

Succeed in the workplace



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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

Succeed in the workplace is a free badged course which lasts 8 weeks, with approximately 3 hours' study time each week. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete another week's study.

You'll start this course by looking at yourself, to explore career opportunities. As you progress you will gain the skills to write strong CVs and application forms, and to handle different types of interviews. By the end of the course you will have made a start on your own realistic and robust action plan to enable you to find a job that will fulfil your aspirations and suit your lifestyle. You'll use plenty of real-life examples to help with this and get plenty of opportunities to practise your new understanding and skills.

Part of this practice will be the weekly interactive quizzes, of which Weeks 4 and 8 will provide you an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After completing this course you will be able to:

- reflect on your interests and values and how these are relevant to your career choice
- understand the value of your networks in career planning
- develop the skills to write strong job applications and CVs
- recognise different interview situations and questions, and know how to approach these
- produce a realistic personal action plan.

Keeping your work

We recommend that you keep a notebook to record your responses to the activities throughout the course. There are several also tables and documents which are useful to work on directly and keep. We've collected these together in the [Resource pack](#), which you can download. You can either work on this directly and store it on your computer or print it out and fill it in by hand.

Moving around the course

The easiest way to navigate around the course is through the 'My course progress' page. You can get back there at any time by clicking on 'Go to my course progress' in the menu bar.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page, including links to the quizzes, to open it in new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Succeed in the workplace* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational well-being of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

To complete a course you need to be able to find about 24 hours of study time, over a period of about 8 weeks. However, it is possible to study them at any time, and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are all available on The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor. But you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes. What is a badge?

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Schools, colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course should encourage you to think about taking other courses.



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each week of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Week 4 and Week 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the [OpenLearn FAQs](#). When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) !Warning! **Tahoma not supported** within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge..

Get started with Week 1.

Week 1: Start planning your career

Introduction

Welcome to Week 1 of the free badged course *Succeed in the workplace* – and congratulations. You have taken the first important step in deciding what you want from your working life and how to achieve it.

You'll make a start on career planning this week by getting to know yourself. You may well feel that you already know yourself pretty well, which is great. Hopefully, the activities will give you the chance to sit and think about what is important to you, both in your day-to-day and your working life, as well as help you to unpick how you got to where you are at the moment. This is something that not many of us consciously do and it can make a very valuable contribution to planning.

All you'll need is a notebook to write down your thoughts.

Watch the introductory video from the Open University Careers Adviser, Wendy Woolery, as she introduces the course and this week.

Video content is not available in this format.



As suggested in the Introduction and guidance, we recommend that you keep a notebook to record your responses to the activities throughout the course. There are also several

tables and documents which are useful to work on directly and keep. We've collected these together in the [Resource pack](#), which you can download. You can either work on this directly and store it on your computer or print it out and fill it in by hand.

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- start to understand the careers planning process
- know what you value about work
- understand the route you have taken in your work-life so far
- recognise what interests and passions you have
- start to identify possible career options open to you.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 What is a career?

Before looking at the career planning process, it is good to stop and think about what is meant by a career. This can mean different things to different people and a good place to start is to ask yourself: what do I think a career is? Have a go at this quick introductory activity.

Activity 1 What does having a career mean?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

Spend a few minutes jotting down in your notebook what you think having a career means. There are no right or wrong answers to this, so write down whatever comes to mind.

Top tip: always write down your answers to activities, so that you have a personal record which you can refer to as the course progresses.

Now click on reveal comment to see some ideas.

Comment

This list is not comprehensive and you may have come up with different ideas but it should give you a flavour of what having a career means for different people:

- Paid work
- Unpaid voluntary work
- Working in an office
- Being self employed
- Running a small business from home
- Having caring responsibilities
- Working at the same kind of job throughout life
- Needs specific training and qualifications
- Always working in the same industry or sector.

You may have been surprised by some of the ideas that having a career can mean to different people.

To many, a career meant and still means, working in the same industry or sector in a similar capacity throughout their working life. It was also associated with needing specialist training and was something only a highly qualified person could have. It has always meant being paid and having to leave the house every day to go somewhere to carry out the job. However, this restricts the idea of a career to a relatively small section of society in the present day and does not reflect the different experiences that people have and their value.

So, when this course talks about a career, it has a much broader meaning. It encompasses anything you do that involves some kind of work, be that outside the home or in the home, paid or unpaid.

The next section will introduce the idea of a career planning process.

1.1 Careers: then and now

It used to be the case, that once you had entered the workforce you could expect to stay, either doing the same type of job or with the same company, until you retired. This gave a straight line direction from joining the workforce to retiring. This is much like this direct train journey shown in Figure 1, from London to Leeds, with London being the start of your working life and Leeds, retirement.

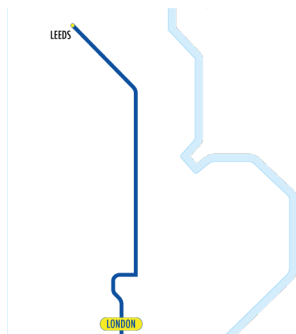


Figure 1 London to Leeds

However, now work tends to be much more fluid and in some ways uncertain, which can open up unexpected opportunities. This means instead of taking a direct route from the start of your working life (London) to retirement (Leeds), you may stop at a station on the way and change the route to retirement. Many people may spend some time at a station on the way to retirement to take on caring responsibilities as well, and then continue on their way. So, a typical career now may look much like that shown in Figure 2 and not be restricted to one industry or sector.

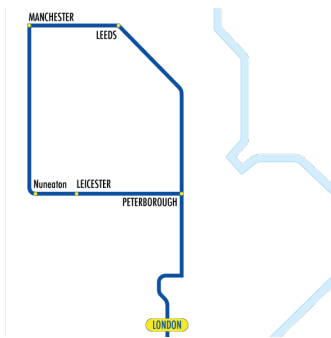


Figure 2 London to Peterborough, Leicester, Nuneaton, Manchester and Leeds

This means your career can be very different from the one you may have anticipated at the start of your working life. Different events along the way will probably mean that you change direction, and get new opportunities. It is difficult to plan for unexpected events. However, if you are at an unexpected station on your journey, having some idea of how to plan the next step will help you take charge.

Fortunately, there is a clear process that can help with this, as you'll see in the next section.

2 The career planning process: knowing yourself

The career planning process is shown in Figure 3.

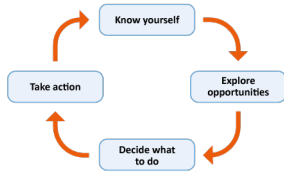


Figure 3 Career planning diagram

Although this is a simple diagram it can have a major impact on the way you see your career and on how you decide to develop it.

The diagram shows a continuous process but this doesn't mean just jumping into the cycle at any of the points. The starting point is always 'know yourself'. Doing this is an important first step as it makes you the centre of the decisions and the career choices you make. If you were to start from 'explore opportunities', it might be likely that you would start by thinking that you must fit in with, or that you are defined by, what is already available. You will see in Activity 2 in the next section that there are advantages to creating your own route.

2.1 What's to love about work?

For this week and the next, the focus is on the first step of knowing yourself. This is the foundation for finding and thinking about opportunities that work for you.

In this next activity you're going to think about the aspects of work that are the most appealing to you. Remember to jot your thoughts down in your notebook, so that you can look back at them later.

Activity 2 Your work – what do you enjoy about it?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

If you decide to commit to a specific type of work, then you need to know that it suits you, personally and practically, and that you can secure opportunities to do it. How do you know what work is going to suit you, though? One place to start is by considering what you like about the work you are doing or have done, be it paid or unpaid.

To get an idea about what to consider, in the following video you will hear a skydiving photographer tell you what he loves about his job.

First watch the video and then jot down your thoughts about why he loves his job.

View at: [youtube:Qm-pZ4xJBZM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm-pZ4xJBZM)

(I Love My: Job Skydiving Photographer, 2012)

Now answer the following questions about your work. Some people may need to think more broadly than the usual idea of what work is. You may be a volunteer, a student, or have a role as a parent or carer.

1. What do I love about work?
2. What do I like least about work?
3. Am I clear about what I think?

Comment

Whatever you have noted down, it will be very personal to you and could well be very different from somebody else. That is just fine – your answer is the right answer for you.

This may be the first time that you have sat and thought about work in this way and you could be wondering, 'why bother?' Well, taking the time to sit and reflect on something can help you develop new insights and more self-understanding. Or, simply just help you to order thoughts that you are already aware of. Developing this better understanding of yourself and your situation allows you to move on. That's why it is important you write down your answers to the activities in your notebook. By the end of the eight weeks, you'll have a very valuable personal record of where you started from this week, the journey you took to reach Week 8 and hopefully how you plan to continue from there.

Perhaps your answer to the last question posed in Activity 2 showed that you were fairly clear about some things but less sure about others. That is perfectly normal! Activity 3 in the next section is designed to help you to clarify your thoughts a bit further. You will think

about how well your current or past work experience has satisfied you and draw some conclusions from this.

3 What do I really want from work?



Figure 4 Satisfied or dissatisfied?

As this course progresses you will be taking charge of your own career choices and decisions, rather than leaving them to chance, or to other people. This is important because although others might help you in your career, it is in your interests to take more control over it.

You made the first step towards this in Activity 2. Now, working from these initial thoughts, you'll think about what it is that you really want from work.

Remember to keep a record of your thoughts in your own notebook, as before.

Activity 3 What do I value about work?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Listed here are a number of factors that will help you to recognise in more depth than in Activity 2, what you are satisfied with, and what you are dissatisfied with, about your work. Each of these implies something that you value. So, for instance, if 'Making friendly contacts with others' is important to you, it suggests that you value a SOCIAL element in your work.

You might be surprised by the range of possible factors of what could be important. This is one of the advantages of taking a course like this one. It opens up your thinking and suggests options and ideas you might not have considered alone.

Identify now how important each factor is to you by using the following scale:

- 4 = Very important
- 3 = Important
- 2 = Less important
- 1 = Not important

Base your ratings on the description of each factor in column 1 and try to use the full scale. Copy Table 1 into your notebook or you can download the [Resource pack](#) for the course and complete it there.

Table 1 Values

Factors	Value	Rating (1–4)
Making decisions, and working independently	Autonomy	
Change or variety in tasks, people, places	Variety	
Scope to learn, study, think, analyse	Intellectual	
Making friendly contacts with others	Social	
Large income, expensive possessions	Economic	

Expressing ethical code or religious beliefs	Spiritual
Using talents, developing skills	Using abilities
Being part of an important organisation	Commitment
Having lots of stimulus, excitement, thrills	Excitement
Having influence or power over others	Authority
Enjoying or making beautiful designs or things	Aesthetic
Getting promotions, career progression	Advancement
Helping or caring for others	Altruism
Concern for surroundings or location	Comfort
Being original, developing new ideas	Creativity
Activity, keeping moving, handling things	Physical
Taking risks; business and trading	Commercial

(Adapted from *Career planning and job-seeking workbook*, page 30, Open University Careers Service.)

Next, write down the values that you scored as most important (those at 4) and those you scored as least important (at 1 or 2).

For example, if you scored 'Having influence or power over others' as 4, then write down 'Authority' under a heading called 'Most important value' in your notebook.

Comment

Clearly, different kinds of work will reflect different values, so it is helpful to know what matters to you. For instance, someone who places a lot of value on altruism might seek out work helping others, but be less comfortable with work where commercial value dominates. If you prize physical aspects, then work that involves being sedentary for long periods might be more of a challenge.

In the same way, how or where the work is done might satisfy some values over others. A manufacturing company, a charity, a newspaper office, a local authority or a financial institution will each have a different 'feel' as a place to work. Try to think through which would suit you best.

In the next section you'll think about your answers to Activity 3.

3.1 Thinking about your answers

Your answers to Activity 3 act much like a mirror does when you look into it. They reflect back something about you to yourself. It is useful, therefore, to think about what they suggest to you in Activity 4.

Activity 4 Considering what you value about work

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Use the following questions to prompt your thoughts and write down your ideas.

- Do any of your answers surprise you? If so, why?
- Do any of the things you find important seem to be in conflict?
- Do your answers suggest anything about the kind of work that is most likely to satisfy the things you find important?
- Do your answers suggest how or where you are likely to be most comfortable working?
- Do your answers suggest where or how you might feel least comfortable working?

Comment

Obviously your work experiences are a reflection of the opportunities you have had, and the choices you have made so far. If you are lucky enough to be fully satisfied by your current work, then your focus may be on how to progress within it. If you are not, then you might want to make changes. These activities are the start of seeing where you may want to go.

Of course, work is only one aspect of your life and to consider it in isolation to all the other things that matter to you would be a mistake. For that reason, in the next section you are encouraged to take a broader look at your life interests and aspirations.

4 What am I like?

You are bringing to this course a wealth of life experiences. These have shaped your interests and aspirations, and have coloured what you believe and care about. Often we take these aspects for granted or are unaware of how they affect the decisions we take. So, it is helpful to bring these to the surface or rediscover them, so that you can decide if they are still relevant for you.

One way of doing this is to create a 'work line', which helps you to think about the pattern of your work life. Producing a work line helps to give shape to the past rather than it feeling like a confusing jumble of events and experiences. This is the next step towards considering the future and moving forward.

Figure 5 is an example of what a work line might include and look like.

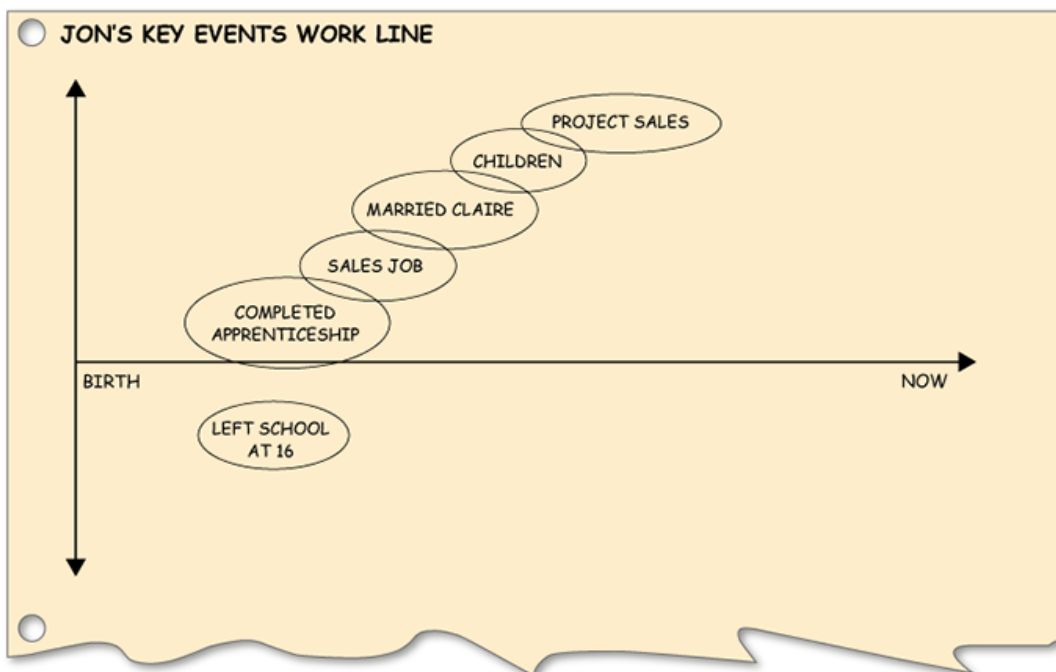


Figure 5 Jon's key events work line

Depending on your age, you may have many or fewer life experiences to draw on. Focus on the ones that seem significant to you in relation to your work-life. For instance, if you are only just out of education, you might want to think about success in particular subjects, about teachers or tutors who were influential, or about friends who affected how you see yourself and your place in the world.

Activity 5 My work line

Allow approximately 15 minutes

First note down key events in your work and study life, to show the high and low points at different times of your life. Only include events that you feel comfortable with.

For some people, the work line 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 emotions with someone you trust.

Create your own work line diagram, either by downloading and printing a copy of Figure 6 below from the [Resource pack](#) and completing it, or by drawing your own.

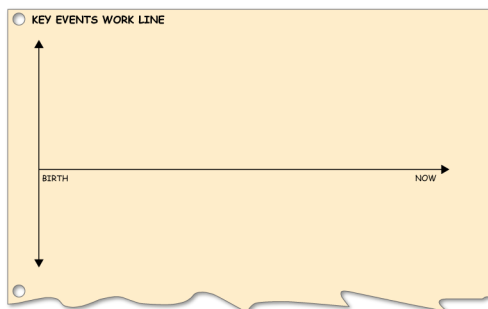


Figure 6 Key events work line diagram

Now you've drawn your work line, consider it as a whole. Then use the following questions to help you to make sense of what your work-line is showing you. Note down your thoughts in your notebook.

- Does the work line say anything about you and how you have lived your life?
- Can you spot any themes that seem to repeat themselves? Or, if the themes are not clear yet, are there any major or significant turning points?
- What is the overall pattern like? Is it generally up or down, steady or changeable?
- Are there any lessons you can draw from your work line?

Comment

For most people this can be a tough activity, so well done for giving it a go. Again, the notes you have made will be very personal to you and different from other people. Here's one example of what was noticed by someone who did this activity, which they hadn't been aware of before:

One person found she had moved location a lot in her life, and that these events tended to be associated with high points. She realised that she loved travelling to new places, but soon got bored again and wanted to move on. A valuable insight, that would help her plan her future.

Did you notice anything similar in your work line? You might not have done and that's perfectly ok. Something may occur to you when you least expect it, so you can always go back and add to your notebook.

How you feel about any particular work is bound up with the values that you identified as being important to you in Activity 3. The next section gives you the chance to think about these more broadly and may help you to make more sense of your work line.

You will now be developing a clearer picture of how you've got to where you are today and identified some of the things that are important to you. Often these are referred to as 'personal values'. They influence what you see as priorities, how you decide what is right for you, and how you measure what you are doing with your life.

You may already be aware of how certain beliefs or values have influenced the kind of work you do, or would like to do. For instance, you may want work that benefits other people, or you may see work simply as a way of funding your preferred lifestyle and interests. It may also be that some things that were once important to you are less so now.

Wednesday 7 August 2019

5.1 Jon's values

In Table 2 Jon has listed what is important to him in the world, about his work, his relationships and himself.

Table 2 Jon's values

	In the world	In my work (paid, unpaid or voluntary)	In my relationships	In myself
What matters to me?	Am interested in environmental issues. Feel strongly about health and fitness and would like to see more people doing sport, especially young people. I think IT has enormous potential to enhance people's lives. Don't necessarily see that as a contradiction!	I'm ambitious but I'm also concerned about what colleagues think of me.	Claire and the children – taking equal responsibility for the children. Want to make sure that we have quality time together.	Keeping fit. Getting a good qualification. Winning – I know I'm competitive! I like to be good at everything I tackle. I want to make sure that my family is financially secure.
What is most important to me?	Concerns about the future in terms of the sort of society my children will live in. Would like to be more involved in promoting sport.	I want the respect of colleagues, I want to be seen as the best person for the job that I do. I want to have a position of responsibility.	Recognising that Claire will want to start a career when the boys are a bit older. To make sure that the children have a good education and the chance to go to university. Want them to have a better start than I did.	

Jon then went on to draw the contents of his table in a spray diagram, shown in Figure 8, which made it easier for him to see some of the connections between his ideas.

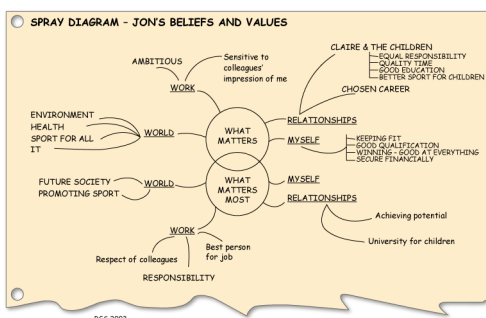


Figure 8 Jon's beliefs and values

Notice how Jon's values and beliefs cut across several aspects of his life. In the 'what matters' part of the spray diagram, his work is only one aspect of what is important to him. When he asks himself what is most important, however, the spray diagram illustrates how his work might fit with his other aspirations.

Now, it's time for you to have a go at this yourself, in the next section.

5.2 Personal beliefs and values

The next activity is designed to help you to think carefully about what values and beliefs you hold and how these might impact on the work options you are drawn to. You might find it useful to look back to Activity 3 where you identified what you valued about work.

Activity 6 My beliefs and values

Allow approximately 15 minutes

First, complete your own beliefs and values audit. Copy Table 3 into your notebook or you can complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 3 Personal beliefs and values table

	In the world	In my work (paid, unpaid or voluntary)	In my relationships	In myself
What matters to me?				
What is most important to me?				

(The Open University, 2013)

Once you have done this, you might find it helpful to see your ideas visually. If so, you could produce a spray diagram, perhaps following Jon's example, in your notebook. This kind of visualisation doesn't work for everybody, though. So it is fine just to complete the table.

Whether or not you decide to convert your table to a spray diagram, take a little time to read back over what you have written and then ask yourself the following questions, writing down the answers to each in your notebook:

1. Are there areas of overlap in what matters to me in different areas of my life?
2. Are there any obvious tensions or conflicts?
3. Have any of my beliefs or values become more or less important to me than they once were?

Comment

Things may not be entirely clear to you at this stage. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers and you can always return to the activities and update your thinking, as you progress through the course.

Most of us have to decide which values we are giving priority to at any given stage. The clearer we are on why we are doing things, the easier it is to live with the choices – and trade-offs – we are making.

What you value in life will clearly be connected strongly to what most interests you. This is what the next section helps you to consider.

6 What most interests me?



Figure 9 Interests and passions

Of course, as well as believing in the value of what we do, our career choices work best if we find the work interesting in itself. Looking afresh at your interests and passions may lead you in new work directions, or may simply highlight ways of getting more out of a career path that already suits you.

Can you envisage yourself making a living from the things that you are most passionate about in life? Obviously, being able to earn an income from your passions is not the only reason to pursue them, but in the context of this course, where we are focusing on workplace success, it makes sense to consider this aspect. As a child, did you dream of being a professional athlete or an actor but ended up confining your dream to a weekend 'hobby'? Now is a good opportunity to dust off some of those dreams and look at them again.

The next activity asks you to think more broadly about your real passions in life, and afterwards to consider how you can bring them together with work.

First, look at the example below, which shows Sarah's list of passions.

My interests/passions

- Being outdoors – preferably in the sun
- Shopping
- Keeping fit
- Protecting the environment
- Helping or caring for other people
- Writing poetry
- Tap dancing – though I don't do it anymore
- History – mostly of places
- Reading – about history mostly
- Hill walking
- Doing practical, hands-on things

Activity 7 My interests and passions

Allow approximately 10 minutes

This activity will help you to remember the interests and passions that have meant or still mean the most to you, and to link them to types of work you might do.

