongside a part-time job and voluntary work.  I have worked unsupervised as a treasurer for a local Residents Association for two years and have always met deadlines for reports.
Interest in wildlife	I have organised several meetings between the RSPB and the local branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England to look at the decline of the blue tit in Cheshire and preventive measures.  I am a regional fund-raiser for BTCV and the PDSA.  I work alternate Sundays at the local animal hospital as a volunteer.  I am an avid reader and subscriber of <i>The Warbler</i> , and make regular contributions to this national magazine.
Presentation skills	I have used PowerPoint to present information on the decline of local bird populations to a community group and to councillors.

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### Activity 7

Allow about 30 minutes

Begin by looking at an advert or job description for a position that interests you. (If you don't have a specific one in mind, you could look in a national or local newspaper, or on a website such as [jobs.co.uk](http://jobs.co.uk).)

Whichever way you choose, ask yourself:

- Does the work genuinely interest me?
- Does it match my personality, values, interests and needs?
- What are the key job requirements?
- What skills are required to perform them?
- Can I produce evidence of these skills?

Using Table 6 as a guide, open [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note down the key characteristics and requirements of your selected vacancy. Try to produce evidence of your suitability against each point.

## 4.4 What employers want

Many employers are moving towards a competency-based style of assessment for evaluating candidates. This requires the candidate to adopt a particular approach if they are going to be successful. There are definite techniques that can be employed to greatly increase the chances of passing this stage. The first hurdle may be a difficult one, because many employers' questionnaires are specifically designed to fail a certain percentage of applicants.

Competencies are the criteria that employers set for each job. They show what you 'can do'. Stating this is not enough – employers want you to demonstrate your competencies through evidence. Some job descriptions don't mention competencies at all, and talk instead about skills. Many employers use the terms 'skills' and 'competencies' interchangeably, so don't worry too much about this. The basis of competency-based assessment is that if you can demonstrate you did something in the past then you can do it in the future.

As noted, in Block 2, a good technique to use when answering questions on application forms or at interview is **STAR**:

- **Situation:** What was the situation and when did it take place?
- **Task:** What task was it, and what was the objective?
- **Action:** What action did you take to achieve this?
- **Results:** What happened as a result of your action?

When considering which example from your experience to select when answering a particular question, it might be helpful to use the **RAPPAS** technique as a guide:

- **Relevant:** Ensure your answer is describing the skill being asked for.
- **Action:** Make sure you include something that you actually did, as opposed to what you learned, or what you might do in a hypothetical situation.
- **Personal:** It is most important to state what you did, as opposed to saying what other people did or what happened.
- **Positive:** The answer will read better if the situation has a positive outcome.
- **Appropriate:** The example needs to be something you can talk comfortably about if asked for more detail.
- **Specific:** If the question asks for an example, then only one should be described, not a composite of several.

You've now completed Section 4 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 5 Application forms

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Application forms come in all shapes and sizes. Some are designed for recruiting people for a particular function or training scheme. Most are intended for a wide variety of posts in the organisation (e.g. an NHS Trust). Most large organisations now make their forms available online, which can save you time and postage.

Whatever format they come in, the principles for completing application forms are very similar. If you're asked to submit an application form, don't send a CV instead. Often – but not always – you're told that you may also enclose a CV. If you do, it shouldn't just repeat what's on your form. Use it effectively to include or to emphasise information that you think is relevant and isn't asked for on the form.

Keep the following points in mind when it comes to completing an application form:

- The purpose of a completed application form, like a CV or a letter, is to get an interview.
- Your aim is to convince the employer that you're worth interviewing – that you appear to be a suitable candidate for the job, and the kind of person that the organisation wants to employ.
- The only information that the selectors will have about you is what you've given them in your written application. Emphasise the positive and leave it to them to spot the negative. Convince them that they need to see you.
- Remember that presentation can be as important as content.
- Many larger employers ask you to complete an online application.

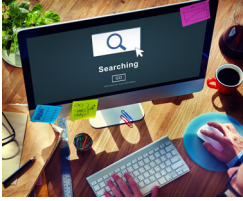
When completing online forms you may find that some of your experiences do not fit neatly into the categories provided. We suggest you contact the employer for advice on how to approach this.

If you haven't looked at employers' application forms for some time, you may be surprised at the probing nature of some of the questions that they ask, and not only for senior jobs. You'll come to some sample questions later in this section.

Bear in mind that employers often receive a large number of forms. This means that on an initial read-through they may spend as little as two minutes looking at your form – so it is crucial that you sell yourself effectively.



## 5.1 Before you start your application form



- Find out as much as you can about the vacancy and the organisation. Ask the organisation for more details (for example, a detailed job description and person specification) and, if possible, visit a careers service or large library to look for other information. You can also research online, as most organisations will have comprehensive information on their websites.
- Read through the whole form before you fill in any of the sections.
- Make a photocopy of the blank form (or print it from the screen) and use it for your rough draft.
- Comply with instructions such as using black ink or block capitals. You must keep to the prescribed format, because many large employers now optically scan applications to enter them into their recruitment databases.
- Usually, the space allowed for each question indicates its relative importance.

