

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY

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What is psychology? Most people are at least a little bit familiar with the field of psychology. Common responses to the question, “What is psychology?” include the following:

“Psychology is the study of the mind.”

“Psychology helps people solve problems.”

“Psychology looks at the things inside us that make us do what we do.”

These are all true, but did you know that psychologists also study animals? Just as most people know a little something about psychology, there are also gaps in most people’s understanding of psychology. For example, what does a professional trained in psychology do? Common responses to this question include the following:

“Studies people’s minds and thought processes to determine causes of health problems that cannot be explained by physiology.”

“Conducts therapy to help people with everyday problems, such as difficulty in personal relations, sleep disruption, or behavioral problems, notably without the use of medication or drugs.”

“Works as a doctor to treat patients suffering from mental disorders and problems by listening.”

Are these responses accurate? Yes and no. Psychology is the study of mind and behavior, and it permits us to help people experiencing problems. However, the discipline of psychology encompasses much more than therapy, as we will discuss throughout this book. Each role described is held by professionals with graduate training in psychology—that is, training beyond the bachelor’s degree.

Although most people believe they know a bit about psychology, they typically fall silent when asked the following question: “What does someone with a bachelor’s degree in psychology do?” If you’re like most psychology students, you’ve been asked this question, perhaps repeatedly. This book will introduce you to the broad range of careers in psychology to help you answer career-related questions with confidence. Most importantly, this book is intended to help you find your personal answer to the question, “What can I do with a degree in psychology?”

PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS SUBFIELDS

Many people first become acquainted with the field of psychology informally through their everyday experience. Turn on the television to see a psychologist on a daytime talk show explaining how parents can help their troubled teens. Scroll through options on a streaming app, and you may see fictional dramas depicting psychologists conducting therapy or assisting families to stage interventions to aid troubled individuals. Social

media posts from psychologists might tout the benefits of mindfulness and becoming more aware of your daily existence. Psychology has ingrained itself into American pop culture. But how much do you really know about psychology and the work of those trained in psychology? You may be surprised to learn that the field of psychology extends beyond therapy, self-help books, and parenting advice.

What is psychology, then? Psychology is the scientific study of behavior—anything an animal or a person does, feels, or thinks. Psychologists are scientists who apply precise methods of observation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation to learn what makes people and animals behave like they do. Psychologists generate hypotheses, or educated guesses, about what might cause a particular behavior or phenomenon, and they conduct careful scientific research to test those hypotheses. Psychology examines interactions among the brain, the environment, psychological functioning, and behavior. Topics of psychological study include social relationships, human development, personality, the brain and the chemicals that influence it, the causes of normative and atypical behavior, and much more.

A wide range of topics fall under the umbrella of psychology, and many subfields of study exist. The largest professional organization for psychologists, the American Psychological Association, lists 56 divisions or specializations in psychology, as shown in the following box.

APA DIVISIONS

1. Society for General Psychology
2. Society for the Teaching of Psychology
3. Society for Experimental Psychology and Cognitive Science
- 4.
5. Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
6. Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology
7. Developmental Psychology
8. Society for Personality and Social Psychology
9. Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)
10. Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts
- 11.
12. Society of Clinical Psychology
13. Society of Consulting Psychology
14. Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology
15. Educational Psychology
16. School Psychology
17. Society of Counseling Psychology
18. Psychologists in Public Service
19. Society for Military Psychology
20. Adult Development and Aging
21. Applied Experimental and Engineering Psychology
22. Rehabilitation Psychology

23. Consumer Psychology
24. Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology
25. Behavior Analysis
26. Society for the History of Psychology
27. Society for Community Research and Action: Division of Community Psychology
28. Society for Psychopharmacology and Substance Use
29. Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy
30. Society of Psychological Hypnosis
31. State, Provincial and Territorial Psychological Association Affairs
32. Society for Humanistic Psychology
33. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities/Autism Spectrum Disorder
34. Society for Environmental, Population and Conservation Psychology
35. Society for the Psychology of Women
36. Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality
37. Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice
38. Society for Health Psychology
39. Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology
40. Society for Clinical Neuropsychology
41. American Psychology-Law Society
42. Psychologists in Independent Practice
43. Society for Couple and Family Psychology
44. Society for Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity
45. Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race
46. Society for Media Psychology and Technology
47. Society for Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology
48. Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology Division
49. Society of Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy
50. Society of Addiction Psychology
51. Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinities
52. International Psychology
53. Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology
54. Society of Pediatric Psychology
55. Society for Prescribing Psychology
56. Trauma Psychology