First of all, in your notebook list the kinds of hobbies, interests, passions you have had – at any stage in your life. Note down your ideas however practical or achievable at this stage.

If you need to jog your memory you can use these questions or alternatively the [A–Z list of potential passions](#).

- How do you like to spend your leisure time?
- If you were choosing a book or magazine to read, what subjects would interest you?
- When you were a child, what did you say you wanted to be when you grew up?
- What were the subjects you most enjoyed at school or college?
- If you were part of a quiz team, what subject would your team mates rely on you for?
- What did you do as a teenager for fun, which perhaps you no longer do?
- If you didn't need to earn money at all, how would you spend your time?
- If you were given half an hour of TV time to give your views, what would you talk about?

It doesn't matter how long your list is but if there are more than five, try to narrow them down to three or four key passions or interests, and highlight these in your notebook.

Use the following questions to help you think about which are most important to you:

- If you were guaranteed you would not fail, which one of these would you pick for a paid occupation?
- If you could introduce one of these into your life now, which one would make you the happiest?
- Which one would you most regret not doing if you were coming to the end of your life?

Now, think about the kind of work these might lead you to and jot your ideas down in your notebook.

Comment

Here are some ideas Sarah had about her own passions and interests.

Table 4 Sarah's ideas about her passions and interests

My key passions or interests	Work that could incorporate these
Being outdoors/protecting the environment	Gardening Looking after public footpaths
History	Volunteering/working for the National Trust or English Heritage – in the grounds or conserving buildings maybe
Shopping	Buying as a job – maybe at a garden centre? Offer to be responsible for buying the stationery supplies at work
Looking after other people	Working at a healing garden Lead 'walks for health' at the weekends

You should feel excited – and perhaps a little daunted – by some of the opportunities you have identified. Some might feel out of your reach at the moment because you doubt you have the knowledge or skills. Others might appear to conflict with your lifestyle preferences, or commitments to other people. Try not to see these as negative thoughts as it really helps to be specific about potential conflicts and constraints, so that you are given the chance to find possible ways around them. This means that you can keep your options open.

You'll get the chance in the next section to think about these potential conflicts and constraints.

7 Are there any limits?

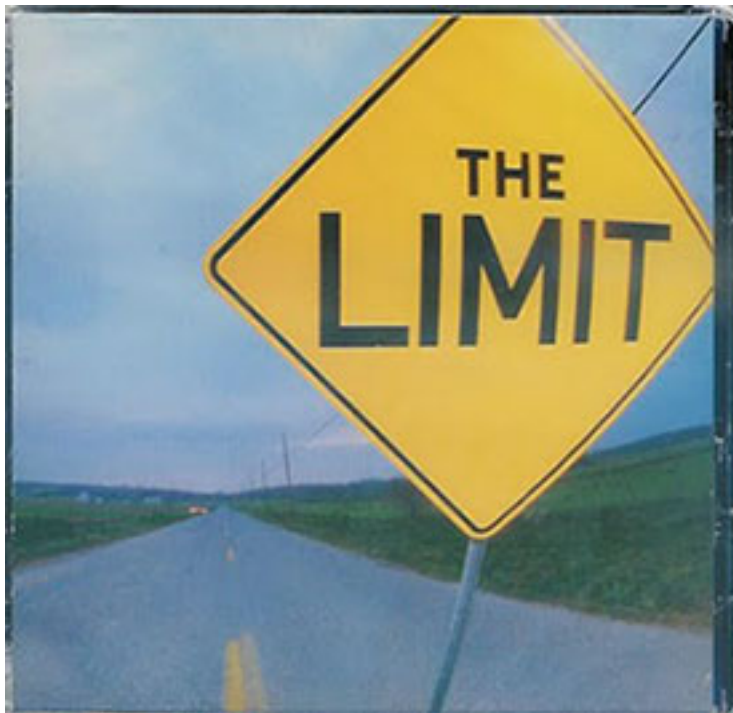


Figure 10 What are the limits?

For everyone, there is a range of personal factors that may affect career choice. These could include:

- needing to earn a certain amount of money
- your health
- your age
- being the main carer for other family members
- the need to live in a particular area
- wanting to gain a qualification quickly or needing to acquire a qualification that is professionally recognised in a field of work, e.g. nursing, plumbing or accountancy.

Take a few moments to look at Angela's example below.

Table 5 Angela's needs, responsibilities and constraints

What are my needs, responsibilities and constraints?		What are the implications and what can I do about them?
What are my needs?	Financial independence	Will be limited by what work is available locally that I have the skills for
	Opportunities to be creative	Could do extra training through work or adult education courses
	Working to live	
What are my responsibilities?	Looking after parents	Want to find best way to manage my finances

	Paying off mortgage	Speak to an independent financial adviser about my options
What constraints are there?	Want to remain in local area To earn enough to cover debts	

Angela has used the implications column to focus on actions she can take. This is important, otherwise it is easy to feel hemmed in and frustrated. Bear this in mind in the next activity as you write your own needs, responsibilities and constraints table.

Activity 8 My needs, responsibilities and constraints

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity will help you to evaluate what you need, what you have to do and what you cannot easily do in your life at the moment. It will encourage you to think about the implications of this and to see ways forward.

Now complete your own table of needs, responsibilities and constraints. You can complete a blank copy of Table 5 in your [Resource pack](#).

Comment

It may not feel as energising to consider potential obstacles as it did to get excited by your interests, but you need a balanced assessment of your situation. By focusing on the implications of your needs, responsibilities and constraints, and deciding what action you could take, you may have been able to spot opportunities that were less visible to you before.

8 Pulling it together

Before finishing for this week, and moving on to complete the end-of-week quiz, you've got one final activity to complete. This asks you to bring together your thoughts from Activities 7 and 8.

Activity 9 Moving forwards

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Look back to what you discovered about your interests in Activity 7 and the options you generated there. Think about the constraints that you identified in Activity 8 and then consider the following questions and write down your answers.

1. Are the barriers as big as you initially felt?
2. Are some of the barriers moveable? What would you have to change for them to be removed?
3. Do any of the constraints make some of your options impractical for you at this stage?
4. Could you modify any of the options that excite you, to make them fit better within the constraints?

Well done, you've completed the last activity of the week, except for the weekly quiz. You have already created a picture of how your experiences, values and interests have shaped your work until now, and how they might continue to influence your choices going forward. These are very important first steps – so well done. You'll be building on this next week.

9 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

[Week 1 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

10 Summary

Hopefully this week has helped you to rekindle some excitement about the possibilities in your work life. You may be seeing ways to bring more of your interests to your existing work, or new opportunities you might like to consider further. You might also be feeling a little unsettled. This is natural whenever you begin to examine your past choices and consider 'what next?' For now, feel proud that you have taken the first steps towards creating a career path in which you can be successful and happy.

Next week you are going to consider the skills and knowledge that you already have, and how you can use these or build on them further, to help you achieve any aspirations you have identified this week.

You should now feel that you can:

- start to understand the careers planning process
- know what you value about work
- understand the route you have taken in your work-life so far
- recognise what interests and passions you have
- start to identify possible career options open to you.

You can now go to Week 2.

Week 2: Understanding your skills and abilities

Introduction

Last week you explored your life experiences, your motivations and some of the practical realities around work options. Hopefully you are beginning to develop ideas about the kind of work you aspire to do or are clearer about how to bring more of yourself and your passions to the fore in work you already do. Knowing what you want, of course, is only part of the challenge. You need to have, or to gain, the knowledge and skills necessary for your work choices, whether they are paid or voluntary. So, this week you'll consider the knowledge and skills you already have and how you might want to add to these to meet your goals.

As with Week 1, you'll need your notebook to jot down your thoughts and responses to the activities.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 2:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- list the knowledge, skills and experience you already have

- identify which knowledge, skills and experience you want to make the most of
- understand any changes you might want to make to your knowledge and skills, in order to pursue your aspirations.

1 The difference between 'knowledge' and 'skills'



Figure 1 Knowledge and skills

Simply put, 'knowledge' is information, facts or understanding about something. So, you might 'know' the rules of cricket, or the recipe for a chicken curry, or how to mend a bicycle puncture. There is a difference, though, between 'knowing what' and 'knowing how.' Knowing the recipe for chicken curry is not the same as having the practical skills needed to make it. For example, if you have never chopped anything, you probably won't have acquired the necessary knife skills. This is a key difference between knowledge and skill. A 'skill' means that you are able to do something. Of course, there are different levels of skill and practice is usually the key to improving these. As your chicken curry making skills improve with practice, in effect you gain what might be called practical knowledge as a result of developing these skills.

It is important to have or to learn the skills and knowledge you need for the kind of work you want to do. You begin by looking at the roles you play in your life and what these require of you. This will help you to see what knowledge and skills you have acquired along the way. Then you are invited to do an 'audit' of your skills and to assess how well you do them, so that you build up a clear picture of how well you do things. This will help you to appreciate your strengths.

2 What roles are played in life?



Figure 2 Roles I play in 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 a role as a parent, as an employee, as a friend, and sometimes, like now, as a student. Each of the roles you play demands different things of you.

One way of uncovering the skills you have already developed is to begin with the range of roles you play in life.

For example, if you have previously been a student you would have needed the skills of learning, of time management and of communicating in writing. Perhaps you enjoy DIY? If so, you have developed not only practical skills but planning and organising skills as well. If you are a parent, you have developed childcare skills, but also probably those of budgeting, time management, delegating, cooking, and so on. By chairing meetings of a club, you develop skills of dealing with people, as well as those of managing the discussion.

Obviously, there are many more examples that could have been included here, but hopefully these will spark your own ideas for the activity in the next section.

2.1 My roles in life

Look at Tom's (an example learner) list below. It shows some of the roles he plays and the kinds of thing these roles demand of him.

Main roles I play ...

1. Student representative – attending meetings to give views of my class to teachers/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 her online shopping with her.
5. Treasurer of pub darts team – taking and banking membership fees, paying expenses, giving reports.

Now think about your own roles in life in this next activity.

Activity 1 My roles in life

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Part 1

This activity will help you to identify the roles you have played in your life so far and thus provide you with a basis for considering the skills they have helped you to develop.

First jot down in your notebook the roles you play most frequently and just one or two key activities associated with them. If you find it difficult to identify roles, go back to your work on interests and passions from Week 1 and see if these remind you of any.

Another memory jogger is to ask yourself who you have been for other people. For example, are you a sister or a brother, or a manager to your team?

(Adapted from *Career planning and job-seeking workbook*, Open University Careers Service.)

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 and you would prefer not to play. For example, are you always expected to be the 'fun maker' in your group of friends, even if you do not feel like doing that?

Part 2

Now you've identified your different roles, consider which ones you find more satisfying than others and the roles that you feel you perform well. Again, write down

your thoughts in your notebook. Copy Table 1 into your notebook or or you can complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 1 Roles

Roles I most enjoy		Roles I think I do well
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You will gain the most from this activity if you take a little time to reflect on what you have written. Use the following questions to trigger your thoughts and write down any answers that occur to you in your notebook.

1. Are you surprised by the range of things you do and take for granted?
2. Were you able to identify the kinds of action you have to take in each of these roles?
3. Did they begin to suggest any skills that might be associated with doing those very different kinds of role?
4. Were you surprised at which roles you enjoyed or not, and which you felt you performed well or not?
5. Which roles might you want to continue and which, if any, might you want to stop playing?

Comment

You may be surprised by the number of different roles that you have, as it is not something that most people ever consider. Most of them you probably take for granted. Hopefully, you can now see the full range of roles you have, and will be able to think more clearly about the abilities you have that enable you to carry these out.

In the next section you'll be able to reflect on the abilities you have that go with these roles.

3 What abilities have these roles required of me?



Figure 3 Abilities

Hopefully, the last activity showed you that most roles you play involve doing different things. Even in a particular job, there are often different roles within it. For instance, a healthcare worker might be both a chiropodist and a manager, or a production worker will also be a problem solver when the work does not go smoothly.

In Activity 1 you identified some of the skills you have gained from performing different roles. When you use these skills, you are demonstrating your ability to do something. At a personal level, people might refer to you as being able to resolve production problems or as an able map reader, which then suggests that you have that ability. Generally, the more you use an ability, the stronger it becomes. It is important when managing your career to know what 'abilities' you have and how well they suit the kind of work you want to do.

The next activity will help you to become more aware of the abilities you've developed through the roles you have already identified.

Activity 2 My abilities

Allow approximately 10 minutes

First look at the table below. It lists things you might have done in the roles you play and expresses them as 'abilities'. For instance, you might have had to 'organise' team meetings or to 'campaign' to raise money for a charity. Read each item on the list and decide if it sounds like you. For the ones that sound most like you, write them down in your notebook and make a note of the role each is associated with. You can also complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 2 My abilities

Initiate	Seek	Communicate
Implement	Organise	Harmonise
Monitor	Solve	Check
Maintain	Decide	Campaign
Improve	Liaise	Persuade
Control	Coordinate	Measure
Allocate	Explore	Supervise
Select	Investigate	Choose
Develop	Link	Guide
Create	Sell	Make
Enhance	Plan	Train
Delegate	Teach	Evaluate

(Adapted from *Career planning and job-seeking workbook*, The Open University, 2014.)

Comment

Look back over this list of abilities. Notice how useful they are in helping you to be precise about what you can do. This helps you to present yourself positively when talking to people who might be helpful to you in developing your career. You will learn more about this in Week 5.

This activity has given you an overview of the kinds of ability you have. Now you need to say something about the activities that helped you to develop them. The next step is to identify the abilities which are most true of you, and link them to activities that enabled you to develop them. You will do this in the next section.

3.1 Evidence of my abilities

Thinking about what you have done shows how you have developed or used your abilities in particular roles. This is very useful for both job applications and interviews.

This next activity will help you do just that.

Activity 3 How have I shown or developed my abilities?

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Table 3 shows an example of how you might link your different abilities to activities that you have carried out.

Table 3 Abilities

Role	Ability used	Evidence of ability
Social Club secretary	Liaise	Have to coordinate dates of meetings with all committee members and the community centre manager for room booking.
	Enhance	The previous secretary used to write very long meeting notes, which people complained about. So I introduced a short summary that just records actions, decisions and news. The chairman said this was a big improvement.

Copy a blank version of Table 3 into your notebook or you can also complete this in your [Resource pack](#) and fill in the list of roles and associated abilities you identified from Activity 2.

Next, think of any specific activities or actions, which show the ability that describes you, and add these to the third column. Evidence means things you have done that show you have used the ability you want to demonstrate. Be as specific as you can. It can be helpful to think of particular occasions when you used the ability.

You are not, at this point, trying to include everything but to pick out significant roles and abilities that have helped you to develop. Aim to include between three to five roles.

Comment

Creating the list may have felt difficult. After all, asking yourself how you know you have an ability, and identifying evidence to show it, is not something you do every day. So pause now and give yourself a bit of credit. You are developing a new skill! Even if your completed table is not quite as you would like it yet, hopefully you can now see how useful this will be when you come to prepare for a job application or for an interview. You'll learn more about this in Weeks 6 and 7.

In the next two sections you will develop your thinking further. You will learn how to gather evidence of your abilities so that you can use this to support your job applications. It is helpful to start to add to your table by linking the abilities you have to any type of work you have already done. Remember that 'work' does not only mean something you are paid for. Interpret it as widely as you find helpful.

Learning about something often develops abilities that are easily overlooked. For instance, you may have studied on a course, served an apprenticeship, or travelled and learned about other places, cultures or people.

The next two sections invite you to think through both your work and learning experiences.

4 Skills developed through work



Figure 4 Skills

By now, you are beginning to see that all the roles in your life require you to have certain skills. Some of these roles may have been in a social context, others in paid or unpaid work situations. In this section, you will focus on roles connected to work in some way. All 'work' counts for the purpose of this section.

Have a look at the example of Angela below. Notice that it is not clear from Table 4 whether the jobs Angela did were paid or voluntary. This is not important since you acquire the skills whether or not someone is paying for your work. The table also shows when Angela has done similar types of job, but that her responsibilities might have been different, and so she was able to extend the skills she had developed.

Table 4 Angela's work and personal achievements

Dates	Employer/ organisation (include clubs, community groups, etc.)	Title	Responsibilities, duties and activities	Training (include formal training, coaching and workshops)	Skills developed
1986 – 1989	W H Smith Ltd	Shop assistant	Management of magazine department and some staff management	Handling customers Use of cash tills	Handling cash Customer care Motivating others Time manage- ment Prioritising
1991 – 1992	Derngate Theatre	Front of house staff	Checking tickets Seating customers Refreshment sales	Basic First Aid	Understanding of team work Interpersonal skills Empathy Listening and questioning Presentation
1993 – 1994	Liverpool Higher Education College	Library assistant	Issue desk duties Cataloguing books Customer training	IT training Cataloguing skills	IT and keyboard skills Inputting data into spread- sheets and da- tabases
1995 – 1999	Sailing Club	Membership secretary	Recruiting new members Managing mem- bership subscrip- tions		Database development Accounting skills
1995 – 1998	De Montfort University	Assistant librarian	Management of Library Social Sciences section Supervision of Li- brary assistants	Management training	Decision taking Budget man- agement Providing rele- vant and ap- propriate infor- mation
1998 – to date	Milton Keynes University	Assistant librarian	Creation of new library service	Business management Process costing	Information literacy skills Report writing
1998 – 2001	Film club	Publicity secretary	Organising publicity leaflets		Creativity

			Writing film re-views		Working to a brief
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Use this example to help you with the next activity.

Activity 4 My work and personal achievements

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity helps you to look back over your own work and personal achievements and to decide what skills they have helped you to develop.

Copy a blank version of Table 4 into your notebook or you can also complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

Comment

After completing this activity pause and allow yourself to feel proud of the abilities you have already developed. It is important to value what you can do. It will help you to present yourself positively to people who can offer you work opportunities.

Of course, work experiences are only part of the story. Any experiences that have helped you to learn can be just as influential in developing your capabilities. The next section, therefore, encourages you to review these too.

5 Skills developed through learning



Figure 5 Learning

When you completed the previous activity, you were asked to think about any training you might have had in any particular jobs. As well as this, you might have done courses outside work, such as evening classes for personal interest. You might have participated in a charity event that involved learning new things, such as deciding to learn to ride a bike to participate in a charity cycling challenge.

It can sometimes be difficult to see the full range of skills developed through learning. You might be clear that you learned to confidently ride a bike for the charity cycling challenge, but be less aware that while on the ride you developed your ability to talk to strangers more easily. It is easy to know that you have passed a test, or completed a tough climb, but it is sometimes difficult to see how you have changed in subtle ways.

The skills you develop during learning experiences can be a positive influence on your role in your family, your involvement in the community, or in your potential to do a job. There is much to gain from reflecting on your skills and qualities, and seeing how these can be used to enhance your career choices and your personal development. This reflection should help you to identify the more subtle changes as well.

The following activity illustrates this for you.

Activity 5 My skills developed through study

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity illustrates how the benefits of learning are not always obvious and encourages you to think differently about your own learning.

Part 1

Watch the video of actor and OU graduate, Stephen McGann, talking about how studying science added to his skills.

Video content is not available in this format.



After you have watched the video all the way through, listen to it again, making notes on the skills Stephen says he developed. Record the main skills in the box below. You do not need to record these in your notebook because they are Stephen's experiences, not your own.

Provide your answer...

Part 2

Select a learning experience of your own and reflect on it for a few minutes. It is up to you whether you choose a formal learning experience, like a course of study, or a life experience such as moving country, or becoming a parent or grandparent.

Imagine, like Stephen, you have been invited to make a short video explaining to someone else how that experience developed different parts of you or new skills that you have been able to deploy in your life more generally. What would you say? Creating short rehearsed pieces of explanation about your learning and skills is good preparation for interviews.

Write a few sentences in your notebook as you might say them in a video. Then try reading aloud what you wrote.

[Comment](#)

When you read your piece aloud, did it sound convincing to you? If not, you might want to keep trying until you hear that note of confidence that Stephen McGann displayed.

As you have seen in last few sections, skills are acquired in many different aspects of our lives. The main areas where we acquire skills are:

- working
- studying

- volunteering
- caring responsibilities
- having a hobby.

Some of these you may not have even considered before. So, hopefully, you are building a good picture of your own skills now and maybe you won't take them for granted so much.

Now that you've identified the skills that you have developed, you need to consider which you feel most confident with, and which may require further development. The next section gives you that chance.

6 Assessing your skills



Figure 6 Skills

By now, you will have a clearer picture of how the range of skills in your life, work and study experiences has helped you to develop. Of course, the chances are that you feel more confident in some of your skills than in others, so it is useful, therefore, to develop a view of where your strengths lie and which skills you feel you might lack or need to strengthen.

For this you need to do a stock-take, or an 'audit' of your skills. A 'skills audit' is a review and assessment of your existing skills. It allows you to create a profile of your skills, which you can then compare to what you need, both now and in the future, to fulfil your aspirations. You need to think about the skills you have gained through your working, home and social life, as well as those you have developed (or are developing) through a programme of study, such as this one.

The activity that follows in the next section will help you to assess your skills in more detail. It will help you to identify 'transferable skills'. These are the skills that can be used in more than one role or activity. For example, if you are good at getting people to talk, you could use that skill in counselling someone, or in making their visit to your hair salon more enjoyable.

By auditing your skills in this way, you start to look at them in the way that employers expect, and in the kind of language that you can use in job applications. Many people, especially those who may be returning to work after a break, feel that they are lacking in skills or that the skills they have are rusty. It may be that if you feel you have gaps in your skills, this exercise will help you to identify them, so that you can think about how to plug the gap.

See how you get on with your own skills audit in the next section now.

6.1 My skills: how good am I at them?

The activity that follows will help you to audit your skills. Remember to keep a record of it in your notebook.

Part 1

The first step in your skills audit is to complete a questionnaire that groups skills into categories, such as 'communication' or 'administrative'. It does this because these are of particular importance to employers.

As you complete the questionnaire, consider how well you can carry out each skill described. It can sometimes be helpful to consider yourself in comparison with other people, or to ask people who know you well to comment, so that you get a sense of how strongly you hold these skills.

The important thing is not to devalue yourself through lack of confidence or modesty. If you do, you might prematurely close down some of the work options you are interested in, by persuading yourself that you do not have the skills for it. You would almost certainly undersell yourself to employers or work colleagues.

[Download](#) a copy of the questionnaire now from your Resource pack and complete it. Save the completed file in a safe place on your computer or print it out and keep it with your notebook.

Part 2

Now look at the skills from the questionnaire in which you scored most highly and those you most enjoy. Make a list of both in your notebook.

Look back through the detailed skills descriptions for each of the categories in the questionnaire. Think of particular skills you would like to develop within those descriptions that you're not yet competent in, but would like to develop. List those as well.

Copy Table 5 into your notebook or [download](#) it from your Resource pack and complete it.