## 5.2 Filling in your form

Here are some hints and tips for completing an application form:

- Complete all sections of the form. If a question doesn't apply to you, write 'N/A' or 'Not applicable' to show that you haven't overlooked it.
- If there isn't enough space for factual information (e.g. 'give names, addresses and dates of all previous employers'), attach a separate sheet, unless you're told that you must not attach any other papers.
- If there isn't enough space for general interest information (e.g. 'What have been the significant factors in your life to date?'), prioritise and keep it within the space allowed.
- Be sure to answer all the elements of each question (e.g. 'What are your spare time activities, what do you contribute and what do you get out of them?').
- Don't cram sections with too much text – it makes them difficult to read. A clear layout can help, so consider using bullet points, underlined topic headings, etc., to clarify your points. Being able to write succinctly is evidence of your written communication skills.
- When answering extended (multi-part) or difficult questions, think of:
  - what you're going to say (understanding the purpose of the question)
  - who you're saying it to (someone who doesn't know you but will make decisions about your future)
  - how you're going to say it (presenting an accurate picture of yourself)

- why you're saying it (showing that you have the qualities, interests and skills the employer is looking for).
- Make your points relevant, interesting and personal (say 'I', not 'we'). Give evidence and be specific (e.g. 'I worked as a volunteer classroom assistant for three years' rather than 'I love children'). The skills you've developed in one context may well be transferable to another and employers will look for evidence that you recognise them, e.g. dealing with members of the public, working under pressure, handling money, working odd hours.
- Use positive language.
- Leave no unexplained gaps in your employment record. If you've been unemployed say so, but mention any part-time or voluntary work you did during that period.
- Tailor your responses to the post you're applying for. If you're applying for a job related to a course that you've completed, give fuller details of your course than you would if it's not particularly relevant.
- Use the 'any other information' section to draw attention to activities and qualities not covered elsewhere on the form.
- Be convincing, positive and honest. Inaccuracy in one section can raise doubts about other areas of the form.
- Get your referees' agreement before giving their names, and keep them well briefed so that they can write supportive references.

It's also important to focus on what you can do rather than anything you can't. When writing an application you are advised to focus on the positives, selling your skills and abilities. You must be truthful, but are expected to omit any deficiencies, e.g. you should never state that you 'don't have relevant experience'. It is up to the prospective employer to deduce that from the information you provide.

### Activity 8

Allow about 15 minutes

These are genuine questions from application forms used by large companies:

1. On the first page of this application you stated a preference for a particular job. Explain why we should select you ahead of other candidates.
2. Outline any activities you have planned and organised. Tell us what you did and how you achieved results.
3. Write a short piece about yourself. Include such details as your achievements and responsibilities; the people, events or experiences that have influenced you; your ambitions and aspirations.

What should you include in your answers? Note down your thoughts before reading the comments.

*Provide your answer...*

### Comment

1. Show that you understand what the job involves and what you have to offer. Go for key points and give evidence from your record.

2. Remember to cover 'planned', 'organised', 'what you did' and 'results'.
3. This section will tell them more about you as an individual than any other part of the form. You should be able to justify each word you have included. You'll need to spend a lot of time writing drafts and fine-tuning your response.

## 5.3 When you've completed the form

It is good practice to do the following before submitting your form:

- Check it thoroughly for spelling and grammatical errors; ideally, get someone else to check it rather than relying on a spell checker. Make sure you've been consistent in style (e.g. in your use of personal pronouns).
- Look over the presentation. If possible, ask someone else to look over your application before you send it to make sure it makes sense and comes across positively.
- Make a note of the job you've applied for, the name and address of the person you sent the form to, and the date you sent it.
- If you're asked to post the application form, use an envelope of a suitable size (such as an A4 envelope with cardboard reinforcement.) so that the form isn't folded. Always send it by first class post. If you are completing an online application, you will usually receive an email when it has been received.
- Make a copy of your completed form so that you can reread it before the interview. It'll also take some of the tedium out of tackling other forms. You can often use the same material, with a little editing, for several applications.
- You'll rarely find the perfect application form that exactly suits your background and experience. You'll need to adapt your answers to the questions you find.

You've now completed Section 5 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 6 The curriculum vitae

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Like an application form, a curriculum vitae (CV) is primarily intended to make the recruiter think it worthwhile interviewing you. The advantage of a CV is that you get to decide what information to include and highlight, and what to leave out or minimise. In addition, your CV doesn't need to conform to any particular format, so you have more control over the impression it will create. You can tailor the style, content and design to show off your strengths and present you in the most positive light.

### The importance of tailoring your CV

It's most important that you keep in mind that one 'all-purpose' CV will not be much use to you. This is only likely to work if you always apply for the same job in several very similar organisations. It is often more effective if you adapt your CV to suit the particular organisation or job you're applying for – something that's easy enough to do if it's word-processed.

Employers expect you to show that you're responding to their own advertisements, not sending out a batch of identical CVs to a list of companies. You may in fact be doing just that, but it must look as though you're targeting the individual company, and you can reinforce this impression by tailoring the covering letter.

### What style of CV?

The general style of the CV should depend on the sector or organisation that it's addressed to. For example, applications to marketing organisations or to the publishing industry can be successful if the style and layout suggest a flair for lively prose or graphic design. To use the same approach for a financial institution or a local authority, say, might have an adverse effect. Bear this in mind when you design your own CV.

### 6.1 Preparing your CV

How you organise and present information about yourself and your activities, will send key messages about your suitability as a potential employee. Be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time on creating and reworking an effective document. You want to make sure that you present yourself positively and accurately. So when it comes to preparing your CV, you need to ask yourself a few key questions:

- What's the area of work I'm after?
- Which employers or organisations am I approaching?
- What messages do I want to send about myself, my strengths and qualities?

- What experiences shall I emphasise?
- How can I match the style of my CV to the type of organisation(s) I'm sending it to, as well as the work I want?