Note: Divisions 4 and 11 are currently vacant. Division 4 was the Psychometric Society, which elected to not become an APA Division. Division 11, originally Abnormal Psychology and Psychotherapy, joined with Division 12 (Society for Clinical Psychology) in 1946.

The many subfields of psychology mean that there are many types of psychologists who engage in a variety of research and applied activities. Each chapter within this book examines one or more subdisciplines within psychology to provide a taste of the many fields in which people with interests in the field (perhaps, like you) may work. Table 1.1 presents an overview of the most common specialties within psychology that we will discuss in this book.

TABLE 1.1 ■ **Subfields in Psychology**

Subfield	Emphasis
Behavioral Neuroscience	Brain and behavior
Clinical Psychology	Emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems or disorders
Community Psychology	Interactions between individuals and their communities
Counseling Psychology	Normative function and healthy adaptation
Developmental Psychology	Optimizing human development across the lifespan
Educational Psychology	Understanding how people learn and modifying educational settings accordingly
Experimental Psychology	Scientific methodology and research
Forensic Psychology	Applying psychology to inform and study legal issues
Health Psychology	Psychological, biological, and social influences on health and wellness
Human Factors or Engineering Psychology	People's interactions with machines, environments, and products
Industrial and Organizational Psychology	Optimizing the workplace
Quantitative Psychology and Psychometrics	Devising techniques for acquiring, measuring, and analyzing
School Psychology	Fostering children's development in the school setting
Social Psychology	Examining people's interactions with each other and the social environment

CAREERS FOR PSYCHOLOGY MAJORS

Psychology is consistently among the top five most popular bachelor's degrees awarded each year. In the 2020–2021 academic year, about 127,000 students earned bachelor's degrees in psychology (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Why are so many students attracted to psychology? Psychology courses cover a range of fascinating topics, such as how we think, learn, use our memory, feel emotions, cope with adversity, and change throughout our lives. Much of what we study in psychology directly relates to our everyday life. We all seek to understand human behavior and the environment around us. Moreover, psychology students develop a host of transferrable skills that are useful across many settings.

Many undergraduate students choose psychology because of their desire to become psychologists. However, a bachelor's degree in psychology will not qualify you to be a psychologist. Becoming a psychologist requires a doctoral degree, which entails several years of education, training, and supervision beyond the bachelor's degree. Degrees in psychology are summarized in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2 ■ Graduate Degrees in Psychology

Degree	Length to Completion	Career Settings
Master's Degree	2 years	Depending on the program and curriculum, master's graduates can teach psychology in high school (other certification may be needed), become more competitive for jobs in government and industry, practice industrial/organizational psychology in business settings, and obtain certification to practice counseling.
Doctoral Degree	4 to 7 years	Generally, students pursue doctoral degrees to teach college, conduct research in a university or private organization in industry or business, practice clinical psychology without supervision, and engage in various consulting roles allowing autonomy.

Types of Doctoral Degrees

Degree	Description
PhD: Doctor of Philosophy	Research degree that culminates in a dissertation based on original research. PhD graduates may work as researchers and practitioners in various settings.
PsyD: Doctor of Psychology	Professional degrees are offered only in clinical, counseling, and school psychology. PsyD students become expert practitioners but do not become researchers.
EdD: Doctor of Education	Research degree offered in education departments. Graduates often work in the field of education and educational psychology as researchers, administrators, and professors.

Although a bachelor's degree in psychology won't qualify you to practice psychology, you can develop psychological literacy and transferrable skills that apply to a variety of careers, including many that entail helping other people. Many psychology students are unaware of career options for psychology majors and overestimate the education needed for their desired careers (Collisson & Eck, 2022; Strapp et al., 2018).