Table 5 My skills audit

Skill area (e.g. Communication)	Particular skill I would like to develop (e.g. Engaging an audience, giving a presentation)
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And finally, which are the skills that you'd most like to use in the future? Write them down in your notebook.

Comment

Your notes may show strengths in particular skill areas, such as financial activities. It may show some skill areas that you have not yet developed to any great degree. What matters is the match between your aspirations and your skills.

By thinking about which skill areas you *want* to use in the future rather than simply those you *can* use well now, you start to see what strengths you need to build on, and which areas you might need to develop further if you are to achieve your aspirations.

The next section gives you time to think about what you have discovered about yourself in the first two weeks of the course.

7 Pulling your thoughts together

In these first two weeks you have been encouraged to take a step back and to think about how you have got to where you are today. You have given some thought to what interests you, what constraints you need to manage within, and what skills you have developed.

As you have worked through all the activities, you may have had new ideas about the kinds of work you would like to do, ideas about how to do your existing work in new ways, and thoughts about how to make your work better suit your life circumstances.

This next activity allows you to capture some of the conclusions you have come to at this point.

Activity 7 My first reflective review

Allow approximately 15 minutes

You may well change your views and plans as you progress through the course, but for now, remind yourself of what felt important when you began it.

Read through the results of your work and any notes you have made in your notebook so far. Then write down your answers in your notebook in response to the following questions. Some of the questions draw directly on the activities you have done during these first two weeks. For others, you will need to reflect on new areas and to add them to your thinking.

What am I good at? Write down the abilities that you would most like to use.

What are my main work values? Write down the values you would like to fulfil.

What would I like to do? Write down the occupations or job areas you would like to work in.

How would I like to work with people? What kind of environment? Write down the kind of contact you would like to have with people, and the kind of environment you would like.

What other aspects are important to me? Write down any other factors that are important to you, such as location, travel, hours, etc.

What changes would I like to make? Write down some changes you would like to make in your work life.

(Adapted from *Career planning and job-seeking workbook*, The Open University, 2014.)

Comment

This activity should have given you a really good overview of the thoughts you have been developing over the first two weeks of the course. Maybe you have surprised yourself or this has just given you opportunity to put into words the thoughts that you've been having for a while. Either way, this is a really great start to your own career planning process.

Your final task for Week 2 is to complete the end-of-week quiz.

8 This week's quiz

Alongside analysing your own career assets, you are learning about how to assess and refocus your working life by learning new concepts. The end-of-week quiz gives you the opportunity to check your understanding and progress. Again, it consists of five questions and will help you to prepare for the longer Week 4 badged quiz.

Go to:

[Week 2 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

9 Summary

Your notebook should be filling up nicely now with reflections on what you like to do, the roles and abilities you have, as well as the abilities you feel confident about, and which may need further development. Hopefully, you're feeling positive about yourself and inspired to keep moving forward. Next week you are going to move on to the next step of the careers planning process – exploring opportunities.

You should now feel that you can:

- list the knowledge, skills and experience you already have
- identify which knowledge, skills and experience you want to make the most of
- understand any changes you might want to make to your knowledge and skills, in order to pursue your aspirations.

You can now go to Week 3.

Week 3: Exploring available opportunities

Introduction

In Weeks 1 and 2 of *Succeed in the workplace* you concentrated on the first step in the careers planning process – knowing yourself. This gives you a solid foundation to work from for the next steps you'll take, specifically exploring opportunities. You'll do this in conjunction with the aspirations that you identified in Week 1.

Whatever your personal starting point, the extent to which you can fulfil your aspirations depends, in part, on being able to identify and access the opportunities open to you.

This week you will focus on exploring new opportunities or looking again at ones that are already there, but which you may not be using as fully as possible. 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.

Now watch Wendy introduce Week 3:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- evaluate the opportunities available to you in developing your career

- identify sources of information on finding work
- consider alternative options to full-time employment
- think of ways to keep motivated.

1 The career planning process – where am I now?

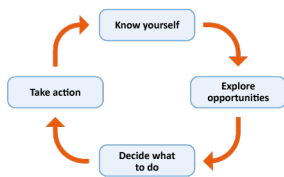


Figure 1 The careers planning process

Here's a quick reminder of where you are in the careers planning process. You've already completed step one, 'know yourself', and are moving on to 'explore opportunities' now. You're already a quarter of the way through the process – well done for sticking with it. Now you need to match what you know about yourself to the opportunities available. You'll learn about the importance of this next step in the first activity of the week.

Activity 1 Why explore opportunities?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Watch this short video in which a careers adviser explains the importance of this step in the career planning process.

Video content is not available in this format.



Although the adviser talks specifically about paid work, the point she is making holds true for unpaid work. It is becoming rare that you can find unpaid work without the same kind of search for opportunities that you do for paid work. You may agree with some of the points made in the video, especially if they reflect your own experiences. You might disagree with some too, for the same reason. Take a few minutes to note down in your notebook your reactions to the following questions.

1. How far do you agree with what the careers adviser says – do you have any personal experiences that suggest she has a good point?
2. How do you feel about taking a structured approach to pursuing your aspirations?
3. What challenges might adopting this approach present for you? Who might support or help you in meeting such a challenge?

Comment

As with most of the activities in this course, what you will have written down will reflect your own personal experiences. Try not to think of any challenges as obstacles, but rather as problems to be solved. In that way you can start to take control of them.

A structured approach can really help, whether you are absolutely certain of what work you want to do, or uncertain. You are fortunate if you have a very clear idea, as most people won't be in this position. Identifying where your ideas fall in this range of possibilities is a good place to start when exploring opportunities and you'll consider this in the next section.

2 How clear are you about what you want?



Figure 2 Clarity

As you watched the video, you might have wondered how clear 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 into thinking about your own. Try this in the next activity.

Activity 2 Are Christopher's thoughts clear?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

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, which closed down. He has since lost his driving licence due to a succession of speeding fines.

Christopher marked himself as '3' on the 'clear about work' continuum. His notes explained his mark 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.

What do you notice about Christopher's case? Jot down a few ideas. (Do not worry about recording these ideas in your notebook as your comments here are not about you.)

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 licence. Although you might feel differently if you discovered that most of those fines were incurred doing the delivery job.

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 but 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 3 Are you clear about your aspirations?

Allow approximately 10 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 kind of questions you might need to be asking.

1 – represents feeling very confused about what work you want to find.

10 – represents absolute certainty.

Try to choose the number which best represents how you feel at the moment and make a note in your notebook.

Now you have made this judgement, use the questions below to help you to see why you might have rated your level of clarity in the way you did. Write your answers in your notebook.

1. I chose number () because ...
2. What I know now about the kind of work I want to do is ...
3. What I would like to find out about work opportunities is ...

Comment

Hopefully, you found that you had some ideas of the kind of work you would like to do, based on your work in Weeks 1 and 2. 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? If you really are unsure, have a look the [OU Careers Advisory Service website](#) to get some more help.

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 work of your choice.

Remember, at this stage, you are not committing yourself to anything. You are just exploring the options. You can afford a bit of uncertainty. You can also afford to change your mind if your discoveries show that your initial ideas are not your best ones.

You've now got an idea or ideas to work on. Your next task is to refine these further.

3 Refining your ideas: where to get information

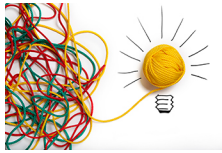


Figure 3 Refining your ideas

However clear you feel about your preferred work options, it is useful to test 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.

The two-step process that follows is designed to help you to do some early testing of your ideas. It will work best if you identify a particular type of work or career path that has so far emerged 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 other charity helping people, would be rewarding. Whatever your thoughts, you need to do a bit of finding out or '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. So, here's a list of possible people or organisations that you could use, and what information you could find out from them.

Table 1

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.
Job Centre 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 to whom they can introduce you.
Jobs pages of local newspapers	Gives 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.
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 companies.
Radio programmes	Local programmes might report on site closures or new businesses starting up in the area, for example.
Community notice boards	They will occasionally carry job advertisements for local jobs, such as acting as clerk to the council.
Local Chamber of Commerce	Through the people you meet via this network, you may hear of jobs that are not advertised. This is true of many professional networks.

For the purposes of these next activities, 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.

Activity 4 Who would you ask?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

Spend a few moments thinking about which three sources you want to consult and why. Write your choices and reasons in your notebook.

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, if there is, to visit your local library to look at a few copies.

Comment

As you completed this activity, you might 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. You might also have had reasons that hint at what you would like to find out. For example, if you are interested in combining your work as a counsellor with your love of education, you might want to find out if your local college or university uses counsellors.

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 in the next section.

3.1 Types of question 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 know where to begin.

So the next activity is designed to help you to identify a few questions that you want answers to.

At this stage, these sorts of question 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 scenario 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 geographical area.

To help you decide what questions to ask, you're going to look again at Christopher's situation from [Activity 2](#).

Activity 5 Identifying Christopher's questions

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Imagine that Christopher is your friend. He tells you he has decided that he wants to pursue his idea of becoming a car mechanic but wants to test the possibility. What questions do 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.

Write the questions you think would be useful for him to research below. As this information is not about you, there is no need to write it in your notebook.

Provide your answer...

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 his/her 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 (like Quick 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 section.

3.2 Identifying your questions

This section will help you to apply your learning about how to create useful research questions for your own needs.

Remember the four different categories are:

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

Activity 6 What do I want to know?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Remind yourself of the three sources of information you wrote down for [Activity 4](#), and identify three questions you think 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:

- What is the trend for software engineering in the UK – are the numbers of employed workers going up or down?
- In which industry sectors do most software engineers 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. So, consider this carefully when constructing your own questions.

Now write down in your notebook 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

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 kinds of work do they ask volunteers to do?

Comment

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

- an idea of the kind of work you want to find out about
- 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.

3.3 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 the final week 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 7 Research in action

Allow approximately 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 6](#). Spend the same amount of time on the three information sources you identified as useful.

Remember to write down in your notebook any information you find. You should also make a note of the source of the information, in case you want to find it again.

When you've done this, organise the information in your notebook under the question categories of:

- 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 kind of 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 kind 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.

4 Matching you and the work



Figure 4 Matching yourself to the work you want

Your research in the last section may well have uncovered practical issues that you might 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 you want to do is restricted to the organisation's head office, which is too far away for you. Before you let issues like these dominate your thinking, consider your timescales for finding this kind of work.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How long are you prepared to take, to develop your career and obtain 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?

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

In Weeks 1 and 2 you considered your preferences based on your interests, values, skills and personal constraints. 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. The next section encourages you to do this.

5 Broader options

It is easy, when thinking about the word 'job', to associate it with a full-time commitment to one organisation over a sustained period of time. As already noted in Week 1, 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.

In this section you will learn about a broader range of options than full-time jobs. As you work 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.

Option 1: Part-time work

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.

Option 2: Temporary and contract work

Temporary and contract work is most often a job that has an end date, unlike a permanent job which has an open-ended contract.

This can give you experience and valuable contacts in a variety of environments. It can be 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.

Option 3: Home-based employee

This is someone employed by an organisation but works from home for all or part of their working week.

Option 4: Self-employment

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 which may or may not suit you.

Option 5: Flexible working

If you are already in employment, and have worked for your employer continuously for the last 26 weeks, you can apply for flexible working arrangements. This 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.

Option 6: Portfolio working

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.

Option 7: Working in another country

This is exactly what it says on the tin and 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 Making choices and keeping going



Figure 5 Making choices

At this point you may be feeling overwhelmed by all the potential work options. This is natural. The kind of work and thinking you are doing can feel challenging at times. As well as this, the world of work and developing a career is very complex. You may feel at the moment as if there are too many options, which may be making you feel unsettled. Although uncomfortable, these kinds of feeling are not necessarily a bad thing. They are a sign that you are making progress with the changes you want.

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

- Prioritise only the options that you think you could make happen within the next 3–6 months
- Do a numerical ratings exercise on the options – give them three points if they feel really attractive, two points if they have some attraction and only one point if they do not appeal to you. Then concentrate your thinking only on the one or two top-scoring options.

Then, before moving on to the final activity this week, remind yourself of how much you have already achieved. Focus only on the things you **have** done, not the ones you might have left to one side. Whatever you are able to do on this course is great. It still takes you forward. Remember that you will have your notebook 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.

Before leaving this week behind though, pause to think about which of the work options may have appeal or merit to you, now or in the future.

Activity 8 Work options and patterns

Allow approximately 15 minutes

First, read back through the research in your notebook for the kind of work you want to find. Next think about whether any of the seven options included in Section 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?

Makes some notes in your notebook 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?

[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.

7 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

[Week 3 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

8 Summary

This week you've had the chance to look further into the work that interests you and to consider different ways of working, which may enable you to progress with your goals. You may well find that instead of having fewer questions now, you have more. This is to be expected when you start digging into a new area of work, so see this as a positive step in your career planning process.

Next week you'll be looking at the value of different types of work experience.

You should now feel that you can:

- evaluate the opportunities available to you in developing your career
- identify sources of information on finding work
- consider alternative options to full-time employment
- think of ways to keep motivated.

You can now go to Week 4.

Week 4: Considering work experience and voluntary work

Introduction

Last week you began to match your interests and aspirations with the employment market. Your discoveries will have been very personal to you. For instance, you might have found reassurance that it is likely to be a straightforward journey from where you are now to the work you would like to do. It is more likely, however, that you have discovered that you need to gain skills or experiences which you currently lack and have begun to think about how you could acquire these.

This week you will focus on how work experience and voluntary work can help you gain some of these skills and experiences. Even if you have a clear career path, and defined aims for what you want to achieve, you can still benefit from considering how work experience and voluntary work might help you.

Since the nature of work experience and voluntary work differ, these are treated separately this week. This may mean that parts of this week will be more relevant to you than others. You'll start by considering work experience.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 4:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- understand the benefits of both work experience and voluntary work
- explore work experience and voluntary work options to support your career development
- understand how to approach a work experience or voluntary work opportunity
- identify what you have discovered from the first half of the course.

1 What is meant by 'work experience'?



Figure 1 Get your future started

Work experience includes work you do before starting on a career path, or as part of enhancing your existing career. It can be part of a formal work experience scheme or from the work you have done, or are currently doing. Whatever form it takes, work experience can be useful whether you are:

- trying to join the workforce for the first time
- aiming to make a change in your current career direction
- building up to taking on work after a break from it
- looking to progress or develop your existing career.

Work experience can take several forms:

- previous or current employment – the experience you get from being employed
- work placement – a period of work experience, paid or unpaid, which forms part of a period of study
- internship – a short-term placement in an organisation, often unpaid
- work-based project – a specific set of assessed activities carried out on the employer's premises. This might be your own employer, of course, but in a different field of work than you usually do
- work shadowing – observing someone do the work you want to do, in order to understand the nature of their role and responsibilities.

Voluntary work is a particular kind of work experience, with different features and benefits, so this is considered in latter part of this week.

The first activity this week will help you to update your skills profile from Week 2 by identifying past work experience.

Activity 1 My past work experience

Allow approximately 5 minutes

In Week 2, you considered the work experiences you have already, and the skills you gained from them. The definition and examples above may have reminded you about work experience you might so far have overlooked. For example:

- Did you undertake any work experience placements whilst you were at school?
- Were you ever part of a project team at your place of work?
- Have you taken a course of study in which you were given a work placement?
- Have you ever observed the work of someone who was already an experienced practitioner as part of your training?

Find your notes on work experience from Week 2 and add any other experiences you may have missed. Remember to include any skills that you've gained.

Comment

You may well not have needed to add anything to your previous notes, if you have already covered all your previous work experience. Or you may find that something pops into your mind later in the week, when least expected – if so, remember to go back to your notebook and update this section then.

So, let's think about what the benefits of work experience are.

2 What are the benefits of work experience?



Figure 2 Dipping your toe into work experience

You may have noticed that some of the options identified in the previous section could involve taking on work in addition to existing commitments, such as a project on top of your 'day job'. Others involve working without pay. You might be unsure about the benefits of doing this. If so you are not alone. Only you can decide whether you have the energy and motivation to invest in gaining work experience which may put you under pressure in other aspects of your life. However, the short video in this next activity may help you to see the benefits of doing work experience.

Activity 2 Why is work experience useful?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Watch the following video in which two Open University students explain the value of work experience. Make notes below on what arguments they put forward for gaining work experience.

Video content is not available in this format.



Provide your answer...

Answer

- It is the best way of understanding a particular career path
- It allows you to see many different routes within a career path
- It might challenge some of your ideas about a career path – for example, that engineering is always dirty work
- Employers would consider you more favourably if you had gone to the trouble of getting work experience
- It is important for you to find out more about what the work entails before you take a paid job.

Discussion

Most employers look favourably on applicants who have work experience that enhances their application. It might, therefore, help you to get the work you want to do but that is not the only reason to do it. It may also benefit your personally.

- You can show that you have developed a range of transferable skills
- When these skills match what an employer is looking for, they make you a more attractive proposition
- The fact that you have sought out work which gives you insight into the career you want to pursue, helps persuade employers that you are committed and understand what the job requires
- It makes a positive impression, shows that you can initiate and follow through on things independently
- You will develop a number of useful contacts.

So, work experience is both pleasing to a prospective employer, as well as helping you to achieve your goals, whether that is in your current employment or a new direction. It can also test out whether some of the ideas on your 'what next' list are really would be as enjoyable as you imagine.

Whatever your reason for wanting to gain new work experiences, the obvious next question to ask yourself is 'where might I find them?'

3 Ways to find work experience opportunities



Figure 3 Finding work experience opportunities

With imagination and planning it is possible to find useful opportunities for work experience whatever your circumstances. Taking the following three-pronged approach to considering your options is useful:

1. Exploit opportunities in your current work situation.
2. Use your contacts.
3. Do your own research.

Let's look at each of these in turn in the next sections.

3.1 Exploit opportunities



Figure 4 Opportunities

If you are already working, you may find you can volunteer or do work experience in a different role with your current employer. Many organisations have schemes for their employees and some may pay for employees to undertake work experience elsewhere. If your organisation has a Human Resources department, they might be the best people to tell you if such a scheme exists. If not, your immediate manager may be able to advise you.

Work shadowing

You might want to consider work shadowing other members of staff whose roles appeal to you. You will get a more realistic idea of the responsibilities, skills and challenges of the posts. How you arrange this might depend on the support of your manager, so opening up a conversation with him or her about the possibility is a good first step.

Job swap

Job swapping within your existing organisation might be a good way to get a 'taste' of different types of work. For instance, if you normally work on the shop floor of a retail organisation, could you ask to swap with a colleague in the store room for a short period?

3.2 Use your contacts



Figure 5 The importance of contact management

If you are not working at the moment, do you still have contacts from any past workplaces that could open up opportunities for you? For example, if you used to work for a local authority which organises summer festivals or sports events using volunteer helpers, could you ask someone if you could be involved? Do you know anyone who volunteers at a local charity who might be able to let you know when new opportunities come up?

Perhaps you have been a student until recently and are looking for your first job. Check out whether any of your fellow ex-students have already found work and might be able to make suggestions or introduce you to their colleagues.

You may be returning to the workforce after, for example, a period of absence due to illness, or serving a custodial sentence, or travelling abroad and so have more limited work-based contacts. If so, do not ignore the obvious potential places to start, such as, friends, family, job centres, voluntary organisations or careers advisers.

3.3 Do your own research



Figure 6 Research

Work experience can be found in all sorts of organisations, but there is likely to be competition for work experience placements at the bigger, well-known organisations, so you need to plan ahead. For instance, are any careers and placements fairs coming up which you could attend, so that you can talk to employers directly about their work experience opportunities?

In Week 3 you practised the skill of researching the kinds of jobs available. Now you can take it a step further. Look at the websites of organisations which interest you. Can you see anything about work experience? Is there a contact you could approach to ask if the organisation takes people on work experience placements? You may find phoning is more productive than an email. Remember that small local businesses may be in a position to help, as well.

Before moving onto the next section, take some time to think about how or if each of these approaches would work for you.

Activity 3 How would you use each prong?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Think about each of the three prongs from this section and jot down any ideas in your notebook about how you could use these in your own situation to find work experience.

Comment

As usual your answer to this activity will depend entirely on your own situation but it should give you some ideas for how you could find some valuable work experience.

Whichever approach you take, you need to be realistic about the work experience options that are open to you. The next section will ask you to do just that.

4 The practicalities of work experience for you



Figure 7 Finding time for work experience

Finding the right work experience might involve you working in your spare time. If you want to teach, for example, it is important to spend time in a classroom before applying for teacher training. If you already have a full time job, you may have to consider using part of your annual leave.

You need to be creative but realistic in assessing options. Organise work experience that suits you and your career plans. Your time is precious, so use it constructively and be realistic about what you can take on. However, work experience need not be full time or even long term. It might be occasional, regular, or even home-based. Local or home-based work experience also has the advantage of requiring little or no travel, so you can have the added benefit of requiring less time and money to undertake it.

Whatever your personal circumstances, for most people making initial approaches can feel daunting, so it can be very helpful to rehearse how you might do this. The next activity is designed to help you with this.

Activity 4 Approaching people about work experience opportunities

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Imagine that you want to approach an employer, about finding work experience you think would be helpful to you. It is useful to have a particular employer or contact person in mind because this helps you to think about:

- Should I email them or write?

- Should I telephone or speak face-to-face?
- What should I say to them about why I have approached them?
- What questions should I ask, about what they have to offer?

In your notebook write down how you would introduce the topic of work experience and what questions you might want to ask them in a first conversation. You may never send the specific email you write here, or say the exact words you write down, but just the act of writing them down prepares you for a real approach.

4.1 Making the most of your work experience



Figure 8 Making the most of opportunities

Once you have found some work experience, how can you ensure that you make the most of it? After all, it is a big commitment on both sides and you want to be sure that you can reap the benefits. The following points can act as a kind of checklist for you.

- **Have clear aims** – set goals you can reasonably achieve in that period.
- **Understand your needs** – they should fit with the organisation that is offering you work experience.
- **Find support** – ask for a named person who is responsible for helping to make your work experience successful.
- **Get feedback** – ask whether you have shown aptitude for the work or demonstrated learning of the skills needed.
- **Build your contacts** – look for opportunities to make contacts, remembering chats during coffee or lunch breaks can be perfect for this.
- **Review what you have done** – what did I learn about the work, the employer or myself from this experience?

This last point is probably the one that gets overlooked, especially if you are particularly busy, but it is perhaps the most important to spend some time on. Asking this simple question and making notes can help you when writing job applications, in interviews and with the important task of deciding on your career path.

Hopefully, you now feel you understand the potential value work experience can offer you personally. You may have concluded that it is just what you need and it will form part of your action plan at the end of the course. You may, on the other hand, still be actively searching for alternatives. Voluntary work is one such alternative and is covered in the next part of this week's study.