## 6.2 What to include (and not include) in your CV

Your CV is uniquely yours in style, content and layout – but you may find the following 'dos' and 'don'ts' helpful. CVs usually contain:

- personal data
- employment experience
- education
- training
- interests and activities
- additional skills
- career aims and personal profile (optional)
- references.

### Personal data

Give the name you want to be known by if you're called for interview or appointed. However, you don't need to give initials or middle names; they're unnecessary at this stage and may confuse matters. Put your name in the centre in a larger, bold font instead of giving the document the title 'Curriculum vitae' – it should be quite obvious what it is.

Be sure to give a full postal address with a postcode, since invitations to interview are often sent at short notice and speedy delivery is in your interest. Include an email address, but make sure this reflects the image you want to project. Including the address 'pinkfluffybunny@hotmail.com' will not promote a professional impression to recruiters. If you include a link to your social media profile, such as your Twitter account; again, make sure this is professional.

It's important to give a telephone number where you can be reached or where a message can be left. Include your mobile number if you have one. If you're employed and prospective employers can contact you during office hours, give your number and say that it's a work number so that the caller will be discreet. Always give the full area code, number and extension so that you can be reached as easily as possible.

There's no need to include such details as your date of birth, nationality, gender, marital status or the number of children you have. These are irrelevant on a CV, where your aim is to get yourself invited for interview. You can discuss them at the interview if appropriate, when you have more opportunity to negotiate any difficulties.

### Employment experience

Your aim here is to stress your achievements at work. Include the nature and place of your employer's business if it isn't obvious from the name, but don't give the address or the name of your manager at this stage. For more recent jobs – during the last ten years, say

– give more detail about particular responsibilities, projects, assignments and results achieved. Avoid jargon, unless you're sure that the reader will understand it.

There are different opinions about whether you set your experience out in forward or reverse date order. So much depends on the nature and relevance of your previous employment to the job you're applying for. But everyone agrees that the most relevant job should appear at the top of the list, so that the reader is encouraged to read on.

Some possible sequences are as follows:

- Put your present or most recent job at the top of the list, with appropriate detail; then the rest of the employment history in backward or forward date order.
- Start with the most relevant work experience, even if it's not the most recent, then work backwards or forwards in time.
- Divide your experience under the sub-headings 'Related' and 'Other'. This allows you to highlight the experience that the employer is likely to be most interested in and play down other, less important, jobs.
- If you had a series of short-lived jobs and you want to abbreviate the list, you could say something like 'In 2010–2015 I worked in various temporary positions in the catering industry'.

However you present your employment experience, make sure it's clear and that the way you present starting and leaving dates is consistent. Don't leave any unexplained gaps. For example, if you've had time out of paid work to bring up a family, state this.

## Education

How far back should you go? School or young college-leavers should be quite explicit about their education since age 11, but it's more appropriate for more mature applicants to include a brief summary of their education, including exams passed. There's no need to include the full address of each school or college – condense the information to dates, names and towns. Present your qualifications in the way that makes the most of them:

- If the job requires a degree or diploma, it's best to start with that, enabling the employer to see at once that you meet the requirement.
- If you have no higher-level educational qualifications, you could list secondary school educational history in date order – that can be easier to digest than starting with the most recent and working backwards. Use the same order you used for your employment experience. If you've worked your way up from the bottom and lack formal qualifications altogether, you could expand your work achievements and contract the education section.
- If you're offering professional qualifications, it might be worth specifying not only the qualification (with the S/NVQ level, if appropriate) and the awarding institution, but also how you obtained it, e.g. full-time course or day release. For a technical post or one that requires special knowledge, consider giving additional information to show that you have the relevant work experience, knowledge or training.
- Be specific about what you studied, highlighting in a covering letter or skill section the personal qualities and skills involved in completing your studies. You might find descriptions for the courses that you have studied very useful: pick out the skills that the course aimed to develop, which are often listed as learning outcomes. Learning outcomes can assist you in mapping out the skills and achievements that you gained

during study. They can also help you identify the subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills you have acquired during each course. Of course, some jobs do require subject-specific knowledge (e.g. being a teacher), while others place more emphasis on transferable skills. Some look for a mixture of both. By studying, whatever the subjects are, you will find that you will have developed a range of both subject knowledge and transferable skills that many employers will value. It is up to you to identify them from your own experience so that you can present this on a CV.

- If your qualifications were awarded overseas, mention the UK equivalent so that the employer knows what level you've reached.

## Training

Don't give an exhaustive list of all the training courses and seminars you've attended. Include useful information about training and development courses of a week or more, or training in relevant specialist skills.

## Interests and activities

This section has various uses. It can show that you have a well-rounded life and don't live for work alone; that you're a sociable person who gets on with others; or that you keep yourself fit. Your hobbies may have given you opportunities to tackle roles and develop skills that you haven't had scope for at work – perhaps you've helped out a school, run a computer club or done voluntary work that demonstrates organisational and management skills. An unusual hobby such as skydiving or family history research can be worth mentioning, even though it has no obvious relevance to the job. It gives your CV an interesting feature and makes it memorable.

## Additional skills

The diversity of individual careers sometimes makes extra sections desirable: you can make up your own sub-headings. Include details you think a prospective employer really ought to know: if you have a driving licence, or additional skills such as foreign languages (if possible, give an indication of your level of competence), first aid training, and so on. It is also important to outline your level of IT and keyboard skills, including software you are familiar with, e.g. Word and Excel.