5 What is 'voluntary work'?



Figure 9 Volunteers

Voluntary work is unpaid work, usually carried out in your own time. Some volunteer organisations may pay expenses, but you give your time and skills for free. It differs from work experience in that it usually offers many more options for patterns of work. Whereas, work experience may be a full time commitment for a defined period of time, such as a week or a month, voluntary work is more often part-time and can be a long-term commitment on both sides.

It is important to remember that getting involved as a volunteer is a commitment as your colleagues will rely on you. So, even if the work is unpaid, you should expect to take your responsibilities seriously.

There are many reasons why people choose to take on voluntary work. Sometimes it is out of a desire to help others and a belief that you get most out of life when you are involved with and contributing to society. This is not the only reason to consider volunteering. For some, volunteering will be about gaining something personally to help achieve their career aims.

You'll see what the benefits of volunteering are in the next section.

6 Voluntary work and career development



Figure 10 Voluntary work and career development

On this course, the focus is primarily on how voluntary work might help you to explore and pursue your preferred career path. Firstly though it is worth considering some of the benefits of volunteering.

They include:

- the chance to enhance existing skills and develop new ones, by doing different work than you may have done before
- the experience of working in a new environment
- a way to learn more about yourself, and your abilities, as well as to gain more self-confidence. You may be exposed to issues, situations and people you would not normally encounter
- the potential to gain relevant vocational training which could lead to a recognised qualification. Some charities require you to undergo training which they provide
- developing new contacts and friends
- a real sense of what it is like to do a particular kind of work in an organisation
- the satisfaction of contributing to something which you find worthwhile
- a place to feel valued and respected for your efforts
- gaining experiences which you will be able to use in future job applications.

It is easy to claim that certain benefits are possible, but it is more persuasive to hear from people who have experienced them. For instance, this is what several Open University students who tried out voluntary work had to say about their experiences:

What OU students say

1. **An inside view** 'I volunteered two days a week for the charity, Action for Sustainable Living. This gave me an inside knowledge of the charity and I built a strong relationship with staff members. When paid roles were made available, I had a clear advantage over other applicants.'
2. **A boost for the CV** 'I'm a treasurer of a youth football team, which I find very rewarding as well as tiring and time consuming. Trying to fit in my job, my OU course and this voluntary work is really stretching me! I would recommend anyone looking for work experience to try volunteering as a means of adding depth to your CV.'
3. **A gateway to new roles** 'Although I am now paid, I started my career as a volunteer advocate while working as a computer programmer. This facilitated a change into the world of social care and gave me the disability awareness I needed to change roles.'

(The Open University, 2014)

So, volunteering can be rewarding in many ways but it can also be challenging. However, as with all challenges, overcoming them helps you to acquire the skills and confidence for the future. Just think carefully about what kind of voluntary work is right for you, at this point in your life.

The next section will help you to decide what might suit you.

7 What voluntary work might suit me?

Remember that voluntary work requires commitment, just like a paid job. Therefore, you need to be realistic about how much of a contribution you can offer alongside your existing work and personal commitments. It might be that the occasional 'one off' event or a short-term project best suits the time you have available. Alternatively, you might find a regular, more long-term but contained commitment, like an hour each week, easier to sustain.

Some voluntary work is less easily accessible. For instance, voluntary opportunities which involve working with potentially vulnerable people, such as counselling, advice work or advocacy, often have rigorous requirements. The selection process may involve providing references and applying for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or a Disclosure check in Scotland. You may also need to commit time to do appropriate training before you begin.

It is important, therefore, that you consider:

- what voluntary work offers you
- what you can bring to it
- your motivations
- what you can do
- what constraints you might have.

The next activity will help do just that.

Activity 5 Identifying what you could offer as a volunteer

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This exercise will help you to explore what type of voluntary work you might be suited to do. Do not start by asking yourself whether or not you want to do voluntary work, instead begin by thinking about what you could offer.

Use the questions below to prompt your thinking. Do not think about it too much. Just write down your first thoughts in your notebook. You will have the chance to revisit this in more depth, if you wish to do so later in the course.

- Why might you be interested in volunteering?
- What causes would you see as worthwhile?
- Do you have any specialist skills or expertise, you are willing to share with others? (To help you to answer this, look again at the skills audit you did in Week 2 in your notebook or the [Resource pack](#).)
- Are there any particular personal qualities which you feel suit you to working as a volunteer, such as the ability to make others feel comfortable, or to empathise with them and their situation? Or are you good at practical problem-solving?
- Would you want to work with a particular client group such as elderly people, children, or adults with learning difficulties? Or in a particular field such as the environment, homelessness or adult literacy?
- How much time could you realistically offer, and are you looking for a short or a longer term commitment?

- Would you need to cover your basic expenses in order for you to get involved as a volunteer?
- How far are you prepared to travel to undertake the work?
- What kind of fulfilment do you want to gain from voluntary work?
- What do you think you might find most challenging about voluntary work?

Comment

Doing this activity helps you to see what you could offer if you do pursue voluntary work and gives you some clues on the kind of volunteer work which might be attractive. In the next section you'll consider whether or not volunteering would be a good choice for you in your life right now.

7.1 Is it the right time to volunteer?

This activity asks you to assess how well voluntary work fits with your needs and objectives.

Activity 6 Voluntary work 'fit' for me

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Part 1

Take a few moments to reflect on the information in this last section.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is 'this is the perfect option for me' and 1 is 'cannot see how this helps me at all') where do you score yourself in relation to volunteering now?

Comment

If you have scored below 5 ask yourself whether or not your answer might be different in the future. Does your answer depend on practicalities which might change over time, or do you just not see this as something which appeals to you at all? If you score 5 or above, then you might want to think about what actions you can take to explore voluntary work options.

If you did score more than 5 for volunteering try Part 2 of this activity.

Part 2

In your notebook answer the following questions about volunteering and any actions you might need to take to do this.

1. In what time frame might I consider voluntary work?
2. What kind of voluntary work might I apply to do?
3. I am keen to consider voluntary work, what research do I need to do?
4. What do I want to do in the next month?
5. What do I want to do after this course ends?

Comment

Voluntary work may not be for everybody but it can be very rewarding on a personal level, as well as having the added benefit of helping with your career development. Whatever you decide to do, it should be what you feel reasonably comfortable with undertaking. Think about starting small, with a local charity and working your way up.

This week has focused on how work experience or voluntary work might help you to develop the kind of career you want, now or in the future.

It adds to the understanding you have developed over the past four weeks about:

- your motivations
- the contributions you can make (and want to make).

You may be feeling impatient to move on to actively pursuing work options. The second half of the course focuses on this but, before you move on, it is important to reflect on your conclusions, so far. The final section in this week provides a structure for doing this.

8 Pausing on the journey

This week represents the half-way point in the course. Pause and congratulate yourself on coming this far! On any learning journey, your motivation and energy will fluctuate. Sometimes you can lose sight of why you began in the first place. Now is a good point, therefore, at which to stand back and consider what you have already learned and what you still want to explore.

The final activity this week is a longer reflective exercise designed to help you to collate your insights and decide on your focus for the next four weeks.

Activity 7 My half-way learning review

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Let's work with the idea that the course is a journey. Imagine that you have been climbing a steep hill. You were keen to see the view from the top and were ready for the challenge of the climb. You have been climbing steadily, sometimes with mist obscuring your view, and at other times with gaps, which allow you to glimpse new horizons.



Figure 11 Reviewing your course journey

About now, you may feel that the top is still a long way off. It is a good point to stop, catch your breath, look back at how far you have climbed and refocus your motivation for the last bit of the climb.

Over the past four weeks, you have been encouraged to keep a record of your journey in your notebook. You may have done this more fully in some weeks than others, and you will almost certainly have made discoveries along the way.

You will find it useful to scan back over your entries, so far, before answering some of the questions. If you have not been recording your thoughts so far, you will still find it useful to do so now.

Reflect on the questions below and write your answers in your notebook.

1. What motivated you to begin this course?
2. Has your motivation changed at all during the last four weeks?
3. What have you concluded, so far, about the kind of work you want to do?
4. What have you discovered about being able to access that kind of work for yourself?

5. What decisions have you made about the action you need to take to pursue your aspirations?
6. How confident do you feel about achieving the kind of career you want for yourself?
7. What would make you feel more confident?
8. What do you want to achieve, and learn, in the remaining four weeks of the course?
9. Think back to the idea, from Week 1, of a career being like a train journey. Now take a moment or two, to visualise success in your career at some point in the future. Choose a time not too far away. Where would you be on your train journey? What would you be doing? Who else might be there? How would you feel?

Top tip – you might find it easier to draw than to write this. If so, do this by hand separately.

[Comment](#)

This activity acts as a useful summary of what you have discovered so far on this course, and some of the actions that you should be thinking of taking now. Over the next four weeks of the course, you may find it helpful to remind yourself now and then of this summary.

Now all that is left for you to complete this week is the first badge quiz.

9 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 4 badge quiz. It is similar to previous quizzes, but this time, instead of answering five questions there will be 15.

Go to:

[Week 4 compulsory badge quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

10 Summary

Congratulations on reaching the end of Week 4 of *Succeed in the workplace*. This is a great achievement in itself. Hopefully, you also feel that you have made good progress in the career planning process. Over the last four weeks you have thought about yourself and started to explore opportunities. This week you have made a start on 'deciding what to do'; as you've looked at possible work experience and volunteering that will help you achieve your aspirations.

In Week 5, you will turn your attention to making the most of the people around you and expanding your contacts – otherwise known, as your network. See you there.

You should now feel that you can:

- understand the benefits of both work experience and voluntary work
- explore work experience and voluntary work options to support your career development
- understand how to approach a work experience or voluntary work opportunity
- identify what you have discovered from the first half of the course.

You are now half way through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional [end-of-course survey](#), which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Week 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You can now go to Week 5.

Week 5: Social and employment networking

Introduction

Over the first four weeks of the course, you have been clarifying what you want to achieve in career terms and how your interests and aspirations might fit the current job market. So you're already half way through the career planning process and should be feeling a bit clearer on what you want to achieve. You have also done some work on how to access your preferred work and have probably realised the importance of contacts and relationships in this process. This week you will deepen your understanding of how to create and sustain networks of contacts that can support your career plans.

Remember to keep making notes on the activities, and any other thoughts that occur to you, in your notebook.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 5:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- understand networks and networking
- explore traditional and online networking opportunities

- consider how networking supports your career development
- map your own network and plan how to extend it.

1 What is networking?

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2009, p. 961) defines a 'network' as an 'arrangement of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines.' This might not immediately seem relevant to networks of people but actually it helps with visualising how people in a network connect up, because the dictionary goes on to suggest that a network can also be 'a group or system of interconnected people and things'. Figure 1 is an example of what a network of people might look like. It shows clearly the direct connections from one person to another. However, it also shows the same people are connected indirectly, via other contacts.



Figure 1 Example of a network of people

Alternatively, Figure 2 is an example of a typical organisation chart for a business.



Figure 2 A typical organisation chart for a business

There are vertical lines between people, representing who is more senior and who reports to whom. As well as this vertical arrangement, there are also clear horizontal arrangements for the roles. These indicate which departments are equal to but different from each other. Effectively, the organisation chart shows how the 'system', which is the business in this case, is interconnected and meant to function.

However, most people who have worked in organisations know that people do not always communicate in the vertical and horizontal ways which the chart suggests. People talk to the people they know. So a more informal network will exist within any organisation and it will look more like the interconnected web shown in Figure 1.

This is because networks are groups of people with a common interest, one which is not dependent on tasks or work objectives. For instance, your organisation might have a running club, where all the members are interested in running but wouldn't necessarily work with each other directly.

In your personal life, you might belong to an online network of rail enthusiasts, or you perhaps participate in a walking group in which walk leadership is provided by anyone knowing the route.

Networks bring together people with a common interest, they are largely outside formal structures, and any hierarchy which might exist is based on the usefulness of a person to the network.

Now you have a picture of a network, let's move onto to thinking about networking in the next section.

2 What does networking look like in action?



Figure 3 Networking

A network is a group of interconnected people with a common interest. The network is the result of making these connections – otherwise known as networking. You will probably have heard this term being used more in recent years.

This first activity gets you to think about examples of networking you may know about, or be involved with yourself.

What connections with other people would you classify as networking?

Activity 1 Prompting thoughts about networking

Allow approximately 5 minutes

As quickly as you can, write down as many examples of networking that you can think of in the box below. An example is given to get you started.

I would be networking if I was ...

(e.g. having lunch with a former colleague who is interested in joining your new organisation.)

Provide your answer...

Answer

Comment

You would be networking if you were ...

- Arranging a coffee morning with your neighbours
- Telephoning someone you met at a local community event
- Going to a local club
- Having coffee with a colleague from another department at work
- Joining in an online conversation
- Setting up a local fitness group
- Chatting with a neighbour at the shops
- Meeting a friend from another department for a drink after work.

You may well have a very different list from this and that is just fine. There are many different ways of networking.

There has to be a purpose for networking to happen. Without it, many of the activities could be simply social. Of course, they are valuable as social events, but what makes them networking activities is that you have a reason beyond just liking the people you are interacting with.

The purpose can just as easily be about giving something to someone else. Networks depend on give and take. Otherwise, why would people sustain them?

By now you understand a little more about networking but may also have questions about how it fits in with shaping and developing your career. The next section addresses this issue.

3 Why network?



Figure 4 Why network?

There are several advantages to developing a network to help you to develop your career. The next few sections outline some of these. Some are directly work-related, others may apply more generally in your life. They are followed by an activity to help you reflect.

3.1 Helping you to get things done



Figure 5 Working with others

Being successful in anything you undertake depends on achieving what you said you would, whether that is for your colleagues, friends in a club or people you work for.

However, this is not always as easy as it sounds. In a complex world, getting things done often requires working with other people and influencing them to help us. For instance, it might not be possible for one small local organisation to set up a community garden but by working with other groups and the local council this could be enough to get it off the ground. Who you know and have conversations with will determine how easy it is to form a partnership.

3.2 Finding creative solutions



Figure 6 Finding creative solutions

Networks also provide a way to increase your creativity and problem solving ability because they allow you to see things from another's perspective. While many organisations benchmark themselves against their industry competitors, they might learn more by comparing how they do things within an organisation in a very different sector.

Imagine, for example, that you have been asked to help with a project to improve communications in a not-for-profit care company. It has grown rapidly from one to five care homes, a head office and a small number of home-based staff.

Where are you likely to learn most about how to communicate with such a dispersed group?

Any kind of organisation whose staff are spread across different sites, such as a national retailer, will be useful, not just other care organisations. They may have practices you could copy, but more importantly, they might encourage you to approach the issue in different ways.

3.3 Ensuring you stay current



Figure 7 Staying current and not obsolete

Searching for the answer to a problem in the way described in the previous section, is developmental in itself. You learn new things, adapt and apply them, and then have new abilities to add to your skills profile. This is important in career terms as most are subject to almost constant changes. Networks help you to keep up to date with these changes as information and ideas flow through them.

For instance, at a community group meeting it is likely that as many ideas will be shared in huddles during coffee, as during the formal meeting itself. Socially, the same is true. You are just as likely to find out about the latest gadgets from a conversation with friends, as from advertisements. Of course today the Internet makes it possible to connect up with people whom you might never meet in another way.

3.4 Finding work



Figure 8 Looking for work

If you are currently seeking work, one reason for networking is that it is an effective way to access jobs which you might not otherwise hear about. You might find it a strange idea that you should look for jobs which might be 'hidden' or that you should focus your efforts on a particular company which interests you, especially if your experience so far has been of applying for advertised jobs. There is practical wisdom in using networks to help you to find work though.

In 2013, research found that 23% of employers reported that speculative or word of mouth approaches were their most effective method of attracting potential staff. In the same year, 33% claimed that referrals from existing staff were their most effective method.

Having a network of contacts can not only help with this but also give you access to information about a business, such as:

- how a company is doing against its competitors
- whether the company is growing, is stable or is declining
- what it is like to work there
- what kind of strategy it is following
- some background information on key managers to you.

Some of these considerations you may have researched in Week 3. Networking adds another element to your research. It creates the opportunity to ask questions, find information or uncover differing perspectives through conversations.

The next activity is designed to help you to reflect on what networking has to offer you.

Activity 2 My reasons for networking

Allow approximately 10 minutes

This activity will help you to identify and prioritise your reasons for building new networks, or extend existing ones. You can be more purposeful about networking when you are clearer on your motivations.

The following table asks you to rank each of the potential reasons for networking according to their importance to you now. Do not worry about assessing this for the long term. You can either copy the table into your notebook or complete it in the [Resource pack](#). Use the following scale:

- 1 = the most important reason (for example, I am unlikely to be successful in my current career aims if I do not do this)
- 2 = important reason (but not my priority)
- 3 = not very important reason (that may only make a small difference to my chances of success)
- 4 = unimportant (will make little or no difference to my chances of success at this point)

Table 1 Reasons for networking

Reason	Ranking
Getting things done	
Finding creative solutions	

Ensuring I stay current	
Finding work	

Now answer the following questions in your notebook.

- Which reasons are the most important to you and why?
- What would you use networking to do next? For example, if the most important reason was 'finding creative solutions' – is there a specific problem you want to address?

Comment

Your thoughts here will depend on where you are with your career at the moment and what you want to achieve. Whatever they are, you will have the opportunity to firm up your plans in Week 8.

It is useful to consider different types of networks and how they can best help you. That is the subject of the next section.

4 Traditional networks and their uses in career management



Figure 9 Traditional networks

There are different types of network, all of which can help you to shape and achieve your career aspirations.

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 help more in general. Sometimes you may just need their encouragement to feel positive about your aspirations and achievements, or benefit from hearing the experiences of people in similar situations to you.

Organisational networks

As you learned earlier, 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 network have been identified:

- The 'advice' network – the key people 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. Similarly, people who perform similar voluntary work, sometimes meet formally or informally. For example, creative writers who work therapeutically with clients in hospitals and care homes might meet to share ideas.

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

Activity 3 Your traditional networks

Allow approximately 10 minutes

For the purpose of this course you should just concentrate on contacts that you think may be helpful with your career development, otherwise your network could become unusable just due to its size!

Be careful though who you omit as 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.

In your notebook write 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

Comment

Whether you have a long, a short or no list under different categories is not important. This will entirely depend on what point you are at in your life. What matters is that you have made a start on mapping your networks.

It is important not to forget about networks that are a result of the Internet. 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.

5 Social media networks

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 in which to expand your knowledge, and contacts, or exchange mutual support. It is also becoming one of the ways in which employers recruit people. For many people today it is becoming increasingly important to engage with these networks if you are serious about finding work.

Figure 10 shows some of the most popular social media networks, with estimates of the number of worldwide users. This gives you just a flavour of the size of these networks and their potential to create new contacts.

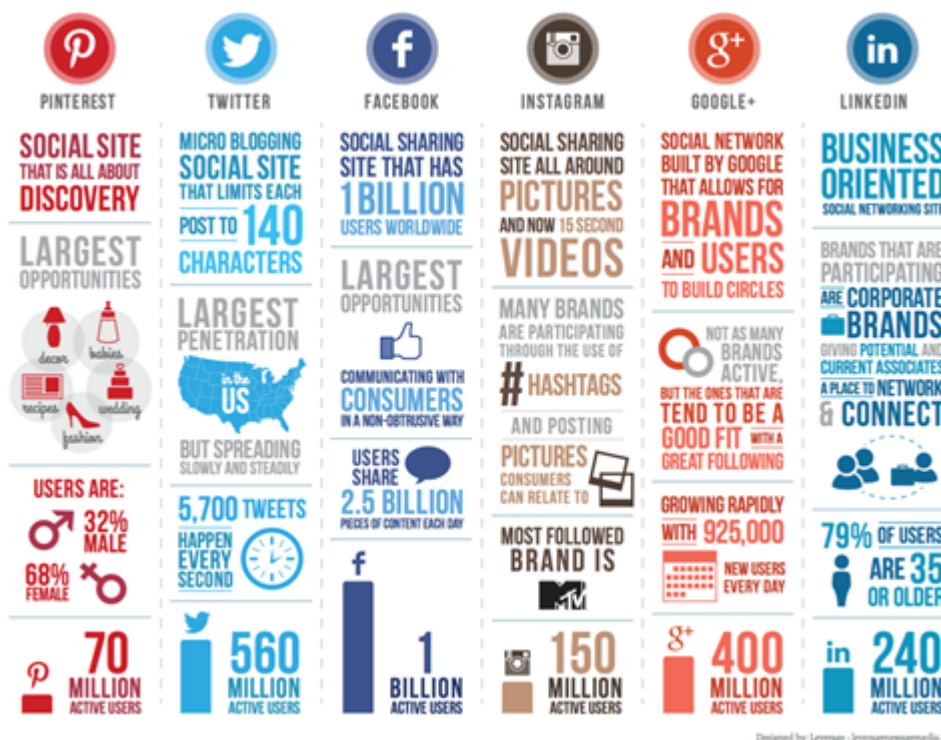


Figure 10 Some of the most popular social media networks

In the next section you'll learn a little more about social media that can be relevant to your career development.

5.1 What are 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).

Here's a brief overview of each.

1. **Facebook** (www.facebook.com)



Figure 11 Facebook

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.

1. **Twitter** (<https://twitter.com>)



Figure 12 Twitter

Twitter is mainly used on mobile phones and enables short messages of less than 140 characters 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 your eye out for opportunities.

Top tip: Include your career interests in your Twitter profile. Make it a kind of micro pitch for work.

1. **LinkedIn** (www.linkedin.com):



Figure 13 LinkedIn

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.

Top tip: There are different levels of membership but the most basic (and free) level is more than adequate for most people.

Some of you may already be active on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social media sites. For others they may be untried, difficult to access or uncomfortable places to be. So, the next section offers some brief tips on how to get started and also how to feel more secure online.

5.2 Getting started with social media

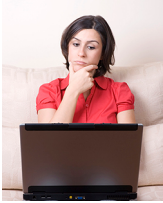


Figure 14 Social media

Social media can be a very useful for widening your existing networks and therefore career opportunities. So, even though you may feel wary about using them, it is worth considering giving them a go.

Here are some tips to help you:

- Dip your toe in the water by exploring social media sites on a need-to-know basis
- Limit the amount of time you give to it
- You can preserve it only for career development purposes
- Log in to social media sites to see who's who and what's what. It's fine to watch from the wings before making your appearance.

If you do take the plunge, bear these tips in mind to help you use the sites wisely:

- Be careful about what information you share and with whom
- Don't accept new friends, followers or contacts with 'no questions asked'
- Project yourself in a way which does not undermine your credibility at work
- Avoid detrimental comments about colleagues, past or present, and people who have interviewed you
- Think about the tone you use in your communications.

Before moving on, this next activity will give you the chance to find out more about Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn.

Activity 4 How can I use social media to help me?

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Use the following online resources to find out more about Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Jot down thoughts in your notebook on how you might like to use them.

- First watch this [short video from YouTube](#) about accessing and learning to use Facebook.
- Visit this [website](#) to find out more about Twitter and how to get started.
- Finally, visit this [website](#) for more on how LinkedIn can help on with your career development.