## Career aims and personal profile

Including career aims and a skill profile can be particularly effective if you're seeking a career change, you have an unconventional work record or you're applying for a job for which the competition is particularly keen.

## References

You'll usually need two referees, and one of these should be from your present or last employer. Give their names, addresses and telephone numbers, and their status or

relationship to you (e.g. line manager, course tutor). If you don't want your employer approached at this stage, say so in your CV or covering letter. You might prefer to omit referees on the CV and put 'available on request'.

## 6.3 Presentation of your CV

To produce an effective CV, pay attention to its appearance as well as its content.

- Make it easy to read and follow. Yours will be one of many that the employer has to read. Use an 'easy-to-read' font and size, such as Arial 11 point.
- Be consistent in how you present the information (e.g. date order) and in your layout. Have headings in the same style (capital letters, bold, underlining). Use bullet points to make reading quicker.
- Two sides of A4 is usually the right length.
- Don't cram the page, or clutter it up with unnecessary punctuation. Space makes text easier to read and more attractive.
- Put the most important information on the first page and as near the top as possible. The employer may not bother to read on if there's nothing of interest to begin with.
- The space you give to each section should reflect its importance. Concentrate on the aspects that are most important for the employer to know.
- Avoid long, complicated sentences. Don't use jargon and abbreviations that the reader may be unfamiliar with. Write the words out in full the first time you use them and put the abbreviation in brackets; after that you can use it on its own.
- Seek other people's views on your draft and proofread the final version carefully.
- If you need to send a paper CV, it should be produced to a high standard, word-processed and printed or copied on good-quality white or cream paper. Make sure the copies are sharp and clear. If you need to demonstrate an interest in design (e.g. for some media jobs), more elaborate graphics and perhaps coloured paper might be appropriate.
- Make sure that your CV arrives looking like a quality document. Don't fold it. Use an A4 envelope with cardboard reinforcement.
- If you send your CV by email, follow it up by sending a hard copy straight away, if required.
- Keep a copy of your CV in a safe place. You'll need it again to adapt for other employers.

## 6.4 Examples of different types of CV

There's no right or wrong way to write a CV. The right one is the one that works for you in your situation and succeeds in getting you interviews. Here we will just provide some guidelines on good practice and offer some examples of possible formats:

- chronological
- functional
- targeted.



We will also show some examples of targeted CVs for specific purposes. Most people tend to prefer one style over the others, but whichever format you choose, it should be flexible enough to allow modification to match the job you're seeking.

For most jobs you need to make a decision about the kind of CV to use, as most employers will not specify. However, some job areas have expectations that a particular format is used. When researching jobs, look at what the expectations might be. It is important that you find out if there is a preferred format for the type of job that you are applying for by doing further research into the job and if necessary seeking advice from a careers adviser (or the professional body, if there is one). For instance, some professions, such as the legal profession, prefer CVs in a chronological format. When you have work experience that is directly relevant, it is useful to highlight this in a separate section as it draws attention to it.

## The chronological CV

You are probably most familiar with a chronological CV. This lists jobs by date, beginning with the most recent, showing the name of each employer, where you worked, the period you were employed, your job title(s), responsibilities and key achievements.

The advantages of a chronological CV are that it:

- can be very easy to produce
- has for many years been recognised as a standard approach to CVs
- allows prospective employers to see very quickly how an individual has progressed and increased responsibility.

However, the disadvantages to a chronological CV are that any gaps in your employment stand out.

As a result, if you've changed jobs frequently, it can suggest instability and will require explanation, particularly if you've changed profession or career direction. In addition, with a chronological CV, it isn't always easy to spot key achievements or skills that might get 'buried' under different job titles.

## The functional CV

A functional CV focuses attention on your skills and achievements, presented according to the function or responsibilities you've undertaken rather than according to individual jobs. This CV shows that you're conscious of the demands of the prospective employer and of what you have to offer. Its advantages are that:

- it can highlight your skills rather than job changes
- if your current or most recent experience isn't related to the position you're applying for, it allows you to place more emphasis on relevant strengths and experience from earlier periods
- you can group different achievements together to match the job that you are applying for.

The disadvantages are that it takes more thought to prepare a functional CV and you have to ensure that it is clear and relevant to the chosen job without looking as though you might be hiding something.

## The targeted CV

A targeted CV is even more closely matched to the needs of a particular employer, with the skills required and the evidence of them clearly laid out at the beginning, followed by the details, dates and so on. It combines elements from both the chronological and the functional CV. Most candidates for managerial posts use this format. The advantages are that:

- it focuses straight away on your strengths
- it is more likely to catch the reader's interest
- you can adapt it to suit the job you're after without sacrificing quality
- you can lead the reader in the direction you want to go – your skills and achievements.

The disadvantages are that, like the functional CV, this one isn't easy to prepare. It has to change to match each job, with all the time, effort and skill that implies.

You've now completed Section 6 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 7 The covering letter

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Your covering letter is your opportunity to market yourself. It introduces your application and draws attention to the main factors that make you suitable for the job. It will usually be read first, so make sure that the reader will want to find out more about you.

It should enhance your application, not repeat what's on the application form or CV.

Always include a covering letter unless the employer specifically tells you not to.

Application forms often allow you reasonable scope to sell yourself and may need only a brief covering letter. A CV will usually require more of an introduction.

### Applying for a job in a vacancy list or answering an advertisement

Mention the job title (including any reference number) and say where and when you saw the vacancy. Highlight your strongest selling points, such as a relevant degree, appropriate qualification and related experience. Stress how you think the organisation can benefit from employing you. Add some other detail to reinforce your suitability, without duplicating what's on the application form.

### Applying speculatively

In a speculative approach, you have to present your case in a letter, usually accompanied by your CV. State clearly what kind of work you're seeking, your qualifications and what you have to offer. You're trying to find out whether there are any vacancies, or whether vacancies will arise in the near future. At the same time you must leave the impression that you're someone it's useful for the employer to know about.

If there's a vacancy, this will – if done well – translate into being someone the employer ought to see. So make clear who you are, where you are and what you're studying, then highlight the relevant points in the CV such as work experience, interests and activities. Say why you want to work for that particular organisation, and when you would be able to start. Do not waste your time, or an organisation's, by submitting speculative applications if they are specifically prohibited.

### Drafting your letter

- Type or word-process your letter (although, very occasionally, an employer will ask for a handwritten letter).
- If you are posting your application, use plain A4 paper of good quality.
- Keep it brief – usually not more than one side of A4.
- Put your name, address, telephone number and date at the top right-hand corner and, on the left-hand side, the name, job title and organisation of the person you're writing to.
- Address your letter to an individual person by name and job title. Switchboard staff can be very helpful in supplying this information if it isn't otherwise available.

- When writing to a named individual, end 'Yours sincerely'. If you do have to resort to 'Dear Sir or Madam', end 'Yours faithfully'.
- Although you should be business-like, steer clear of stilted expressions like 'I beg to remain'.
- Make sure your spelling and grammar are correct, and that you've expressed yourself clearly.
- Ask someone else to read it – don't rely on your computer's spelling check, especially as it may be based on US spelling.
- Print your name clearly below your signature.
- You can use your covering letter to give additional information such as reasons for an unusual change in career, or to highlight aspects of your CV that you feel are particularly important.
- If there are any special circumstances not covered in the application form or CV, such as a disability and how you overcome potential difficulties, mention them in the letter.
- Keep a copy of your letter. If you haven't received an acknowledgement within two or three weeks, send a brief follow-up letter or telephone to make sure that it's been received.

You've now completed Section 7 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 8 The interview

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Interviews remain the most common method of filling vacancies. There are several types of interview that you may be asked to attend:

- **Face-to-face:** this is the most common, and can be in the form of a one-to-one meeting or there may be a sequence of interviews, each with a different member of staff.
- **Telephone:** these are as formal as face-to-face interviews, so you need to be well prepared.
- **Panel:** you will meet several interviewers in one interview. It is important to maintain eye contact with the person speaking to you. Try not to be put off by panel members making notes as you speak.
- **Competency-based:** interviewers ask you questions relating to the skills and competencies needed for the job. You therefore need to know what they are, and have prepared some examples from your experiences to demonstrate them.

### 8.1 Interview tips

Here are some initial tips for interviews:

- Interviewers want you to do yourself justice. They're hoping that you'll be an excellent candidate and that the interview time and effort will be well spent.
- Interviewers may also be inexperienced or nervous. It's up to you to help them out and make them feel comfortable.
- When faced with a panel of interviewers, you should address the majority of your response to the interviewer who has asked you a question, while ensuring that you still have some eye contact with the rest of the panel.
- Show acceptance of the interviewer as a person. Remember that interviewers want to be liked and hope to be supported in their day-to-day work and career by your appointment. They'll be asking themselves 'Could we get on?' and 'Would this person be supportive?'
- Balance the initiative-taking. The ideal interview should flow like a conversation, reaching greater depths as the rapport develops between the two parties. Neither should psychologically dominate the discussion, although as the candidate you should do most of the talking, in effect determining the content, while the interviewer sets the format.
- A few seconds' silence in an interview can seem an eternity. Don't be panicked into responding too quickly, perhaps in an illogical way. Fill a thinking gap with comments such as 'That's an interesting question – I need a moment or two to think about it'.

- Always try to be positive in what you say and never be critical of a previous employer.
- Guard against being too open.
- When asked whether you have any questions, it can be useful to ask about future business plans. If the interview has already covered that, use the opportunity to add relevant information about yourself that you haven't had an adequate opportunity to express.

From the vast amount of research into interviews as a selection method, some important insights for candidates emerge. For example:

- Some interviewers make up their minds about candidates within the first four minutes of an interview, and aren't easily swayed by factual information thereafter. First impressions count: initial answers are critical.
- Interviewers are more likely to be swayed by negative information or behaviour on the part of the candidate than positive. Interviews tend to exclude rather than to include.
- Interviewers may be poor at assessing the personality characteristics of individual candidates with any validity, but they make very consistent judgements and assessments between candidates. This suggests that a good interview performance is likely to impress.
- A candidate's body language in an interview (for example, not maintaining eye contact) can be more important in determining its outcome than experience or qualifications.
- Interviewers' judgements about a candidate are always made in relation to judgements about earlier candidates, so the sequence of interviews assumes an importance of its own. If you're given a choice, go first. You can set a standard against which the others will be judged.

## 8.2 Interviewers

Below we list the four main types of interviewers you may come across. Don't let your own stereotyping of the interviewer affect your interview technique. Remember that when managers interview they're playing a role to a set of social rules, and may not be entirely their usual selves. Their perspectives may differ according to their job function:

- **Human resource/recruitment managers:** well-trained and experienced, often astute and very sensitive. Acting as internal screener; judgement valued by others. Likely to concentrate on personality and organisational 'fit'. May have a fund of knowledge about company cultures.
- **Head of a group or department:** a technical expert with wider managerial experience. Will talk shop, problems and solutions within a broader organisational framework. May have standard questions, pick bits from CV. Concerned about your professional competence and the rapport between you.
- **Line manager or decision-maker:** trying to assess your style of working. Concerned about your motivation, achievements and personal ambition. Considering how you'll fit with the rest of the team. May have to 'sell' you to more senior colleagues. Serious but relaxed; may try to 'sell' the job.