Comment

Hopefully, you now feel better informed about the potential that social media has to help you in your career development. You may want to dive straight in or just dip your

toe in the water. Whatever you decide, remember to use social media wisely to help you.

In the next section, you will return to your networks and bring together, in one place, all the information that you have gathered so far.

6 What does your complete network look like?



Figure 15 Your complete network

It is useful to get an understanding of how your different networks, and the contacts within them, fit together. It will make it clearer where they cross and are connected. You will use your notes from Activities 3 and 4 to do this now.

Activity 5 Mapping your whole network

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity helps you to create a 'network map'. This is a visual representation of all your contacts, and how they might connect together.

Part 1

Use the names from Activities 3 and 4 to create a visual representation of each network in your notebook. This is not a drawing exercise, so do not worry about your artistic abilities. You are simply trying to show on paper how things 'look' inside your head.

Remember to include your online contacts from social media, if you are already actively engaged online.

One method of doing this is to use a mind map.

There are many ways to approach this. However, one way may be to put yourself in the centre, with links from you to each of the different networks, off of which you can write the appropriate names. As shown in Figure 16.



Figure 16 Example mind map of your network

Or devise your own picture if you have an idea of your own.

Comment

When you think visually, you often think differently and see things you might not have realised before. The final step in the exercise, therefore, is to reflect on what you have learned about your existing network.

Part 2

Write down your answers to these questions in your notebook to help you think about what you have learned from your mapping. Do not feel constrained by the prompt questions though. Make a note of whatever feels significant to you.

- Are there some types of network you do not build or sustain from some reason? What might be the benefit if you did?
- Is the network imbalanced in some way? For example, do you have a great organisation network but know relatively few people outside your usual place of work? What effect might this have?
- What did you rank as your most and least important reasons for networking?
- Are there any strands of the network which need to be improved to help you to satisfy your main purpose in networking? What and why?
- What would you like to be able to say about your network in two years from now?

Comment

You may have been surprised by how extensive a network you have already developed. You will almost certainly have noticed some gaps or duplications in it. This is fine though, as it is a natural result of different ways we live our lives. The important thing is to consider how you can use and sustain your network or extend it.

Creating networks is one thing. Sustaining them is another. You need to be realistic, therefore, about how broad and deep a network you can manage at the moment. Being able to use networks skilfully and respectfully is the real challenge. You'll look at this in the next section.

7 Networks and finding work



Figure 17 Networks

Whatever career benefits come from having a good network, a primary reason for developing and sustaining a network will be to allow you to access the work you want to do.

Although you cannot rely on your contacts to help you to find a job, as there are many other ways that businesses recruit employees, they can probably help by providing valuable information.

Before you think about how your networks can help you, look at the list below of some of the ways that employers recruit:

- newspapers and journals
- the Internet
- recruitment agencies
- job centres.

Activity 6 Networking to support job applications

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Use these questions to identify how your network of contacts might help you with these different recruitment avenues. Write your answers in your notebook.

Part 1

- Do you know how and where the organisation/profession you are interested in advertises their opportunities? How might you find out?
- Is there a specific profession to which you belong to or which you would like to join? Do you know anyone who currently belongs to it?
- Do you know anyone who has successfully found a job through an Internet site? What questions might you want to ask him/her?
- Do you know the best recruitment agencies for the kind of work you are seeking?
- How many people could I call for help, if I saw a job advertised that I am interested in? How could they help me?

Comment

You may have found it easier to answer some of these questions than others. The ease or difficulty may tell you something about your existing network.

Part 2

Now, take a few minutes to reflect on how easy you found it to answer the questions and write down your thoughts in your notebook. Some questions are offered to prompt you but do not feel constrained by these. Make whatever notes feel pertinent to you.

- How easy was it for me to identify people in my network who could help me?
- Are there some key individuals in my network who seem to be of most use in my job search?
- Are there some gaps in my network which I might need to address if I am to find help in securing the work I want?
- My own thoughts ...

Comment

As you have probably realised by this, your network of contacts is a potential goldmine of information. The skill is in being able to identify the people who might know – and who to ask.

You might be starting to notice that approaching people or asking them for information does not always rely on face-to-face or telephone contact. Depending on your preferences, you might find it a little less daunting to approach people by email or online, than by personal contact. It can give you more time to think about what you want to say or ask, and you can manage your reactions to the responses more privately. Alternatively, you might be less comfortable expressing yourself in writing, and prefer to meet or talk to someone. It is not that one way is necessarily better than another. Knowing which might work best for you can help in the early stages if networking is new to you.

8 Effective networking etiquette

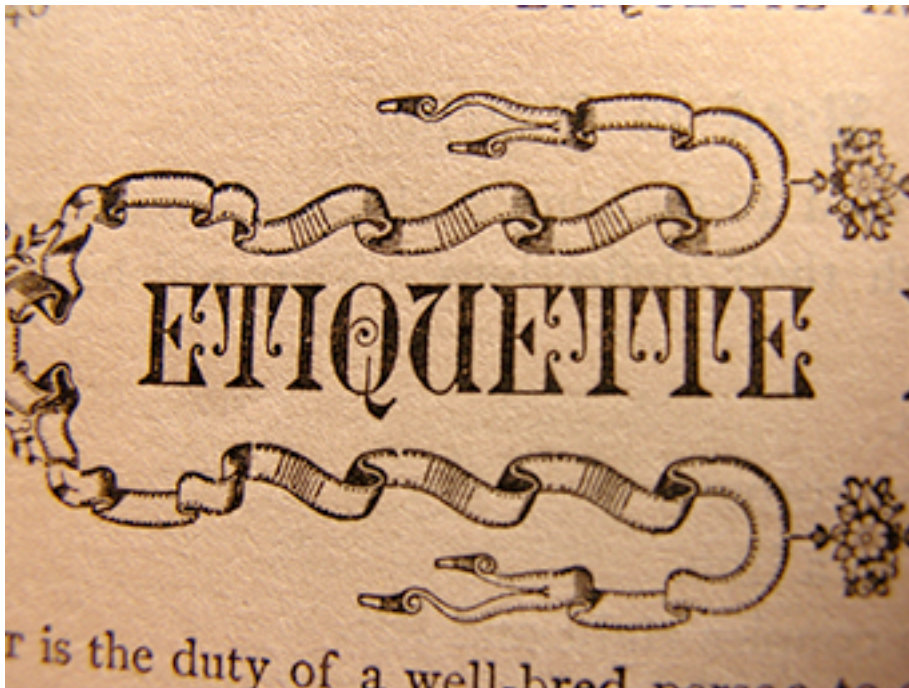


Figure 18 Networking etiquette

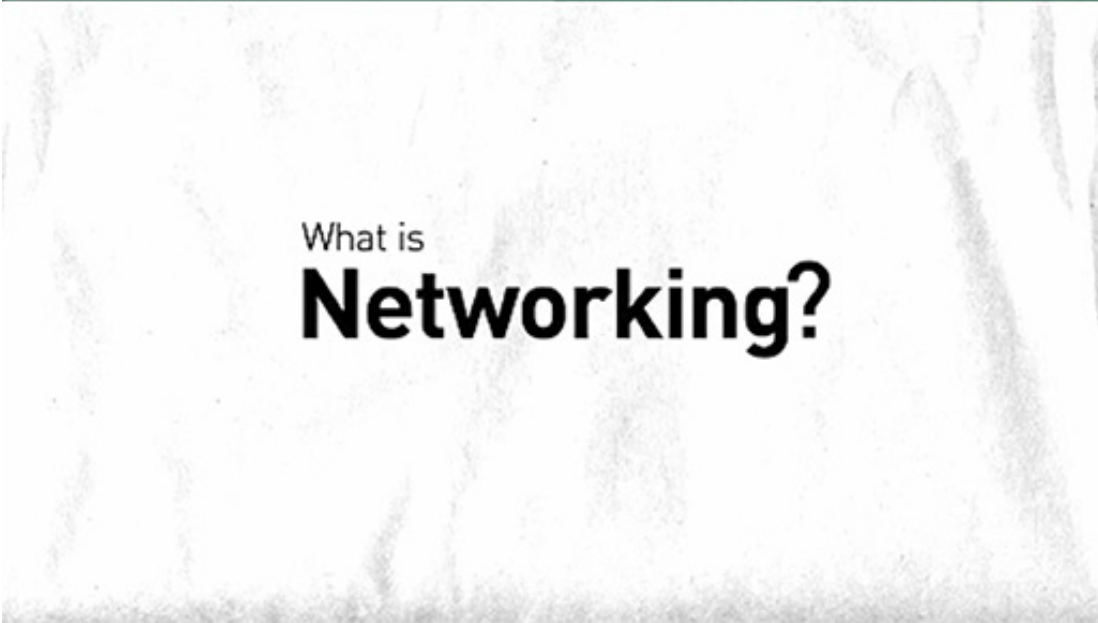
Whether you are networking online, or in person, you need to do it well. Before reading on, take a few minutes to watch a short video about networking.

Activity 7 Extending and managing your network

Allow approximately 10 minutes

This activity helps you to recap on some of the main points covered so far, and extends them to include how you might widen your network. The video will take only two minutes to watch.

Video content is not available in this format.



What is **Networking?**

Take a few minutes to record in your notebook any key points from the videos which you want to remember or put into practice.

Well done for completing your last activity of week. Now it is time to turn your attention to the weekly quiz.



9 This week's quiz

Well done, you have just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

[Week 5 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

10 Summary

This week has encouraged you to think about the network of contacts you have in place, how you can engage with them to help you in achieving your career aspirations and how to engage with networks when looking for work.

In the next two weeks, you will be considering how to present yourself to people who may be able to offer you the kind of work you want to do. That work may be within your existing employment or career or with new potential employers, whether or not the work is paid or voluntary.

You should now feel that you can:

- understand networks and networking
- explore traditional and online networking opportunities
- consider how networking supports your career development
- map your own network and plan how to extend it.

You can now go to Week 6.

Week 6: Creating strong job applications

Introduction

Developing your career will involve applying for the work you want to do. This might be with your existing employer, with a new employer, voluntary work, short-term contracts or work experience. Whichever option you decide to pursue, you will need to be able to match yourself to the work and the expectations of the employer. This week the focus is on helping you to do that successfully.

The first step is to analyse what is needed for a particular job. In Week 3 you learned how to research the requirements of types of work or employer. The process here is similar, though your focus will be on a specific opportunity. However, you still need to find out what is needed and then present yourself in the best way.

In the first part of this week you will consider how to do this in response to advertised jobs. In the second half of the week, you will create a CV which allows you to respond effectively to more formal opportunities which arise.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 6:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- review a job advert
- consider what makes a good job application
- explore why it is important to have a current curriculum vitae
- create or update your curriculum vitae (CV).

1 What to look for in job advertisements



Figure 1 Looking at job adverts

Your analysis should begin with understanding what any job advertisement is telling you. Below is an advert and sample analysis. It is a general advert for graduates to work in the Scottish Health Service, rather than for a specific job. The advert is for someone who has already graduated from university, but it has been chosen because it contains the kind of information which is useful for demonstrating how close reading can tell you a lot about an employer's needs.

The bracketed numbers and bold text in the advert indicate points that were considered important to understand, or remember, by the person considering applying for the post. Read the text through first without looking at the notes, then read it again noting what the applicant thought was important.

Graduate opportunities

Greater Glasgow Health Board serves a population of 1 million people, **[1] treating over 21,000 in-patients** and dealing with 2.25 million out-patient attendances annually. As one of the UK's largest Health Authorities we regard our on-going **[2] commitment to the training of graduates as crucial** to our future success.

Management Trainees

Salary to £19,426

You will be a graduate with a **[3] relevant degree**, be **[4] able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing and possess good interpersonal, statistical and analytical skills**. You will also be able to demonstrate the potential to manage physical and human resources in the pursuit of achieving the **[5] Board's Organisational Goals**.

For our part we will give you a comprehensive two year training in **[6] one of the most progressive and innovative organisations in the country** which will emphasize 'hands-on' management experience and the **[7] application of sound business**

techniques in the delivery of Health Care. There will also be an opportunity to develop a special interest in **[8] Supplies Management**. You will be supervised personally by one of the Board's Unit General Managers, and will be assisted with **[9] further study**, tailored to suit your needs.

If you have the capacity and ability to make a success of the training we are offering, write for further details to the Appointments Section, Greater Glasgow Health Board, 112 Ingram Street, Glasgow G1 1ET.

[10] Great Glasgow Health Board (presented within a Charles Rennie Mackintosh motif).

[11] *Our business is health.*

Greater Glasgow job advert notes

[1] Proud of being a part of large organisation, I should reflect on this when I say why GGHB appeals to me.

[2] Find out about their training programme and mention this as a further attraction.

[3] What do they have in mind and why? Any degree could be relevant. Demonstrate relevance of mine.

[4] Give good evidence of my skills.

[5] Find out about these.

[6] What do they mean?

[7] Note changed view of NHS as a business. Any relevant Department of Health publications that might put this into context?

[8] What does this mean? What skills are required? Info that I have on them.

[9] What might this involve? Will my degree qualify me for any exemptions?

[10] Greater Glasgow Health Board is enclosed in a Charles Rennie Mackintosh type motif. Subliminal messages in the use of this motif, new image for NHS, proud to be in Glasgow.

[11] A significant statement about change in NHS; as (7) above. What connections should I be making with regard to the NHS as a whole or Department of Health initiatives and management styles?

(The Open University, 2015)

One way of learning something new is to observe what someone else does. You have seen the way someone analysed a particular advert and, whether or not the job opportunity feels relevant to you or your life, you will have noticed some general things that the person doing the analysis drew out from their reading. Such as, noting the general information about the NHS, the qualification required for the position, the additional training provided and the general skills required.

It doesn't matter what kind of job advert you are looking at, it is this kind of detail that you need to concentrate on.

1.1 Picking out the details from a job advert

Many employers will supply a job description and a person specification. The job description tells you about the job and the person specification what abilities, qualities and qualifications are required. Job adverts will usually be based on these two documents and present the most important aspects of them.

The job advertisement you've already looked at has both these elements, so provides good practice in analysing what is expected of you.

This activity helps you to 'spot' useful information in an advert and to interpret what it asks of you.

Activity 1 The NHS advert: what does it tell you?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Read back through the [NHS advert](#). Note in the box below, what descriptions of the work you find, and then what descriptions of the person specification it contains. You don't need to do this in your notebook, unless you would like a record of the activity.

Provide your answer...

Comment

How easy did you find it? Some 'reading between' the lines was probably necessary. Look at the answer below and compare it with your own.

Description of work

- the potential to manage physical and human resources in the pursuit of achieving the Board's Organisational Goals – *though you don't know the goals you can deduce that you would be managing either people or things required for health care.*

Person specification

- relevant degree – *you need a degree but you need find out which ones are relevant.* Able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing and possesses good interpersonal statistical and analytical skills – *these are clear skills that you would need to show you had.*

Description of work

- 'hands-on' management training – *this implies 'doing' some management rather than just learning the theory.*

Person specification

- application of sound business techniques in the delivery of Health Care – *it doesn't say which techniques, but it suggests thinking of health care as a business. Supplies Management – this is a specific area of activity and expertise that could be developed.*

Description of work

- demonstrate the potential to manage physical and human resources – *the key word is 'potential' here. You need to provide of an ability of manage people, whatever the context.*

Person specification

- the capacity and ability to make a success of the training – *here you are being asked to demonstrate that you can learn and put this into practice.*

The next section will provide you with nine key areas to look for in any job advert.

2 The key areas in a job advert

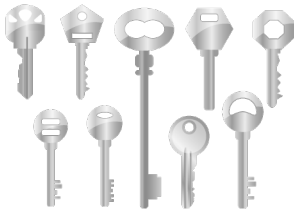


Figure 2 Nine key areas

As well as reading between the lines on the specific requirements included in a job advertisement, this will also tell you something about the kind of workplace it might be and whether or not it would suit your interests and needs. To do all this though, it helps to look out for nine key areas. This will give the best chance of matching yourself to an employer's needs.

1 Style and language

Look at the advert. Does how it looks, suggest anything to you? What kind of language is used to describe the organisation? It might use factual language like 'multinational' or more emotional language like 'dynamic' or 'nurturing'. This tells you something about how the organisation sees itself. If you pay attention to the tone and feel of the advert, you can evaluate whether or not you feel comfortable with its choice of words and whether your personality or values might fit or conflict with those of the organisation.

2 Brief job description

Look out for the job description and remember to tease out what it is telling you about the role. Does the work genuinely interest you? Even if it does, it must still meet your current needs. For example, it may involve shift work which may not appeal to you. What are the main tasks and the kind of skills they need? Think about the evidence you can provide for these. Remember this doesn't need to be from a work context. Are there some aspects which are unclear and you would want to find out about, during the recruitment process?

3 Qualifications

Look out for specific qualification requirements and whether or not they are preferred or essential.

4 Experience

Sometimes advertisements state that certain experience is needed. Note what this is and consider how you can demonstrate the requirement from different aspects of your life.

5 Qualities

Look at the kind of language used to describe the ideal applicant. If an advertisement for a job asked for a 'committed self-starter,' it could imply that there will be little supervision. You would need to find out what a phrase like this means in practice, and then compare it honestly to what you know about your own personality and needs.

6 Location and geographical mobility

These are more obvious pieces of information to spot. You will need to consider if it is practical and cost effective for you to travel to the advertised workplace.

7 Prospects

You might be looking for work which gives you promotion opportunities, so look for any indications on this. Assess whether the employer is looking for evidence that you want to and can progress. Even if the opportunities seem limited, the job could still help to develop your skills and experience.

8 Salary

Where this is stated, it is often a good guide to the level of qualifications and experience you might be expected to offer. You need to compare the salary both with the going rate for that kind of work, and with your own needs.

9 Named contact

Sometimes advertisements give a name to contact for further information. It is a good idea to follow this up. Be prepared when you do make contact because the person will form an impression of you from the very beginning. Rehearse your introduction, and know what you want to ask. Be ready to say something about yourself, as well.

The best way to understand and develop your skill at this process is to give it a go with a real advert. You'll do this in the next activity.

Activity 2 Real life practice

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Find an advert for a job that interests you. As you are working online, the easiest adverts to find may be on company or organisation websites. However, if you prefer, you can look in local newspapers.

Work through the nine key areas and write down your thoughts on each in your notebook.

Also make a note of where the job was advertised and the date, in case you want to look back at it in the future.

Comment

This activity may well have been a little easier than looking through our first example, as it was probably more relevant to you and you've had some practice already.

However you found it, try and always bear the nine key areas in mind when you consider a job advert.

In the next section you'll learn more about the specific language used in job adverts, job descriptions and person specifications and what it means.

3 What do they mean?

View the document 'Skills that employers want and how they can be developed' in the [Resource pack](#). This shows the types of skills employers may want, the way they might describe them, and provides an opportunity to illustrate how you might develop these through work, education or your interests. It will also act as a useful tool when completing a job application.

You will see from this that there are four clusters of skills

- self-reliance
- people skills
- general skills
- specialist skills.

The middle column details specific skills or qualities, and lists the words used to describe them. Of course, different employers might mean different things by them. So, ask questions if you can within your network or the named contact for the job advert.

Column 3 gives examples of how you might have already developed or be able to develop some of these generic skills. The examples could act as prompts for you when completing a job advert.

The next activity has some similarities with the approach you took in Week 2 when you considered your experiences, the abilities you developed from them and evidence for these. The next step is to learn to do this in relation to a specific job and the next activity gives you this opportunity.

Activity 3 Showing how you meet the job requirements

Allow approximately 15 minutes

[Revisit](#) the advert you considered in Activity 2.

Write down the six most important characteristics and requirements of the job, leaving space to note down evidence of your suitability against each point. Remember to do this in your notebook.

You might find it useful to look back at your notes from Week 2.

Comment

Think back to the first week of the course – do you feel more confident that you can match the requirements in a job advert to your abilities and also show an employer how your past experience fits with their needs?

Once you've decided that a job advert is relevant to you, then the next step is to present yourself to the employer for the vacancy. In the next section you consider how to strengthen your new skills with job applications still further.

4 How to present yourself to an employer



Figure 3 Presenting yourself

Many employers are moving towards a competency-based assessment of candidates. Competencies are a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours. When you apply for a job an employer will ask for a range of these and you need to show how you can meet these by providing evidence.

The basic idea behind competency-based recruitment is that if you can demonstrate you did something in the past, you can do it in the future.

So, if you come across this it means you have to adopt a particular approach to be successful. Fortunately, there are techniques that greatly increase the chances of success.

Activity 3 will have refreshed your skill in using 'evidence' of what you have done in the past to show what you are capable of now. You can now enhance this by learning to use a technique that is very useful for answering competency based questions you might find on an application form.

It is a widely used technique known as 'STAR'.

When using this technique, you think about a specific piece of experience you want to offer up and describe it in the following way.

- **Situation** – Think about a specific situation and when it happened.
- **Task** – Was a task required in that situation and what were you supposed to achieve by completing it?
- **Action** – What action(s) did you take to complete the task?
- **Results** – Think about the outcome of the actions you took.

This really helps you to organise your thoughts. However, this technique alone may not keep you entirely on track, so it can be used in combination with another known as 'RAPPAS'. This translates as:

- **Relevant** – The skill you put forward needs to be relevant to what is being asked for.

- **Action** – Include what you actually did (rather than what you might do if in a hypothetical situation), or something you learned.
- **Personal** – Focus on what **you** personally did, rather than what other people did or what happened generally. Don't say what 'we' did, say what 'I' did.
- **Positive** – Use a situation with a good outcome, even if everything was not achieved as planned.
- **Appropriate** – You need to feel comfortable to talk about the situation, so choose examples which would allow this.
- **Specific** – Give one example, not a mixture of different examples.

It is easier to understand this when you see it in practice, so in the next activity you'll review someone else's attempt before trying it with yourself.

Activity 4 Suzy's competency evidence

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Read the following case study and then consider whether Suzy has followed STAR and RAPPAS to enable her to present the strongest evidence of her ability to manage conflict. Concentrate on the six points of RAPPAS and write your thoughts in the box provided.

Case Study

Suzy has applied for the job of production shift leader in the manufacturing plant where she currently works as a materials buyer. One of the skills listed in the person specification is handling conflict and the application form asks the candidate to:

Please describe a conflict which you have had to manage and say how you approached the issue and what resolution was achieved?

Suzy's response is as follows:

I volunteer on Saturdays at a local retail charity shop. There is an official manager for the shop, but everyone else is a volunteer. The manager only works every other Saturday, but we can contact her for advice by telephone if there is a problem. Mostly, on Saturdays, there will be three volunteers because it is a busy day, but not always the same three. Most of us get along ok but there is one woman, Tricia, who tends to act as if she were in charge when the manager is not around. For example, she is always telling us what needs to be done, when we know for ourselves.

Last Saturday, we had a new volunteer working with us who was asked by a customer to put something by for them for a day or two until they got paid. She didn't know if this was allowed or not, and started to ask me, but Tricia butted in and, in front of the customer, started saying that it was not allowed because we couldn't show favouritism amongst customers. The customer was embarrassed, said it didn't matter, handed the item back and started to leave the shop. Our new volunteer was upset and said that she didn't think Tricia had a right to tell her off in front of the customer like that.

Tricia said she had every right, if she was about to make a mistake. I tried to cut in and say I'd been helping, but she just talked over me.

!Warning! Calibri not supported I was really angry but there didn't seem to be much that I could do at the time. On Monday when our manager was back in, I explained to her what had happened and said that I was not happy with working on Saturdays if Tricia was also scheduled to work. She agreed that she would keep us on different working weeks in future, so I was glad I had raised the issue then because it resolved the problem of possible conflict between us.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Relevance – Not strong, because it shows how the manager of the shop chose to deal with a member of staff who found it difficult to work with another. It did not showcase Suzy's own ability to find a solution to the problem between her and her colleague.

Action – Meets this criteria because it says what actually happened.

Personal – Meets this criteria because it is clear what Suzy did for herself.

Positive – Not strong, because it avoids rather than resolves the issue. Although the manager arranges for Suzy not to work with Tricia, the actual conflict was between Tricia and the new volunteer and this could happen again.

Appropriate – Yes, this is probably ok, in that it is not too personal or emotive an example, provided that Suzy does not get angry all over again if asked about it in interview.

Specific – Meets this criteria because it is an example of one incident.

Practising with someone else's example is a good way to get a feel for what works, and what does not. However, it is always better to use your own example, so if you have time you might want to revisit Activity 4 now. This is not essential though because you will revisit the technique in Week 7.

So far this week, you have considered the need to:

- find out about the work and what skills are needed
- make of the most of the main skills you have that are required to do the job and provide examples that show these skills.

Next you need to think about how to complete an application form and make sure you do yourself justice.

5 Completing application forms



Figure 4 Application forms

Making a strong application takes time. Getting it right is important because most candidates are screened out from their application forms. Employers often receive far more applications for a job than they can interview. This means they will read quickly through applications, maybe looking for key words and phrases. It is therefore vital that your form shows you are a clear match to their needs. So think carefully about how you describe your activities and skills to match those you've identified from the advert.

This can sometimes apply to voluntary work as well, due to the competition for highly sought after roles. Your objective needs to be to persuade the employer that you are worth interviewing because you seem to be a suitable candidate for the job. Your chance of doing this is higher if you submit an application form which is convincing and interesting. Often, the information in your application form is all the employer will have about you. Put your best foot forward. Be positive about what you have to offer, and leave them to spot any potential negatives for themselves. Showing that you match their needs is important but remember that good presentation is also vital. Use the guidance below to ensure that your application is the best representation of you.

Application check-list

- You won't get your application spot on first time, so make some photocopies of the original form for drafts, or save your drafts on a PC.
- Do what the form asks you to do – for example, use block capitals or black ink if these are the requirements. Don't send a CV unless you are asked for one.
- Make sure that you complete all the sections. If some sections do not seem to apply, write 'not applicable'.
- If there is insufficient space for factual details, such as dates and addresses of previous employers, add a separate sheet of paper, labelled clearly with all relevant details. Check before doing this, that this is permitted.

- Prioritise what you include. For instance, if there is not enough space to do justice to general interest information, choose those which best illustrate something relevant to the employer.
- Watch out for questions which have more than one element and make sure you respond to each part of the question.
- Avoid unexplained gaps in your employment record. If you have been unemployed, say so, but point out any voluntary work, or other projects, you did during that period.
- Use active word to describe yourself, like 'organised', 'responsible' or 'managed'. These create a more confident and competent impression.
- Finally, remember to compare what you have written with the analysis you did of the skills needed in the job advert.
- Before you send it off, do a last check:
 - Visual impression – is it neat and easy to read?
 - Accuracy – have you put the right information in the right places? Are all your dates right?
 - Spelling and grammar – are there any mistakes you need to correct?

Always keep a copy. It might be some time before the interview, when you will need to reread it.

This section has considered how to best present yourself when a job has been advertised and the recruitment process requires you to complete an application form. Sometimes, however, the employer might ask you to submit a curriculum vitae (CV) rather than an application form.

So, this is the topic for the next section.

6 What is a curriculum vitae and why do I need one?

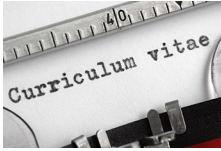


Figure 5 Curriculum vitae

The words 'curriculum vitae' are Latin and translate as 'course of life'. In practice a CV has become a brief account of your education, qualifications and previous occupations used in support of a job application. Depending on when you are writing it, you may have more or less to include in it, or you may want to emphasise some things more than others. Even if you already have a CV, it is wise to regularly review and update it, so that the content still fits with your career goals. For instance, if you want to make a change from one career path to another, you might need to emphasise different aspects of your experience.

Activity 5 Assessing the value of CVs

Allow approximately 5 minutes

This activity will familiarise you with some of the benefits of writing and maintaining a CV.

Watch the following short video clip in which people describe their personal experiences of creating a CV and what they see as the benefits.

Video content is not available in this format.



Jot down the main points made, if you find them helpful.

So, now you've considered why CVs are useful, let's look at what you should include, in the next section.

6.1 What should be included in a CV?



Figure 6 CV checklist

Whether you are updating an existing CV or creating a new one, you need to know what to include and exclude.

Any CV should include:

- your contact details
- a 'personal profile', which summarises your main skills and career aims
- your education and qualifications you have gained including dates and grades
- any work experience stating your responsibilities and main achievements
- your main skills
- relevant interests or activities, such as languages, IT or sports captaincy
- your references. Give the names of two people who have agreed to provide a reference, or say that you can provide details on request.

You don't need to include your nationality (unless you need a work permit), age, marital status or health.

Now you need to understand the different ways in which this information can be presented in a CV. You will explore two types of CVs in the next section.

6.2 The main types of CV and when to use them



Figure 7 Types of CV

There are different ways of writing a CV and you need to choose the one which works best in your situation and helps you succeed in getting interviews.

Most employers do not specify which kind of CV to use, so it will be your decision to make. However, some job areas do expect a particular kind of CV. So, make sure you find this out before sending yours in. In the next sections you will be introduced to two basic types of CV, the chronological CV and the functional CV.

6.3 Chronological CV



Figure 8 Chronological CV

This is the most commonly used form of CV and gives information about your work in date order. It shows where you worked, for how long, the kind of work you did and your main achievements. If you are writing your CV for the first time, this is the most useful type to create.

Have a look at the example of Derek's CV in the [Resource pack](#). Note that any periods of unemployment are included.

Derek's example shows some of the advantages this kind of CV offers. For example:

- it shows potential recruiters or employers the story of Derek's employment so far
- it allows him to highlight key skills and to show progress made
- it is easy to produce.

However, it works less effectively where there are gaps in employment. Derek chose to be clear about his unemployment and to show how he is acquiring new skills.

It can be problematic too, if you have changed jobs very frequently, or had long periods of time out of the workplace. This might need some explanation. It does not need to be done on the CV, but you might send an accompanying letter which gives more information. For instance, had Derek's period of unemployment been because he had served a short prison sentence, he might have left a gap in his CV, but explained the gap in a covering letter.

The other problem you might have noticed is that it is not easy to pick out key achievements or skills, because they are listed by individual jobs. You will learn later on how to create a strong personal profile statement, which summarises your achievements and skills to help to counter this risk. There are limitations to this type of CV, as it may not convey a sense of you as a person very clearly.

The second type of CV handles this aspect better, as you will see in the next section.

6.4 Functional CVs



Figure 9 Functional CV

A functional CV is one which focuses on you and your skills, rather than your work history. It allows you to say more about your ability and the things you have achieved in your life. This is because it presents the information according to the type of work you have done and the responsibilities you have had, rather than by individual jobs.

Look at Sandra's example CV in the [Resource pack](#).

As you can see, this highlights skills rather than job changes. Therefore it can be useful if the job you are applying for is different from those you have done previously. The functional CV allows you to emphasise strengths and skills developed in different situations. For example, Sandra draws attention to the fact that her gap year of travelling helped her to develop better planning skills.

It is generally easier to group skills together and you can use the four skills clusters from '[Skills that employers want and how they can be developed](#)' to do this. You might have noticed that this example makes an attempt at that. The disadvantage with this type of CV is that, it is less 'standard' than the chronological type. You have to think about how you want to prepare it, to ensure that it is clearly relevant to the job. Any gaps in employment are likely to be less prominent but assume that employers will notice this and you should be prepared to explain them at the interview.

If you already have a CV in the chronological style, you might want to write a second functional one as a way of clarifying what skills you have to offer.

Either of these types of CV would be suitable for making a speculative approach to an organisation or via a network contact, as well as part of a job application, where a CV is required. In this case, though, you would need to tailor it to reflect the specific job.

The place to begin though is to create a basic CV which you can later tailor to different situations. The next section offers some general guidance on how to do this.

6.5 Preparing a CV



Figure 10 CV preparation

It is very useful to always have a good basic CV to hand. Even if you are not immediately seeking work, you never know when one of your contacts might spot an opportunity and open a door for you. So, you need to have one you can update or tailor quickly.

Your CV both gives facts and creates an impression of the kind of employee you would be. Just like an application form, it needs to be accurate, clearly presented, easy to read, and not too long. Remember though to include brief specific examples that demonstrate your skills and achievements to make your CV persuasive.

Whereas an application form tells you what the employer wants to know, for a CV you have to decide that for yourself. So use your earlier research about the job.

Be concise. Aim for a CV no longer than two sides of A4 paper. This means including only key relevant information. The examples show you how this can be done by the use of headings and bullet points.

Make your CV distinctive by including activities or achievements that may be unconnected to your work but that still demonstrate specific abilities that may interest an employer. You might be relieved at this point to learn that you do not necessarily have to do all the work on CVs yourself. There are online tools which can help. If you would like more information visit the Open University [Careers Advisory Service website](#).

In the next section you'll get the chance to put into practice everything you've learned about CVs this week.

6.6 Bringing your CV to your network

THIS IS ME!

Figure 11 Promoting yourself

With the uptake of social media, such as LinkedIn, by large companies and recruitment agencies to search for potential employees, it is useful to have both a traditional and online CV.

Your final activity for this week is to use a template to help you to create both.

It is a slightly longer activity than others, but you do not need to do it all in one go. Just remember to keep saving the work you do as you go along.

Activity 6 Creating your CV

Allow approximately 45 minutes

In the [Resource pack](#) you'll find a template for a chronological CV. Complete it with the help of the information that you have gathered in your notebook so far. You may also find it useful to look back at Derek's CV from earlier in the week.

Once you have completed your CV, you can also use it to create a profile in LinkedIn that can be viewed by potential employers. Here are some tips to help you create a strong profile:

- Add a photograph. With one, you are apparently seven times more likely to be found on LinkedIn. Remember to choose one which sends an appropriate message.
- Keep your summary to about three or four paragraphs. It works best if it is written in the first person, (i.e. I am).
- You may want to show off a portfolio of work by including videos, documents, and links. If you do this, be careful to copyright the ideas you share.
- Ask people who know your work to recommend you on LinkedIn.
- Lastly, ask your network contacts to check your profile, they may be able to see gaps that you can't. Helpfully, LinkedIn automatically suggests how you can improve your profile.

If this feels daunting, remember that you do not need a perfect profile from the start. It is very easy to change or update your LinkedIn profile at any stage. So, start with a basic one and build it up as you become clearer what you want to share and more confident about how to do it.

Once you have a version of your profile you are happy to go public with, you can convert it to a CV.

Comment

Well done for completing this last activity of the week. You should feel proud that you now have a CV to work with. What an achievement.

That was your final activity of this week packed with information to help you understand job adverts, and write relevant and solid job applications and CVs. You can check your understanding in this week's quiz. There was a lot of information to take on board this week, so remember that you can use your notes or go back to the study material, if you want to check an answer.

7 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

[Week 6 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

8 Summary

You have come a long way since the beginning of the course. Remember the career planning model reproduced here? Well, you are on the brink now of moving into the action phase – you should pat yourself on the back for reaching this stage.

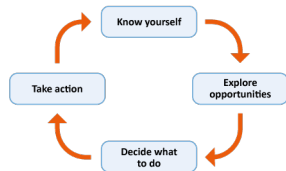


Figure 12 The career planning process

This week you have started to bring together ideas about your working life that you can use in a practical way.

Some of you will want to do this almost immediately. Others may still be planning when and how to use the knowledge and skills you have developed in creating applications and CVs. Just remember to be ready for those opportunities which are unexpected, that come at a time which never feels quite right, but might be just the right next step for you.

Next week you will move onto the next stage in the process – the interview. See you there.

You should now feel that you can:

- review a job advert
- consider what makes a good job application
- explore why it is important to have a current curriculum vitae
- create or update your curriculum vitae (CV).

You can now go to Week 7.

Week 7: Presenting your 'best' self at interview

Introduction

This week focuses on the role of the interview and how to manage this well. Even if you are not seeking a specific job, much of the guidance offered stands you in good stead whenever you meet someone to talk about what you can offer.

If you are asking to be considered for work, you are interviewed to find out if you are suited to the work and to the organisation, and you should ask questions to help you to work out if you think you would fit in well, too. After all, even if you are offered the job, you might decide not to accept it. Whatever you decide, making interviews productive is vital if you are to achieve your career aims.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 7:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- explore different types of interviews
- consider how to prepare for interviews
- explore question types and how to handle them
- practise answering interview questions
- enhance your confidence in performing well at an interview.

1 Your experience of interviews

It is useful to start this week by considering your own experience of interviews.

Activity 1 Reviewing past interviews

Allow approximately 10 minutes

This activity is about what you already know and how confident you are about interviews.

Choose a specific past experience of an interview you have attended. If you have no job interview experience to draw on, think more widely. Have you ever been interviewed for a course you wanted to attend or by a health professional as part of a hospital appointment, or by a local journalist about a charity event or family celebration, for instance?

Use the following prompt questions to spark your thinking, but write down whatever you remember about it. Record your thoughts in your notebook.

The 'facts' of the interview ...

What was the interview for?

Who led the interview?

How many people were involved?

How long was it?

What kind of place was it held in?

The 'feel' of the interview ...

Was the interview a good experience for you or not? If so, why?

What, if anything, did you find difficult about it?

What do you remember most about it?

The interview in a nutshell ...

If you were describing the interview to other people, what three words would you choose to sum it up?

Now take a couple of minutes to assess your current level of confidence in relation to job interviews. You can complete Table 1 in your [Resource pack](#). Put 'today' against the description which is closest to where you think you are currently, and 'future' by where you would like to be by the end of this week.

Table 1 Your level of confidence

Scale Number	Descriptor
1	I am supremely confident – this is something I am really good at. I do not worry about it all.
2	I think I am pretty good at interviews once I get in the room, but I am usually a bit nervous before them.
3	It depends a bit on the interviewers. I am usually nervous when we start, but if they settle me in, I can give a good account of myself.
4	It's a bit hit and miss. I have had some interviews where I think I have presented myself pretty well and others where I have barely strung a sensible sentence together.
5	Not great. I get very nervous before it and then when I get in the room, sometimes I let that get the better of me for the first half of the interview.
6	Pretty dire usually. I am fine at writing the application but I do not seem to be able to present my best self in the interview room and the more I think about it before, the more nervous I get.
7	This is the thing I fear most and I am really bad at it. It is a big source of frustration because I know it stops me from getting the jobs I want.
0	I do not know – I have not had enough job interviews to be sure.

Comment

This brief exercise puts a 'peg in the ground' and at the end of the week you will have the opportunity to reassess and to decide what action, if any, to take.

Now you've had a chance to consider your past experiences, let's consider why interviews are used in recruitment and what an interviewer wants to achieve.

2 Role of interviews and interviewers in the recruitment process



Figure 1 Interviews

Last week you learned how to present yourself in an application form, and to match what the employer is looking for. The employer also has to do their own matching exercise and has to select the person, or people, who can best contribute to and fit into their enterprise. Bringing the wrong people into an organisation does not help either the organisation, or the person they have just recruited.

The most common method by which employers select people to join them is an interview. Most people do not perform perfectly in an interview but fortunately, there has been a lot of research into the kind of errors which tend to be made. This has resulted in some important insights for candidates:

- First impressions matter and the first answers you give are critical. This is because interviewers tend to form a view about candidates within the first four minutes, and might discount any other information that counters this.
- Negative information about a candidate, or negative behaviour by them, can affect an interviewers judgement more strongly than positive information.
- Body language can raise a similar problem in that it sometimes determines the outcome of an interview, rather than experience or qualifications. For example, not maintaining eye contact in an interview might not be seen positively.

Initially, this might not sound encouraging. You might wonder why employers use such an apparently flawed method. It is empowering to think of it from a different perspective. Notice that there are ways in which you can compensate for some of the problems by developing your own skills as an interviewee. For example, you know that first impressions count, so you can consciously think about how you present yourself for the interview. This will enable you to be in control of your first few actions and words.

Like any other skill, practice helps with interviews. For the rest of this week, therefore, you will be learning about effective interview strategies and practising the skills associated with them.

Before that, let's first look at different types of interviews.

3 Types of interview you might encounter



Figure 2 Types of interviews

It is helpful to know the different types of interviews you might be invited to attend, and the demands they make of you. Although the format might differ slightly, keep in mind that the aim is always to see how good a fit there is between you and the needs of the employer.

The main types of interview you might encounter are as follows:

Face-to-face

This is the most common form of interview. It can be in the form of a one-to-one meeting or there may be a sequence of such meetings, each with a different member of staff. Alternatively, some might be what is known as a 'panel' interview.

Panel

It is not unusual, especially in larger organisations and specifically in the public sector, for there to be several interviewers present. Specific skills are needed to handle this type of interview well. For instance, it is important to acknowledge each panel member and to maintain eye contact with the person speaking to you.

Telephone

It is becoming more common for employers to use the telephone for interviews, especially in the early stages. They might do this in one of several ways:

- **Automated** – you will be given a freephone telephone number to call. When you do, you hear a series of statements and you press a number on the telephone keypad to give your response. Here the system records your responses, and screens out candidates whose responses do not match what the employer needs.
- **Structured** – you will be offered a time in advance to have a telephone interview. You answer a series of questions which are recorded and then analysed by trained interviewers, to establish whether or not you have the skills needed.
- **Screening** – this would be more conversational and you would be questioned about aspects of your CV or application form, in order determine whether or not to offer you a face-to-face interview.

Competency-based

You came across the idea of demonstrating the skills and competencies for a job last week. Organisations using a competency-based approach will want you to demonstrate your abilities with examples, so it is important to be prepared for this. Use the STAR technique before the interview to help you. You looked at STAR in Week 6 and you'll recap in Section 7 this week.

It is also important that you show the ability and the interest to learn new skills, so if you are asked about something that is outside your experience, you could use an example of a time when you learned something new to illustrate your willingness to do this.

Second interview

Some organisations have a series of steps in their interview process. They might 'first interview' a larger number of people who they think might fit their needs. From this, they select a smaller number of people, in a process known as 'shortlisting'. If you are shortlisted, the interviewer will be looking for evidence of your skills, abilities and interests. It is probably already evident that preparation for an interview is likely to lead to a better outcome. Being prepared gives you the best chance of coming across well. The next two sections focus on developing your interview strategy and practising how you will respond to questions you may be asked.

4 Preparation: before the interview



Figure 3 Preparation

If you have attended job interviews before, you will, doubtlessly, have developed your own ways of preparing. In the next activity, you will compare your preparation tactics with those of other people.

Activity 2 Preparing for interviews

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Watch the brief video of Open University students talking about how they tend to prepare for job interviews. Look out for points on why they prepare and how they went about it. Write these in the space provided below the video.

Video content is not available in this format.



Video notes ... Reasons for preparing How to prepare

Now compare the answers given in the video to your own preparation strategies, using the prompt questions provided. Add any other thoughts you have, as well and keep a record of it all in your notebook.

- For past interviews, what things have you tended to do to prepare for them?
- How long before the interview did you start your preparation?
- What did you spend most or least time on?
- Have you had any experiences which left you wishing you had prepared some aspect better than you did? If so, what?
- Did the comments of the video interviewees suggest any new ideas you might use in future?

Discussion

Your thoughts and experiences will be very personal to you but most people have been in interview situations that don't quite go as well as they would have liked. Hopefully, you picked up a few new tips from the video to help you in the future.

Some people find the preparation for interviews difficult. Others find preparation easy but then struggle to use it in the interview. You will learn, in the next section, strategies for strengthening both aspects. The basics of preparing remain the same whatever the interview type but there are also some tips on specific types of interview which need to be considered.

4.1 Preparation basics

Whatever the interview type, some basic guidelines always apply:

- Find out beforehand what the format of the interview will be – it helps to minimise anxiety if you know what to expect.
- Check again how your skills and experience suit the job – by rereading the job information you have and what you wrote in your application form. It will build your confidence and help you to remember what points to make.
- Try to work out the questions you might be asked and rehearse your answers.
- Make sure that you have thought about examples from your study, work or personal life which demonstrate key skills – and memorise a few.
- Update your research on the employer, if it has been awhile since your application was made.
- Plan the questions you want to ask in the interview.

Once you've done this basic preparation put yourself in the position of the interviewer and review your application or CV. The following questions are useful ones to consider:

- What would have attracted them to invite you for interview?
- What are your main strengths in relation to the job?
- Is there anything which might differentiate you positively from other applicants? Anything particularly relevant to this job or this organisation?
- What are your main achievements?
- What has motivated you to apply?
- What is likely to be your strongest contribution?
- What are your weak spots and what do you feel uncomfortable talking about?
- Why would you not employ yourself? What convincing counter-arguments might you offer?

Then, make sure you get all the practical aspects sorted out in advance.

4.2 Practical planning



Figure 4 Planning

In preparing for your interview it's important that you consider the following practical aspects.

Plan your journey

If it is to somewhere you don't know well, try to do a dummy run. Check the times of public transport, if you need to and aim to arrive at least ten minutes early. Take spare money in case you need to take a taxi or bus unexpectedly. Carry a town map or note down the organisation's postcode and address in case your planned route is diverted.

Decide what to wear

Think about the style and culture of the organisation and dress in a way which respects it. If in doubt, dress more formally than less. Even in less formal organisations, people sometimes dress more formally for interviews. Ideally, try out the whole outfit well before the interview. You want to be able to relax and focus on the interview task, rather than worrying about how you look.

Sort out what to take with you

Try not to take too much. You should only need your application, the job information and any notes you have made, as well as anything you have been asked to bring with you. Make sure before the day that you have everything to hand.