- **Managing director or company founder:** may digress into lengthy company history. Concerned about cultural fit; may look for shared vision. May be looking for someone who'll question or act as an agent of change. Will seek views from all those who've come into contact with you.

You could read all the books ever written on how to do well at interview and still not be good at it. Practice is essential. Even experience as an interviewer doesn't make for a flawless performance, for insight often leads to heightened anxiety. How you project yourself through your social and communication skills will determine your success whenever you speak with potential employers.

Find out all you can about interviewing techniques and be ready to cope with them:

- Read about the process.
- Think about the interview and plan for it. Try to foresee questions or situations and work out possible answers.
- Practise by role-playing with a partner, careers adviser or colleague, or use audio or video recordings. How you sound will be crucial.
- Practise speaking on the phone to a friend and ask what impression you're making. Practise some answers into a voice recorder and listen critically to yourself.
- Ask for comments from a partner, network contacts or interviewers who have rejected you.
- Learn from observing others – take the role of interviewer with a partner.
- Reflect on your experience. Evaluate your performance and incorporate the learning into your next interview.

## 8.3 Before your interview

Here are some things to think about in the run-up to your interview:

- Research the job and employer thoroughly beforehand. If you can, find out something about the people interviewing you.
- Review your CV or reread your application form.
- Think about why you have been invited for interview? What are your unique selling points? Questions are likely to focus on:
  - your achievements
  - your motives for applying
  - your likely contribution.
- Prepare by organising your material in advance.
- Collect as many concrete examples of things you've done that clearly demonstrate your skills, as you can. Read the tough questions in [Section 8.8](#) and practise some answers out loud.
- Think about what skills may be important to perform well in the job.
- Think about times in the past when you have demonstrated the required abilities, e.g. successful projects; successful interactions with other people; convincing a difficult audience; analysing a large amount of information, etc. Don't just think about job-related examples – you may have excellent evidence from your study, hobbies or other activities.

- What are your weak spots and what do you feel uncomfortable talking about?
- Why would you not employ yourself? Produce convincing counter-arguments.
- Practise your answers in the weak areas. Ask a careers adviser or a friend or colleague to help you. Do it out loud, record it and listen to it again.
- Plan travel and arrival times, and if possible do a dummy run.
- Decide what to wear. Show that you know the interview 'rules' by wearing smart clothes, polishing your shoes and so on. Conservative dress is more likely to pay off than flamboyance. Try the whole outfit some days before, so that if it doesn't feel right you've got time to change your plans. Dress appropriately for the culture. If you're very unsure about this, look at company literature or their website to get an idea of how people dress. If there's no suitable literature, you could telephone and ask the person on the switchboard or the secretary of the person interviewing you.
- Prepare some questions that you would like to ask. Having questions prepared can show, for example, your interest and keenness to develop within the organisation, e.g. 'How is performance and development assessed?' or 'How is the job likely to develop over the next two years?'

## 8.4 On the day

Things to remember:

- Don't smoke before you go into the interview.
- Don't be overburdened with bags, papers or umbrellas.
- Arrive in good time and allow yourself time to relax.
- If you are delayed, telephone.
- Remember the need for a poised, confident first impression.
- Listen carefully and attentively to the questions; ask for repetition or clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Remember to take a copy of your application with you.
- Don't forget to turn off your mobile phone.

## How you sound

- Sound as if you have confidence in yourself.
- Speak clearly. Don't drop your voice towards the end of sentences and don't mumble or speak too fast.
- Use plain language that doesn't confuse the interviewer, or go off at a tangent. Avoid jargon or clichés.
- Speak concisely, be specific, and judge when you've said enough. Watch the interviewer's behaviour, which will give you clues to whether you are answering the questions and timing your replies appropriately. If in doubt, ask 'Would you like me to go on?'
- Show through your answers that you've done your research into the company and tailored your answers specifically to them.



- Don't just tell them what you think they want to hear.
- Make sure you answer the question that is being asked.
- Convey the right amount of enthusiasm, warmth, friendliness and sincerity. Smile!
- Avoid negative statements.

## Body language

- Walk and sit with good posture.
- Shake hands firmly and briefly. Some people need to practise this.
- Use your natural gestures – there's no need to look frozen.
- Avoid fidgeting and keep your hands away from your mouth.
- Don't fold your arms.
- Maintain good eye contact with the person you're speaking to.

## 8.5 Answering questions

Whatever the nature of the job, the interviewer will be focusing on three related groups of characteristics: your personal, professional and achievement profile. It's your task to provide evidence in your answers that demonstrates these characteristics.

- Personal profile:
  - intellectual ability
  - communication skills
  - listening skills
  - confidence
  - job motivation
  - energy and drive
  - endurance
  - development
  - financial motivation.
- Professional profile:
  - knowledge
  - reliability
  - integrity
  - commitment.
- Achievement profile:
  - effectiveness
  - efficiency
  - economy.

You also need to be prepared to adapt your responses to the different kinds of question:

- Specific questions invite factual replies, often with a technical content, e.g. 'What problems did you encounter in the early planning stage of the building extension?'

- Open questions can be used by skilled interviewers to encourage expansive replies incorporating both facts and attitudes or feelings, e.g. 'Tell me about the three years you spent studying for your NVQ'.
- Hypothetical questions test a candidate's speed and quality of thought, e.g. 'What if the policy changed to carrying more freight by rail?' In reply, be methodical, state the assumptions that you're making, and say where you'd need more information, e.g. 'Would this just be in the UK or the whole of Europe?' There is usually no right or wrong answer – the interviewer is looking for logical, clear thinking.
- Competency-based questions look for you to talk about your skills, qualities and competencies relating to the job. The basic idea of a competency-based question is that if you can demonstrate that you did something in the past, you can do it in the future. These questions would normally ask for an example of a situation in which you have shown that skill, and how you would deal effectively with it. Questions often begin 'Can you tell us a time when ...'.
- Technical questions ask you to demonstrate your knowledge of specialist language. These often feature in engineering, scientific and IT interviews.

## 8.6 After your interview

- Think about the questions and your answers. Did you do yourself justice? Did you allow negative information or negative expressions of feelings to creep in?
- Send the employer an informal thank-you note soon afterwards. This reinforces recollections of you. Even if you're unsuccessful this time, there may be other positions coming up.
- If you're rejected, write a letter asking for some constructive feedback by telephone, at the employer's convenience.

## 8.7 Telephone interviews

An increasing number of companies are using the telephone in the first stage of the interviewing process. They do this in several ways:

- **Fully automated:** you receive a letter giving a freephone telephone number to ring. You hear a list of statements and press a number on the telephone keypad to indicate your response.
- **Structured:** a mutually convenient time is fixed in advance for the interview. You're taken through a series of questions that are recorded and analysed by trained interviewers. The questions are designed to establish whether or not you have the required skills for the job.
- **Screening:** you're questioned on various aspects of your CV or application form to decide whether you'll be invited to a personal interview.
- **A sales exercise:** you're given an opportunity to sell a product over the phone. This technique is used for recruiting sales, marketing or telesales staff.

The advice that follows about face-to-face interviews applies just as much to telephone interviews, but some things are especially important:

- Try to arrange the interview for a time and place where you won't be interrupted.
- Keep your application and any other prepared notes with you.
- Consider how you might come across over the telephone, using the following questions:
  - Do you speak loudly enough?
  - Is your voice clear or do you have a tendency to mumble?
  - Do you sound confident and interested, or monotonous or tentative?
- Don't forget to smile when you're talking on the telephone, as you would when talking to someone face-to-face. The smile won't be seen but it can be heard.
- Standing up while talking on the telephone can make you sound more confident.
- Some candidates dress in the clothes that they would wear to an interview to put themselves in the right frame of mind.

## 8.8 Tough questions

Everyone has a different understanding about what a tough question is. Here are some tips to help you through them, followed by some examples and how to approach them.

In general:

- If you feel yourself under pressure, you'll tend not to listen so acutely. Ask for the question to be repeated, take time and keep to the point. When you've answered, stop and leave it at that.
- Try to show that you understand why the interviewers have asked you the question. If you can show that you know what they're getting at, you're halfway to giving an appropriate answer.
- In response to embarrassing – rather than simply tough – questions, keep your answer simple and short.
- Always put a positive spin on your answers to difficult questions. If you lack a particular skill, try to emphasise how quickly you learn and can develop this.

## Examples of tough questions and how to answer them

- **How much are you worth?** Try to delay answering this until you know the responsibilities and scope of the job, and the typical salary ranges. Mention your previous salary and any financial commitments that lead you to raise or lower your expectations. Negotiations like this might seem strange to you if your only experience is of fixed salary scales.
- **What are your strengths?** You'll have become aware of these through your self-analysis. Draw on examples from the three profiles – personal, professional and achievement – discussed in [Section 8.5](#) to produce a rounded picture. Include any particular characteristics that you feel relate to the job.
- **Tell me about yourself.** Cover relevant aspects of your life, e.g. early years (if appropriate), education, work experience, significant events.

- **Having worked for one company for so long, what difficulties do you expect in adapting to our culture?** Make it clear that you understand the importance of the concept of culture by mentioning the internal diversity of companies and organisations you've had contact with. Describe how you've adapted to different sub-cultures you've encountered.

### Activity 9

Allow about 30 minutes

Here are some more examples of interviewers' questions to think through yourself.

- Why did you decide to study with ...?
- The classic three-part question: What kind of people do you like to work with? What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with? How have you worked successfully with this difficult type of person?
- What are your short-, medium- and long-term goals?
- Why have you decided to change careers?
- What are the main challenges facing (e.g. the Health Service, education, this company ...) today?
- Do you feel well equipped to meet those challenges?
- None of your experience is at managerial level. How would you cope with the transition?
- How long would you expect to stay here?
- How would you describe yourself?
- In your present/last job, what do/did you like most/least? Why? What was your greatest success? What has been your biggest failure?
- What do you see as the most difficult aspect of (e.g. this job, being a manager ...)?
- How do you react to criticism?

Note down your responses in the space below.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 8 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning and a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 9 What to do if you are not successful

If you are not getting selected for interviews, you can take various steps to improve your chances:

- Review your CV or application form. Were they tailored to the specific job? Do they promote you in the best way?
- Ask others to give you feedback on your applications. Talk to a careers adviser or friends/colleagues.
- Think about whether you are applying for appropriate vacancies. Do you have the skills and experience they are asking for?
- Look at your job-hunting strategy. Are you only applying speculatively? Do you need to think about which sectors or employers you are applying to?