If you have been asked to make a presentation, take a copy on a memory stick. Even if you were asked to email it beforehand, it is reassuring to have a back-up. Take paper copies of your presentation. Giving the interview panel copies of the slides will help them to remember you once you have left the room.

Much of this guidance assumes that you are having a first interview for a job, face-to-face and in a specific place. This won't always be true, of course, so in the next section you'll consider some aspects of preparation for particular situations.

4.3 Special situations



Figure 5 Phone interview

Certain situations will require you to make some more specific preparation.

Phone interviews

When preparing for a phone interview it is important to consider:

- Location – find a quiet place for the interview, where you will be undisturbed by noise or others.
- Phone choice – make sure phone batteries are fully charged and you have a strong signal if using a mobile phone.
- Your key messages – write key attributes down and have this available during the phone call.

Skype or video interviews

More recently, there has been an increase in Skype or video interviews. As with telephone interviews location is important and as is checking your equipment is working beforehand. Remember to dress appropriately and check what else will be in the shot before the interview begins.

Academic interviews

Instead of a job interview, you may be applying to do an educational course vital to the next stage of your career. In this situation, the general interview guidelines apply, but you should also familiarise yourself with the entry requirements. You need to be prepared to talk in detail about the content of your previous study. For a vocational course, identify specific examples of experience you have gained through related employment.

Unexpected or 'hidden' interviews

Sometimes work opportunities present themselves in unexpected ways leaving little time to prepare. It might be that a network contact is able to set up a meeting at short notice or a company you approached, speculatively calls to say they are interested in meeting you to discuss opportunities. In such cases it is important to take along an up to date CV, and to be able to give a brief statement about yourself. The summary at the top of your CV or LinkedIn profile is one which you can adapt and rehearse.

In the next sections you'll develop a clear personal profile and from this a summary you might use in an interview, whether expected or not.

5 A summary of yourself



Figure 6 Personal statement

It is important for any interview situation to be able to give a clear and concise summary of yourself and your interests. This activity gives you that chance, so remember to keep a record of your final summary in your notebook – it could come in very handy.

Activity 3 Drafting a personal statement

Allow approximately 10 minutes

One of the ways of putting yourself in the right frame of mind for this task is to envisage that you are in a lift with someone very important at your workplace. You introduce yourselves, and then your very important person (VIP) asks:

'What do you do?'

What would you say? Remember that it needs to be short and sweet because you only have the lift journey in which to say it.

Write no more than three sentences as your answer in your notebook.

Comment

You may have found it tricky to sum yourself up in three sentences, which also sounds natural when you read it out. That will also make it less memorable.

Let's look at an example of the kind of thing you might have written. Sally is employed by a supermarket chain on the tills. It's not her ideal job, but the prospects in the organisation are good if she can demonstrate her potential. The person in the lift with her is the Area Manager. Look at the responses below which she might give to the question 'what do you do?' and choose the one which you think it best by ticking the right hand box.

- ☐ I am Sally, I just work on the tills ... I like the fact that it keeps me busy
No – the use of the word 'just' implies this is not important at all. It is not going to impress a manager to suggest that the work or your contribution is not worth much.
- ☐ I am Sally and I work on the till in the food section. I really like the fact that I get to specialise in one type of product.

No – this is quite precise about what Sally does and says what she likes about the work. It does not really say why that is useful to the manager though.

- I'm Sally, I work on the food section. I really enjoy being able to answer queries and, of course, taking the customer's money – because that keeps us all in a job.

Yes – this says clearly what she does, what she likes and the value of it to her employer.

In the next section you'll finalise the statement that says who you are.

5.1 Your personal profile

When someone meets you for the first time in a work context, they are likely to have three questions in the back of their mind:

- Who are you?
- What can you do for me?
- Why should I trust you?

Who you are is more than just your name. You might be Joe the merchant seaman, or Sophie, mother of three and part-time artist, or Steve the qualified electrician and amateur footballer. How would you identify yourself?

What you can do for the person is a reasonable question for them to ask if you want them to give you work. Steve might be self-employed and looking for a new client project. So, he might say he is a self-employed electrician with lots of experience of shop refits, so if the person knows of any work in that area, he would be very interested.

Why should I trust you might sound an odd question but if someone is going to offer you work or recommend you to someone, then they need at least to be able to trust that you can do what you say you can do. Staying with our example of Steve, he might add to his statement that he can produce customer references, or say that his customers tend to compliment him on his reliability. In other words, he will use evidence to demonstrate his skills.

Activity 4 Your final personal statement

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Now try to redraft your own statement using the three questions as prompts.

- Who are you?
- What can you do for me?
- Why should I trust you?

Keep a record in your notebook.

Comment

You may still feel that it is not quite right, don't worry too much about getting it right on the page. The important thing is that it sounds natural. So, try saying it out loud, and test it on a good friend. That way you can keep refining it.

The real benefit of the statement is that you can use it either as an opening statement in an interview or with people you are just meeting speculatively.

What about questions you'll be asked? You will need to anticipate what might be asked, and to plan how you might reply. The next section provides information on types of question you might face and the strategies for answering them well.

6 Interview question practice



Figure 7 Practice

Interviews are conversations with a purpose. Your job as the interviewee is to give as good an account of yourself as you can, so that the interviewer can fairly assess that you match their needs. Preparation helps you to avoid feeling under pressure to respond before you feel ready.

Preparing involves two main activities:

- Anticipating what questions you might be asked
- Constructing answers for them.

By doing this, you focus your ideas so that you are ready to give clear and strong answers to the questions you may be asked.

It can be helpful to write down your possible answers, giving evidence from your experience to support what you say. You may remember them better. Have a go at this in the next activity.

Activity 5 Interview answer practice

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity encourages you to practice developing answers to commonly asked interview questions. As you write your answers try to make them general enough to give as a response to more than one question. Prepare more than one example to illustrate your main points. You may be asked for more than one or be asked the same question in different ways and you should avoid having to repeat yourself.

There are seven question areas suggested below, each with typical questions which might be asked.

Choose at least three questions to answer.

About you

- A common question that can throw a lot of people is 'Tell me about yourself'.
- Think carefully about this one. How do you put yourself in the most positive light without giving them your life history? Try to come up with an answer that will take less than two minutes.

About your skills

- Tell me about your IT skills. Can you give an example of when you have had to use them in your study or work?
- Questions about your skills will relate to the specific job, so make sure you are familiar with all the skills required for the job and have your examples ready as proof of your abilities.

About your work experience

- What were your main responsibilities at your last job?

About your non-work interests

- What appeals to you most about caving/cooking/gardening?

About the organisation/employer/sector

- What do you know about our organisation/company/project? Where do you see it in five years' time?

Obviously, your answer to this question would depend on the specific opportunity you were pursuing but write down the kind of things you would like to be able to say. For instance, you might want to say something about the profitability of a company or the history of a charity.

About the job

- What do you know about the job?

Again, unless you have a specific job in mind, think generally here. For example, you might want to say that you've spoken to your cousin who does this kind of work and learned that it involves marketing or that you noticed from the job description that the emphasis seems to be on administration and social media.

Your future

- Where do you see yourself in a year's/five years' time?

Write down your chosen questions and answers in your notebook.

Comment

Some of these questions are general, so will provide you with a good start for any interview. Others are more specific but will have still given you an idea of what you need to prepare for.



The next section covers the different types of questions you can be asked.

6.1 Types of interview question



Figure 8 Interview questions

Did you notice anything about the way the questions were asked in the last activity? They were difficult to give a one word answer to, like yes or no. They require you to provide information. These are known as **open** questions and encourage replies incorporating both facts and attitudes or feelings.

There are other ways in which questions might be asked, and they expect different things of you. Below are the main types of questions you might encounter.

Specific questions require you to give a factual response. They are often used when there is some technical content expected in the answer. For example, 'What problems did you encounter in the early planning stage of the building extension?'.

Hypothetical questions ask you to imagine a scenario and aim to assess the speed and quality of your thoughts. An example might be 'What if the policy changed to carrying more freight by rail?'. When replying, say what assumptions you are making, and indicate what other information you might need. For instance, you might ask 'Would this just be in the UK or the whole of Europe?'. The interviewer will look for logical, clear thinking rather than a specific answer.

Technical questions are those which test your knowledge. You might be asked about specialist concepts, terms and methods. They are often used in engineering, scientific and IT interviews.

Closed questions require short, one or two word answers. They are often asked to establish facts or to clarify something you have said. For example, 'Were you dismissed from your previous company?' or 'How many years did you work there?'. They are sometimes asked to refocus you when you have drifted off the point, so spot them, and give the one word answer needed.

Competency-based questions ask you to give specific examples of skills, qualities and competencies needed in the job. They work on the principle that if you did something in the past, you can do it again. You will normally be asked to talk about a situation in which you have used that skill. Questions often begin 'Can you tell us a time when...?'.

You encountered this kind of question in Week 6 when you learned how to use the STAR technique in answering questions on application forms. Now you have the chance to learn how to do it in an interview.

Activity 6 Answering competency-based questions

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity aims to give you practice in working out the kind of answers you would give to competency-based questions. You will construct two example responses you would give if asked one of these questions in an interview.

Firstly, do you remember what STAR stands for? Write down your answer below.

STAR stands for: S T A R

Answer

Situation, Task, Action, Result.

If you want to recap this technique have a look back at Week 6.

Now answer these two questions in your notebook. They are designed to test competencies which are likely to be needed in all jobs. Remember that you can draw on examples from any aspect of your life.

Tell me about a time when you had to manage competing demands on your time?

Competency you need to demonstrate – an ability to prioritise

Give me an example of a time you had to persuade someone to do something?

Competency you need to demonstrate – persuading others

Comment

Now read your answers out loud. Do they sound right and natural? If not, you might want to edit them or rehearse how you might say this differently in a real situation. In front of your mirror at home or on long dull journeys are good times for this kind of rehearsal.

If you have time in your study schedule you may want to practice writing more competency based answers. Choose competencies which your research has shown you, are important in the kind of work you want to do. These will often be listed on job descriptions.

Of course, not all questions will be as straightforward as the ones you have practised, so the following section provides guidance on how to handle some of the tougher or trickier questions you may be asked.

6.2 Tough questions



Figure 9 Tough questions

Some questions in interviews can be challenging, especially if they are unexpected. Do not assume that tough questions will only be asked in formal interview situations. You might find an informal contact asks you whether it is wise to look for a career change or how much you want to be paid, for example. Of course, what one person considers tough, might not feel the same way to someone else. It is worth anticipating, and preparing for the questions you would personally find tricky. The next activity helps you to do this.

Activity 7 Answering tough questions

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity will help you to think ahead to interview questions you might not find easy to deal with and how to prepare for them.

Spend a few moments thinking over interviews you have previously attended, career conversations you might have had, or the questions you generally dislike being asked about yourself. Write down between three and five questions in your notebook.

Answer

Now compare them to the list below. How many of them are similar to your own?

What are your strengths?

Tell me about yourself.

What are your weaknesses?

Why should you be appointed rather than an internal candidate?

How much are you worth?

Having worked for one company for so long, what difficulties do you expect in adapting to our culture?

Isn't it a bit late in your working life to change career?

How have you tried to stay up to date?

How would you describe your management style?

Why do you want to work for us?

What are your ambitions?

Do you not feel that you might be over-qualified (or too experienced) for the position we are filling?

What were the circumstances of your leaving your last employer?

Why has it taken you so long to find a new job?

If you had complete freedom of a choice of jobs and employers, what would you choose?

What interests you least about this job?

What sort of relationship did you have with your last manager?

Comment

It is likely that you found some overlap because the list above, while not comprehensive, features commonly asked questions.

Obviously, if you anticipate and prepare for questions like these you are going to give a better answer than if they catch you unawares. If you have time in your study schedule this week, you may want to make some notes on what you would include in your answer, and what you might exclude. Often the best policy is just to be honest with these types of questions.

These last sections have been about what questions you may be asked. Remember, though, that the interview is a conversation, so you are expected to ask questions too. So, think about what you want to know, which will allow you to decide if the opportunity is right for you and demonstrates extra interest in the position you have applied for. This is an essential part of your basic preparation and is covered in the next section.

6.3 Prepare questions to ask



Figure 10 Prepare questions to ask

Asking questions shows you have thought about the job and how it relates to you. You will probably be given time for this at the end of any interview, so be prepared.

Obvious areas you might want to ask about include:

- **promotion opportunities** – what could I expect to be doing in two years' time?
- **performance** – how is this monitored or assessed?
- **qualifications** – what further study could I do? (check the employer's literature first)
- **company culture** – how would they describe it?
- **retention** – how long do people tend to stay?
- **next steps** – when will you hear about the result of the interview? Will you be offered feedback?

Activity 8 Your questions

Allow approximately 5 minutes

The list above is obviously not a complete set of the areas you might have questions about, or the questions you would ask. Think about question areas which might be important to you personally.

Aim to add three question topics and questions to the list. An example is given for you to follow. Write your answer in your notebook.

Example: travel – in an average month, how much travel away from the office would be expected?

Comment

In any interview, you are unlikely to have enough time to ask all of the questions on your list, so choose the most appropriate. Commit the topic headings to memory and you will never be left with nothing to say when, at the end of an interview, the interviewer turns to you and says 'Do you have any questions for us?'.

Now you've considered questions you may be asked and want to ask, the next section looks at how to give your best performance.

7 At the interview



Figure 11 What to do in an interview?

There are expected and effective ways to behave in formal interview situations. These cluster into three areas:

- the way you present yourself physically
- what you say and how you say it
- how you deal with difficulties in the interview.

Let's take a closer look at each of these in the next three sections.

7.1 Physical impression



Figure 12 What first impression will you give?

As you know from Section 2, first impressions are extremely important. You will be assessed from the moment you enter the interview room. Good first impressions can be helped by:

- Walking in confidently and smiling.
- A firm, confident handshake.
- Look at the person asking questions. If there is more than one interviewer, you will need to include each person by looking at them too as you answer.
- Sitting comfortably but upright. Don't be afraid to shift position during the interview. Sitting absolutely still could seem a little unnatural.
- Avoid fidgeting – it is usually best to keep your hands on your lap unless you are using them to illustrate an answer.
- Try not to be too flamboyant if you do use hand gestures.

Three tips on things NOT to do would be to:

- smoke before your interview – the smell will linger
- forget to switch your mobile phone to silent – it could look rude if the phone rings
- fold your arms – it can appear defensive or aggressive.

7.2 What you say and how you say it



Figure 13 Sound confident

You need to sound like you, but the most confident version of yourself, even if you are nervous. If you speak clearly, not too quickly, and avoid dropping your voice towards the end of sentences, you will sound more confident.

Much of the time you will be answering questions. To do this convincingly, follow these tips.

- **Be enthusiastic** – but do not overdo it.
- **Be brief** – do not ramble.
- **Use plain language** – jargon or buzz words can be alienating.
- **Be positive** – and if you have to offer up a negative, focus on what you learned.
- **Be truthful** – but not too modest.
- **Give an example** – remember to use the STAR structure.
- **Ask** – if it's not clear what is being asked.
- **Stop speaking** – when you have answered the question.
- **Do not be afraid to pause** – if you need time to think about a question.
- **Answer the question asked** – not the one you wish they had asked.
- **Don't just tell them what you think they want to hear** – remember that you are helping the interviewers to make the right decision, for both of you.

If you are being interviewed by telephone then how you sound is even more important. The interviewer can't see you, so make your voice clear and expressive, so that you convey enthusiasm and interest in the job. It can be difficult to gauge the interviewer's reaction to your answers because you cannot see them. Say what you need to say to answer the question, then stop.

Some small tips which often help when having an important conversation on the telephone are:

- 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 can make you sound more confident.

7.3 Dealing with difficulties



Figure 14 Difficult questions

However well you have prepared for questions, some will still feel difficult on the day. The following tips will help you through them.

In general:

- When you feel under pressure you might not listen as well as usual. Do not be afraid to ask for the question to be repeated. Take your time to answer and keep to the point.
- If you are asked embarrassing questions, keep your answer simple and short.

Occasionally you will be asked more unpredictable or 'off the wall' questions such as:

- What were you like as a child?
- If you were a biscuit what would you choose to be?
- If you could ban something, what would it be?

Often the interviewer does not really want to know the answer. They simply want to see how you might deal with something unexpected. They might be interested in whether you can think on your feet or get flustered, or if you can present a convincing argument or original idea under pressure. It is fine to pause and say that it is an unexpected or difficult question before you answer.

Sometimes it is not the questions which are difficult, but the interviewers. You may feel you are not achieving rapport with them.

In general, interviewers are trying to help you to do yourself justice.

However, the world is not perfect and neither are people. You may, unfortunately, meet some interviewers with whom you do not have a pleasant experience. If this happens to you, the best strategy is to keep firmly in your mind that your goal is to present yourself as well as possible. Just stick to your plan of being professional, positive and focused on showing your abilities. Then, after the interview, chalk it down to experience. You may just have caught the person on a bad day or they may be indicative of the way the organisations works. Either way, the damage done is to them – unless you let it damage you. After all, if they decided to offer you the job, you would have to think long and hard about whether to take it.

The final section this week considers what you should do after the interview.

8 After the interview



Figure 15 Thank you note

There are some practical steps you can take immediately after an interview.

Firstly, send the interviewers an informal thank you note. They paid you the compliment of inviting you to interview and gave up their time to see you. A follow up note is not only polite, but reinforces their memory of you. Even if you are not offered the job, other vacancies may arise and you want them to have a positive recollection of you.

If you are not offered the job, telephone or write a letter asking if it would be possible to have some feedback. Not all employers offer this, but if they do, it can provide useful tips for future applications and point you in the right direction.

Also, think about the questions and your answers. Did you do yourself justice? By now, in this course, you are very familiar with the benefits of reflecting on the things you have done, or said, so that you can decide if you want to change your approach in the future. So, conduct your own mini reflective review after each interview. Remember – write it down! The chances are you would have forgotten some of it by the next interview.

Now you have nearly finished this week, it is time to think back to how you confident you were about interviews at the start of the week.

Activity 9 Interviews: how do you feel now?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

Look back at the notes you wrote for Activity 1 in which you rated your confidence in interview situations.

Do you now feel more confident about tackling different types of interviews?

Rate yourself again now. You might also find it useful to jot down any tips from this week you particularly want to remember for your next interview.

Comment

Hopefully, you feel more confident as a result of what you have learned and practised this week. By putting these ideas into practice in the future, you will certainly be able to build on this confidence. Remember though to reflect on each new interview situation, to build your skills.

This finishes your work on interview techniques and was the final topic for the course as well. It's time now to complete this week's quiz.

9 Week 7 quiz

This week's quiz is your last opportunity to practise before the final badge quiz, next week. It will give you the chance to check your understanding of interviews and interview techniques.

Go to:

[Week 7 practice quiz.](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

10 Summary

This week you have deepened your understanding of how to present your best self to the people who can offer you the work in an interview situation. You should feel more confident about how to handle these opportunities and also better prepared for what to expect in different situations. These should all help you to be successful in the future.

This is the culmination of seven weeks of work on understanding your strengths, aspirations and options. Congratulations for reaching this point – it is great achievement. In the next, and final, week of the course, you look back over the work you have done since the start of course, fill in any gaps and to plan for what you will do with your new learning and confidence.

You should now feel that you can:

- explore different types of interview
- consider how to prepare for interviews
- explore question types and how to handle them
- practise answering interview questions
- enhance your confidence in performing well at interview.

You can now go to Week 8.

Week 8: Planning your next steps

Introduction

Hopefully, your engagement with this course has left you feeling that everyone, including you, is entitled to think that they have a career and to define 'that career' in a way that makes sense to you. This week you prepare for life after this course and how you will apply what you have learned. The activities are designed to help you ask 'what next?' and to create your own personal development plan.

Instead of introducing you to a lot of new material this week, the focus is on helping you to make sense of the learning experience this course has offered and to plan ahead. The week begins with a reminder of the career planning process, and explains how personal development planning helps. You will review your prior work on the course, fill in any gaps, and use this as the basis for planning what you will do when the course ends.

Finally, you will take the second of the two assessed quizzes, which must be successfully completed if you want to gain a badge for the course.

Watch Wendy introduce Week 8:

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- summarise what you have learned from the course
- use SWOT and SMART to assess your wish list and action plan
- produce an action plan for the next six months
- understand the need to review and update your action plan.

1 Your career planning process

In Week 1 you were introduced to the four main steps in a career planning process shown in Figure 1. As you probably realise, the course has been following this cycle.

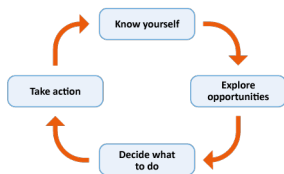


Figure 1 The career planning process

In the early weeks you undertook activities designed to help you to ‘know yourself’ in new ways. This enabled you to decide which opportunities you might want to explore. As you explored opportunities, you were encouraged to make decisions about what might be right for you. All that remains now is to decide what action to take.

Of course, the process does not work as neatly as the diagram suggests. Each time you explore an opportunity you may learn something new about yourself. As you learn more about your abilities, your horizons extend and you may be prepared to consider opportunities that you might previously have dismissed as ‘not for the likes of me’. You may have revised your ideas on what options would be fit for you, and some of your decisions about what kind of work to pursue, or about the working patterns that might suit you, may have changed. See the cycle as a dynamic, interactive set of activities to which you can return, at any stage.

At this stage in the course though, you are asked to focus on two things:

- deciding what you will do
- writing a personal development plan.

First, though, let’s consider what is meant by personal development plans.

2 Personal development planning



Figure 2 Your future

As the career planning diagram suggests, there are different steps you need to take at different stages of managing your career. A personal development plan is simply a structure you put around your activities, to make sure that they tie back to your thinking about the direction you want to go in.

A key idea in personal development planning is that learning is something which is life-long and encompasses all aspects of our life. A career is one aspect of our life, but as you have seen, it connects to many personal goals so it is easier to think of them together.

So, a good personal development plan helps you to:

- understand the skills you already have and to identify those you need to acquire or to develop further
- work out what you want to do in your career and how you will go about achieving this
- make choices between study and other development options, which might be important for your career and for your personal growth
- gather together the kind of information that you need in order to:
 - write a good CV or job application
 - present yourself positively in recruitment or appraisal interviews
 - show that you are ready to take on more responsibilities, apply for a promotion or apply for development opportunities that will stretch you.

By completing the course activities in your notebook you have been identifying what you are learning from new ideas and experiences. This is a core skill, which not only helps you to plan your own personal, study or work-based development, but is central to some educational programmes and many forms of employment (QAA, 2009).