If you are getting interviews but are not getting any further, you should do the following:

- Ask for feedback from the employer to find out where you fell short on this occasion. This should provide invaluable advice to help you succeed next time.
- Review your interview technique. Did you do enough research beforehand? Were you prepared for the questions? Ask yourself what you could have done better.
- Talk to a careers adviser who can help you with your preparation.

### Handling rejection

If you have done all of the above, having asked for feedback to make sure that you have interviewed well, the next thing to remember, if you are rejected, is to try not to take it personally. It is not a criticism of you; it is simply that in this instance you have been unsuccessful. It doesn't mean that they thought you couldn't do the job.

That may mean that someone with more relevant experience has got the job, or that there was a strongly favoured internal candidate. If you were invited to interview it means that, on paper, the recruiters believed you could do the job. Interviewing is expensive, so employers won't waste time interviewing someone they feel is not qualified for the role in question.

It can help to make notes as soon as you come out of an interview. You could make a list of what did and didn't go well, and suggestions of how you might improve. Once you relax after an interview, you may not remember as much detail. You can also compare your notes to any feedback you get by asking, 'How could I strengthen any future application?' Try to treat the whole experience as something you can learn from.

Remember, it took J.K. Rowling a year to find a publisher for her first Harry Potter book and some of the publishing houses made what was, with hindsight, an enormous mistake. It is important to try to stay positive and focused, and persevere with your job search.

You've now completed Section 9 – well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.



## What you have learned in this block

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- In Block 3 you've learned about making decisions, setting goals and action planning, which are all parts of the career planning process.
- You have also been given some practical advice on how to get the job you want, including advice and guidance on examining vacancies, completing application forms, and writing CVs and covering letters, as well as tips for good interview techniques.
- Finally, you've been given some sound advice on how to handle rejection.

## Block 3 quiz

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Well done; you have now reached the end of Block 3 of *Planning a better future*, and it is time to attempt the assessment questions. This is designed to be a fun activity to help consolidate your learning.

There are only five questions, and if you get at least four correct answers you will pass the quiz.

- I would like to try the [Block 3 quiz](#).

## I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to [one of the other blocks](#).

If you feel that you've now got what you need from the course and don't wish to attempt the quiz, please visit the [Taking my learning further](#) section. There you can reflect on what you have learned and find suggestions of further learning opportunities.

We would love to know what you thought of the course and how you plan to use what you have learned. Your feedback is anonymous and will help us to improve the courses that we offer.

- Take our [Open University end-of-course survey](#).





# Taking my learning further

## 1 What have I learned?

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We hope you found [Planning a better future](#) interesting and informative.

You may remember answering a few questions at the start of the course about your learning motivations. Now you've completed all or part of the course we'd like to ask you to reflect on your experience by completing one last short activity.

### Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

#### [Questionnaire about your learning \(2\)](#)

If you like, you can review your responses from the first questionnaire at the start of the course; you can do so by revisiting the [Questionnaire about your learning \(1\)](#).

Consider where you were when you first started this course.

- How did studying this course fit within your general everyday routine? Did you make or were you given dedicated time to work on it?
- Were there any particular challenges you faced? How did you overcome them?
- Have you learned anything that you will be able to take forwards in the future? How might this influence how you do things in the future?

By studying this course you should now be able to:

- reflect on where you are now and where you would like to be
- understand the impact of change for you and what options are open to you
- identify your goals and the action that you can take next to reach them.

## 2 Badge and statement of participation

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We hope that you now feel a sense of achievement after gaining the badge for *Planning a better future*. For a reminder on how to obtain your badge, please see [How do I access my badge?](#)

For a reminder on how to obtain your statement of participation after achieving your badge, please see [How do I access my statement of participation?](#)

When you have successfully achieved the badge, you will be able to access and download your *Planning a better future* statement of participation. You will receive email notification that your badge has been awarded and it will appear in your *My badges* area in your OpenLearn Create profile. Please note it can take up to 24 hours for a badge to be issued. You will be notified by email if you have received a statement of participation. Once it is available (as a PDF file), you will be able to see and download it from your OpenLearn Create profile.

It may take up to 24 hours for the statement of participation to be issued after you have completed the course.

## 3 Where next?

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We hope you enjoyed *Planning a better future*, and we hope the course has inspired you to continue your learning journey. Below are some key links to where you might like to go next.

### Progressing your career

- [Open University Careers Advisory Service](#)
- [National Careers Service](#)
- [Sector Skills Councils](#)

### Volunteering

You may like to consider volunteering to extend and enhance your skills and knowledge. These websites may help you to think about your options:

- [Leonard Cheshire Disability](#)
- [National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#)

### More free and informal courses

*Planning a better future* is one of a suite of six courses. You may like to study one of the other [five](#).

The OU also provides [further online introductory courses](#) and [skills for study courses](#), all of which are free and online.

[FutureLearn](#) also has a wide range of online courses that you may like to consider.

### The Open University

You may like to consider one of The Open University's [Access courses](#) to prepare you to successfully study towards a nationally recognised higher education qualification.

The OU offers [a range of qualifications](#) that you might want to consider.

### The PEARL website

[Part-time Education for Adults Returning to Learn \(PEARL\)](#) is a useful website for adults looking for part-time study opportunities, including all types of provision from free, non-accredited courses through to higher-level learning.

[FEEDBACK](#)

## 4 Feedback

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Finally, please take our short [end-of-course survey](#).

We're really interested in hearing from you, and completing this survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

## References

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