2.1 The next steps in your plan

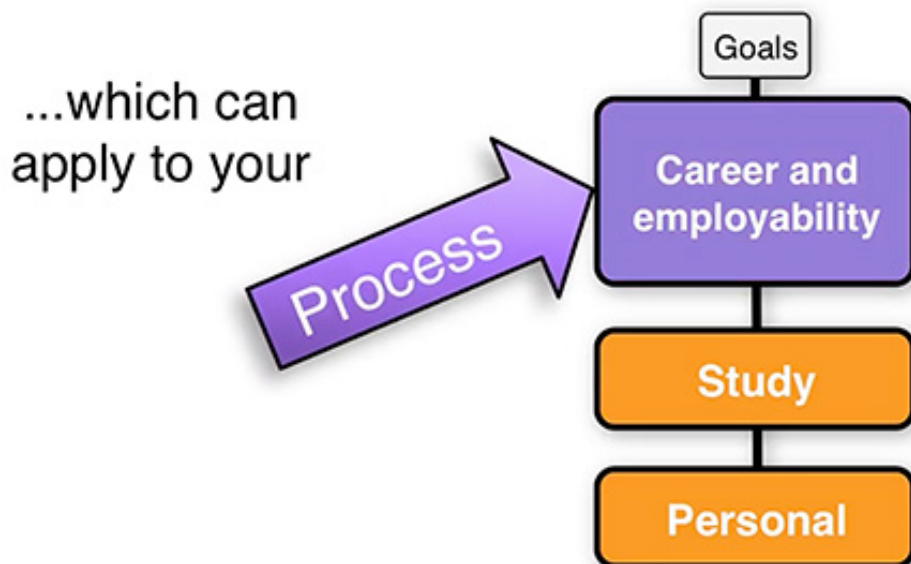
The process you have been following over the last seven weeks has been part of your personal development planning. It just needs completing by considering your next steps. This first activity helps you to understand the process and what it might offer you personally.

Activity 1 Personal development plan process

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Watch the following short video, which explains the personal development plan process.

Video content is not available in this format.



Take a few moments to reflect on what you heard. What were the main points being made? Write down your answer in your notebook.

Then, check your answer.

Answer

Some of the points which you might have written down include:

- Personal development plans can encompass career, study or personal aspirations.
- You need to assess your skills and strengths.
- You need to set realistic goals.
- You need a plan with timescales.
- You need to plan the actions you will take to progress each goal.
- You need to constantly record your achievements and new skills.

- You need to step back now and then and review how you have done against the plan, what you have learned and what the next phase of the plan needs to be.

Discussion

Which of these might be most important to you personally, at this stage?

Again, write down your answer in your notebook. Choose no more than three. You can always revise and add to them later. For now, focus on the things which will be most important immediately after the course finishes. It will serve as a reminder for you to go back to, when you have more time.

This sounds easier than personal development planning is in practice, as those of you who may have been asked to write one before may know. Of course, all the work you have done over the previous seven weeks has been a foundation for yours, so it makes sense to pause in the next section to review that work, and to fill in any gaps.

3 Reviewing and strengthening



Figure 3 Reviewing

Before writing your action plan, you need to give yourself space to review what you have done on the course, and to revisit any aspects that you need to complete, or about which you want to think more deeply.

Activity 2 Filling in the gaps

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Table 1 is provided to remind you of the kinds of activity you covered in each week. Use your thoughts in your notebook, to decide which activities you might need to devote some time to this week before moving on. Identify those activities you need to:

- revisit (in order to cover an area in more depth or to do a bit more thinking or work on)
- do for the first time.

Make further notes in your notebook or in the 'My note' column of Table 1 in the Resource pack.

Table 1 Activities covered

Week	Key topics/activities	My note
1	'Wants' from work Workline – influences on you so far Beliefs and values Interests and passions Constraints and limitations	
2	Knowledge and skills Roles in life Skills acquired in work, learning and life	
3	Work you want to do Market for work and matching it Finding out about types of work Working patterns and options	
4	Work experience placement	

	<p>Finding work experience</p> <p>Benefiting from work experience</p> <p>Voluntary work and how to find it</p> <p>Learning review of the course so far</p>	
5	<p>Networking</p> <p>What it is and why to do it</p> <p>Types of networking</p> <p>Mapping out your own network</p> <p>Using networks to obtain work</p> <p>Social networks and registering online</p>	
6	<p>Analysing job advertisements</p> <p>Matching skills to job advertisements</p> <p>STAR and RAPPAS techniques</p> <p>Completing application forms</p> <p>CVs – and the different types</p> <p>LinkedIn profile creation</p>	
7	<p>Interviews and how to approach them</p> <p>Types of interviews</p> <p>Types of interview question</p> <p>Preparing for interviews</p> <p>Performing in interviews</p> <p>Following up from interviews</p>	

Now identify three priority areas you want to review this week. You can always go back to the lesser priorities later. For now, focus on the things that will help you to decide where to focus your energy once the course ends.

Write down your priorities in your notebook.

Try to make your ideas about what you need to do quite specific. So, instead of writing 'look again at interviews', for example, write something like 'practise answers to competency-based questions' or 'practise (with a friend) giving my answers in a confident voice'.

Copy this table into your notebook or you can complete it in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 2 Priority areas

Priority Area	Why	What do I need to do?

Once you have your priorities, you are in a good position to decide how best to use your time this week. The activity in the next section is one which you construct (in part) yourself, as it focuses on your priorities.

3.1 Your priorities and decisions so far



Figure 4 Your priorities

This is an activity that you partly design yourself because time has been allowed this week for you to:

- complete or revise work from previous weeks that is on your priority list
- review all your thoughts in your notebook and to draw out any key decisions you have made along the way.

Activity 3 Revisions and decisions time

Allow approximately 30 minutes

For activities that you wish to complete or revise (which you identified in Activity 2), you should return to the relevant section of your notebook and do the work there.

Once you are ready to review your notes and draw out your decisions, list them in your notebook under the heading 'My decisions so far ...'

Decisions might sound a strong word, and you may not yet feel wholly committed to some of the ideas you have had so far. This is fine. You are looking for the areas in which your thinking is pretty clear. For example, you want to work part time, or you wish to stay in your current career but perhaps move employer, or your next step is to find voluntary work that allows you to develop your interests in some way.

When you are ready to review your notes and draw out your 'decisions', make sure you record them in your notebook.

The following topics might prompt your thoughts, but do not feel constrained by them.

You may have made decisions about:

- yourself and what motivates you
- how you might be holding yourself back
- what changes you might need to make to pursue your aspirations
- the type of work you want to do – and where
- the kind of career you want
- the working pattern that best suits you
- the skills or knowledge you might need to acquire
- personal contacts you want to talk to
- jobs or work you want to actively seek soon
- new contacts you want to build.

Comment

You may well be surprised by the amount of ground you have covered over the last seven weeks, and also the number of decisions you have made already. That is just great! You should feel a real sense of achievement, however long your list is in answer to this activity. After all, making a decision to rule something out is just as important as identifying a potential new career path.

Having reviewed what you have done over the past few weeks, and taken a bit of time to sharpen your ideas where needed, you are now in a good position to think about what you want to take forward into an action plan. The next section takes you through this in a structured way.

4 Moving forward

You have just done a 'stock take' of where you are and now can think about how you want to move forward.

The first thing to do is to construct a 'wish list' of what you would like to achieve in both the short term and the long term. Below is an example of Jon's wish list, presented as a spray diagram (sometimes known as a 'mind map'). You encountered mind mapping as a technique in Week 5 when you mapped out your personal contacts network.

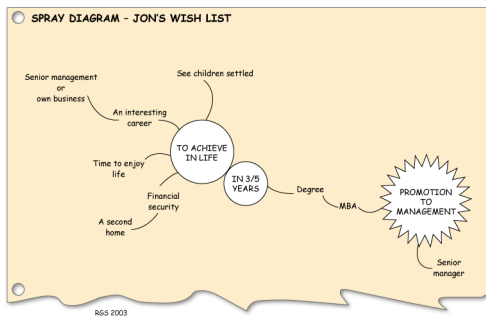


Figure 5 Jon's wish list

You might feel that Jon has aspirations that are way beyond what feels achievable for you and feel slightly demotivated. Or, perhaps you identify with Jon, and see him as someone who might be in a similar position to you. It is an ambitious set of wishes, and you might wonder whether they are even achievable. For instance, doing both a degree and a Masters in Business Administration within three to five years is certainly challenging, and could probably only be done if he studied on a full-time basis.

Without more knowledge of Jon's personal circumstances, it is tricky to judge how realistic he might have been in creating his wish list. In a way, it is not too much of a problem if he has been unrealistic. They are only 'wishes', not a plan. But notice that Jon's wishes are not all about work. They are wishes for his life. Work seems to be important in its own right because Jon wants an 'interesting' career. It is also something that makes other things possible. For instance, work may provide the income to buy the second home he wants. Now it's your turn to create your own wish list.

Activity 4 My personal wish list

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity encourages you to create your own list of wishes, but in a structured way. Throughout the course you have written down lots of your wishes and wants and, in the previous section, you wrote down any 'decisions' you made along the way. Now is the time to pull them together.

Produce your own wish list of what you would like to achieve in the short term (next 6–12 months) and the longer term (3–5 years). If you like the mind mapping technique you may want to follow Jon's example. Otherwise, use a table similar to the example below in your notebook or you can complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 3 My wish list

What would I like to achieve in the long term?	What would I like to achieve in the short term?

Having worked out what you would like to happen in your life over the next few years, it now makes sense to briefly consider where you are starting from. The next step is to create what is called a 'SWOT' analysis of yourself and your situation. SWOT stands for:

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats.

You'll do this analysis in the next section.

4.1 SWOT analysis



Figure 6 SWOT analysis

The purpose of a SWOT analysis is to help you to move from your wish list to a specific and achievable goal.

When you complete it, you will be again pulling together some of the questions you have already asked yourself over the last seven weeks.

Let's look at Jon's SWOT analysis to get a feel for this and as an example of how it can help you to take a balanced view.

Table 4 Jon's SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good interpersonal skills • Motivated • Good team worker • Organised – meet targets • Leadership skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to do too much at once • Find uncertainty quite difficult to manage • Can be too single-minded
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good position at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing work and home

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to further study • Support from work for further training • Supportive family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain commercial market, especially in IT • What are the priorities?
--	---

Now you need to do your own analysis to help you move forward with confidence.

Activity 5 My personal SWOT analysis

Allow approximately 15 minutes

This activity helps you to shape your thoughts from the last seven weeks, and to highlight where to focus your energy.

Carry out your own SWOT analysis by copying this example grid into your notebook or you can complete this in your [Resource pack](#).

The following table of questions is to help you get started, but remember to use the thinking you have already developed in your notebook.

Table 5 Example SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
What do I do well in life?	What do I do less well in life?
What do other people see as the things I am good at?	What do other people suggest I need to get better at doing?
What skills do I tend to rely on most?	What skills do I tend to avoid using?
Which skills are the ones I've developed furthest so far?	What personal qualities might I wish I had – but don't?
What personal qualities are strengths for me?	
Opportunities	Threats
What possibilities are open to me?	What might cause me difficulties?
What works in my favour at the moment?	What restrictions are there on me?
What resources do I have?	What is changing in my life and may close options for me?
What/who can help me?	Where are there gaps in my resources or sources of help?
What is changing in my life and may open new options for me?	

Be honest about your weaknesses – there is no point deceiving yourself and, as you know, you can take steps to develop those areas. Keep the responses simple. Once you have identified what is feasible, you can start to prioritise and decide what you want to achieve first.

Comment

Your wish list is an expression of your aspirations, of what you want for yourself at some point in the future. If they are 'wishes', they are likely to be things you do not have now, or feel you do not have enough of currently. The SWOT analysis describes where you are right now. Obviously, there will be a gap between the two, so you are likely to want to make some change. That's a good result, as it means you are on the way to planning for the future and taking action.

You need to work actively towards any changes you have identified in your wish list. The SWOT analysis will help you identify what actions you need to take and issues you need to watch out for.

4.2 Reflecting on your wish list and SWOT analysis

You might have concluded that trying to improve your current situation is your best option. For instance, if you are employed and not doing the work that most interests you, or feel that you are struggling to get right the balance between work and the rest of your life, you may already have thought about how you might seek some changes within your existing job.

Some of your future-based aspirations, however, may not fit at all with your current situation. Perhaps you are not in work at all and are struggling to find a job. Perhaps you like your job but do not seem to be able to get promoted. You might not be able to take on work at the moment, but want to prepare yourself for doing that in the future; however, making time for study or work experience is difficult. Whatever the change you want to make, you might need to consider one or more of the following approaches:

- Change yourself. Examine your own attitudes, behaviour, ambitions, skills and lifestyle, and consider how, if you changed any of these, your situation might improve.
- Live with it. Devise a strategy to minimise the aspects of the situation you do not like and maximise those you do.
- Leave. Find a constructive way to move away from the situation that causes you difficulties.

In the next section you will be writing an action plan for the next six months. Bear these potential changes in mind as you think about the actions that might best serve you.

5 Action planning



Figure 7 SMART

Some changes happen in life without planning, or without you taking action. Others need your focus, attention and energy, if they are to take place. If you want changes in a specific direction, then you need to take charge of that process and plan what you are going to do to make it happen.

A good action plan breaks down your goals into smaller, more specific steps in order to make them more achievable. One of Jon's goals is to gain a degree within four years. He asks himself four questions:

1. What do I need to do to realise the goal?
2. How I can do this?
3. What resources might I need to help me?
4. When do I need to take action to secure these resources?

The table below shows how Jon collated his answers and acted. It is an example of the kind of action plan you might want to create.

Table 6 Jon's action plan

My goal	
A degree within four years	
What?	How?
Need to do 90 credits per year	Do breakdown of typical week
Allocate realistic time for study, i.e. 24 hours per week	Note best and worst times of day for study Timetable in 24 hours using as much 'best time' as possible Think about which study tasks I might tackle during 'difficult' times, e.g. watching course videos
Resources to help	When?
Tom, my line manager – to negotiate some study leave and/or flexible working hours	Talk to Tom during my appraisal on 10 November
Clare – to add key family commitments to timetable, e.g. parents' evenings	Talk to Clare next weekend while children are at swimming lessons and do timetable

Parents – to ask for help with children and garden Ask Mum and Dad over for a meal next week

5.1 SMART

After you've constructed an action plan you need to think about how good it is. Fortunately, there is a tool called SMART to help you do this.

This means the best action plans are:

Specific – they state the goal, ideally as an outcome. For instance, saying that you will weigh 10 stones is more specific than saying that you will weigh less than you do now.

Measurable – you will know whether or not you have achieved something. If you know you want to end up at 10 stones, you know how many pounds you need to lose, and can measure your progress.

Achievable – it is within reasonable reach for you. Assessing this, for instance, might involve checking what percentage weight loss this would represent and how long it might take you to do it.

Realistic – it takes circumstances into account. For instance, if your weight loss plan involves a 20% loss over three months, and you worked out how many pounds weight loss per week that would mean, you would be better able to judge whether or not it is practical.

Time-bound – it has a target within which you will have done something. If three months is not realistic for your weight loss, what would be?

You can use the SMART tool to help you to create goals and action plans, as well as to review how good your plan is.

See how you get on using SMART in the next activity.

Activity 6 Using SMART criteria

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Look back at Jon's action plan and review it against the SMART criteria. Would you say that it meets them?

Look for the evidence against each of the criteria. An example has been given to start you off. You may have to make some assumptions about what is realistic or achievable, but look for indicators of whether or not Jon has tried to test these things. Carry out your own SMART analysis by copying this example grid into your notebook or you can complete it in your [Resource pack](#).

Table 7 SMART evidence

Criterion	Evidence
Specific	
Measurable	
Achievable	
Realistic	
Time-bound	Example – Jon gives himself four years in which to do a degree.

Comment

You probably found that some of Jon's ideas were 'SMARTer' than others. This should have given you some clues on what you might imitate or do differently in your own planning.

In the next section you will devise your own action plan and test it using SMART.

5.2 Building your own action plan



Figure 8 Planning

The next activity gives you the chance to complete the third part of the career planning process (decide what to do) and move on to 'take action'.

Activity 7 My action plan

Allow approximately 30 minutes

Now put what you have learned into practice by creating your own action plan.

First of all, choose your priority goal for the next six months. For example, you might decide that finding a paid job is your priority, or that you want to apply for promotion at work, or that you need to take a qualification related to the work you are doing or want to do. If your focus is not on work right now, you might want goals related to your relationship with your family, a role you want to play in your local community, or a sport or a craft you want to master.

When you have chosen the goal you want to work on, follow Jon's example and create your own action plan by drawing Table 8 in your notebook or you can complete it in your [Resource pack](#).

Don't forget to check your plan against the SMART criteria.

Table 8 My action plan

My goal:	
What?	How?
Resources to help	When?

Comment

The real test is how clear you are about what you are going to do in the first few months after the course ends. Of course, you have long-term goals too, so you need to keep your plan under review to make sure you keep those in your sight.

The next section covers how to review your development plan.

6 Planning to 'stay on track'



Figure 9 Keeping on track

It is one thing to write a plan, but it is quite another to follow it through. Thinking about your achievements and recording them helps you stay on track once you get started. You have invested time on this course in establishing what skills and abilities you have to offer, and where they might best be offered. You have also acquired new skills and knowledge. It is important not only to keep a record of what you can do, but also to keep it current and up to date. No one else is going to have as clear a view of your abilities and your development as you are, so if you don't keep your record up to date, you will always be selling yourself short in some way.

As you follow your action plan, paying attention to this becomes part of your routine. The following guidelines are designed to act as a checklist for you:

1. Make sure you add to your record of achievements at regular intervals, perhaps every month, or every three months. Have a diary date to remind you.
2. Don't forget to continue to collect evidence and examples of the new skills you acquire.
3. If you uncover a gap in your knowledge, or struggle to do something because of a lack of skill in particular area, make a note in your plan and put an action to address it. (Then make sure to do Step 2 when you have completed the development.)
4. As your achievements build, look at your goals again and decide which have been met, which still remain relevant and whether or not you can add any new goals.

It is possible that plans will not work out exactly as you intended, so it is always useful to stand back from them now and then and review the situation as it has unfolded. It is not necessarily a bad thing if plans do not go as we expected. Sometimes opportunities or alternatives open up that you had not originally anticipated.

When you decide to review your plans then the questions below might help:

- Was I being realistic in my plans – in terms of how much time I could give to something, how long it might take me, how much it asked of me?
- Did anything affect my plan that I could not influence? Could I have anticipated any of this?
- Did my plans change because of something I did or did not do? Was this helpful or unhelpful?
- Has the plan taken me in an unexpected direction but one I am happy with following? Or have I gone off track altogether?
- Do I need to re-plan? If so, what are the next natural one or two things for me to do – either to get back on track or to move forward?

You may have questions of your own to add. As you have learned through practice each week, questions are a good way of prompting reflection. So, use the questions to reflect on any changes you might want to make to your goals and plans, and how to make them achievable.

In the last section of the course you'll look at the importance of reflection, before finishing by reflecting on your own learning throughout the course.

7 The importance of reflection



Figure 10 Reflection

You have had a lot of practice in reflecting on what you have done over the course of the last eight weeks, and this is an important skill in its own right. Before your final learning review of the course, watch a short video in which Stephen McGann discusses his own experience of learning how to reflect in practice, and why he now understands it to be so important.

Activity 8 Learning from reflection

Allow approximately 5 minutes

In this video, actor and OU graduate Stephen McGann discusses how learning to reflect on what he did was an integral part of his degree course. He introduces the term 'reflective practice' – which is the same skill you have been encouraged to use on this short course, although you may not have always been aware of it. Listen to his views on what he gained from reflective practice and why it has become such an important skill that he continues to use it. Make a few notes.

Video content is not available in this format.



Comment

Hopefully Stephen inspired you to want to continue to use your reflective skills. You may want to jot down in your notebook any thoughts about how and when you might do this.

For now, at least, put your reflective skills into practice in the final section of this week, which invites you to look back over the course and record your main learning points.

7.1 Learning review

No doubt you have discovered for yourself that you can spend as little or as long as you like on reflective activity. The more time you give to it, the deeper your reflections will be, but the important thing is to write down your thoughts so that you can revisit them in the future and add to them if you wish to.

Activity 9 Final learning review

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Use these questions to prompt your reflections on your learning over the last eight weeks, but do not limit yourself to these. Aim to think of three questions of your own and write your answers to them too. Write your thoughts in your notebook.

Reflective questions

- What motivated you to begin this course?
- Has your motivation changed at all during the course?
- What have you decided about the kind of work you want to do?
- Has this decision changed over time? If so, why?
- What areas of the course have you found most interesting and useful to you?

- How do you plan to use the areas you found most interesting and useful?
- Which areas of the course did you find least interesting or least useful to you?
- Might any of the less interesting or less useful areas become more valuable to you in the future?
- What are you most proud of having done or achieved over the last seven weeks?

Imagine it is now six months since you completed the course and you are talking to someone who might be able to offer you work. They ask you what you learned from this course. What would you say? (Remember the 'lift activity', and the need to make clear the value of your learning to the other person in a short time.)

Comment

This activity should have helped you to see how far you have come since the beginning of the course. It may have raised more questions for you but see this as a positive. That means you have more options to explore and work on.

And that's it – you've finished all the activities for the course and should have a notebook full of ideas and thoughts to help you move forward. Well done, you should feel proud of what you've achieved. Remember you can always revisit your notebook at any time to add more thoughts that occur to you. Reflection and learning never stop. **Warning! Tahoma not supported**

8 Week 8 quiz

You are now ready to take the final quiz for your badge. This quiz is another 15-question quiz, like Week 4, but as with all the other quizzes, you still have three chances to answer each question.

Remember to take your time reading the questions, and answer options if given, to give yourself the best chance to show your full knowledge and understanding. Good luck!

Go to:

[Week 8 compulsory badge quiz.](#)

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

9 Summary

During the past eight weeks you have been drawing out your thoughts on:

- who you are
- what you want for yourself going forward
- how to find out what kind of opportunities might be available
- how to develop a network of contacts who can help you with your aspirations
- how to put together a convincing written presentation of your abilities
- how to put those abilities across in situations where you are trying to secure a job or access the work you want
- your action plan going forwards.

Alongside the ideas and arguments you have encountered, you have been encouraged to apply the ideas to your own situation, and to reflect on your experiences. Your notebook is now your 'resource bank' of ideas about what matters to you, where you might want to take your interests, and what you need to do to achieve them.

It is a great achievement to complete the course, so remember to add the new skills to your CV, but you have also taken the first steps that may enable you to achieve your goals. Always keep these in mind now you have identified them, and good luck with fulfilling your career aspirations.

You should now feel that you can:

- summarise what you have learned from the course
- use SWOT and SMART to assess your wish list and action plan
- produce an action plan for the next six months
- understand the need to review and update your action plan.

If you've gained your badge you'll receive an email to notify you. You can view and manage your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing all the criteria to gain a badge.

Now you've completed the course we would again appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us a bit about your experience of studying it and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. If you'd like to help, please fill in this [optional survey](#).

Tell us what you think

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short [end-of-course survey](#) (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Week 4). We'd like to find out a bit about your experience of studying the course and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

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