Most students with bachelor's degrees in psychology do not go to graduate school. About 17% of graduates with bachelor's degrees in psychology and other social sciences earned in 2016–2017 enrolled in graduate school within 12 months after graduation (Velez et al., 2019). In 2019, 14% of all the 3.7 million people in the United States who held psychology bachelor's degrees also held graduate degrees in psychology; another 29% had graduate degrees in other fields (American Psychological Association, 2021). The takeaway? Most psychology majors head into the job market.

Moreover, the unemployment rate for psychology majors is consistently similar and often slightly lower than the overall federal unemployment rate (Gellerman & Ahuja, 2021). In 2023, the unemployment rate for psychology majors aged 22 to 27 was 4.7%, compared to the national average of 5.1% (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2023). Unemployment rates ranged from about 1% in nursing, 5% in business, 9% in sociology, and 12% in the fine arts.

Jobs, Occupations, and Careers

You may have noticed both the terms “job” and “career” in this chapter. In conversations, these two terms are often used interchangeably, often with the term “occupation,” but jobs, occupations, and careers have subtle but significant differences.

A *job* primarily serves as a means of financial support, involving a specific hired position within an organization. For instance, human resources assistant is a job title associated with assisting the human resources department with tasks like recruitment and clerical duties. In contrast, an *occupation* is a broader category encompassing the field or type of work. A particular occupation includes many job titles. In this example, human resources assistant is a job title within the occupation of human resources.

A *career* is a person's lifelong body of professional experiences, a journey guided by their passions and aspirations. It includes the collection of jobs they have held, education and training, and accumulated experience. Constructing a career involves aligning one's values, interests, and long-term goals. Specific jobs and experiences are stepping stones toward developing skills and achieving career goals. However, for most people, career development is not a linear process. Instead, most people's careers progress curvilinearly, forming spirals and swirls as they gain new skills and move from position to position (Coffee et al., 2019). A career inspires one to seek opportunities to learn, build skills, grow professionally, and advance, taking on more challenging roles and responsibilities. A fulfilling career brings personal satisfaction.

Most students find the prospect of choosing a career overwhelming. You're not alone. As you begin this process, remember, a career isn't decided in one sitting. Most people refine their ideas and plans as they gain experience—and a career develops over a lifetime. For this reason, in this chapter, we focus on skills, learning about jobs, and how to prepare for careers.

Transferable Skills Developed With a Psychology Education

The psychology major prepares graduates for “lifelong learning, thinking, and action” (McGovern et al., 1991, p. 600). Like other liberal arts majors, psychology students learn valuable thinking and communication skills. Psychology education, however, is unique because it emphasizes learning and applying principles of psychology to understand human behavior. Psychology majors develop a host of transferrable skills, skills that apply to a variety of careers.

Knowledge of Human Behavior

The content of psychology, knowledge about human behavior, is intrinsically valuable. Undergraduate education in psychology is intended to expose students to the discipline’s major facts, theories, and issues. Understanding human behavior entails learning about physiology, perception, cognition, emotion, development, and more. Consequently, psychology majors construct a broad knowledge base that serves as the conceptual framework for lifelong learning about human behavior and the capacity to apply their understanding in everyday situations.

Information Acquisition and Synthesis Skills

The knowledge base of psychology is constantly expanding. Successful psychology students learn how to gather and synthesize information. They learn how to use a range of sources, including the library, computerized databases, and the internet, to gather information about an area of interest. Psychology students learn to weigh and integrate information into a coherent and persuasive argument. In addition, successful psychology students apply their advanced understanding of cognition and memory to enhance their processing and recall of information.

Research Methods and Statistical Skills

Psychology students learn how to apply the scientific method to address questions about human behavior. They learn how to identify a problem, devise a hypothesis, choose and carry out scientific methods to gather information about the problem, conduct statistical analyses to evaluate a hypothesis, and interpret data summaries to devise a conclusion. In other words, psychology students can pose and answer questions about human behavior and experience.

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Exposure to the diverse perspectives within psychology trains students to think flexibly and to accept some ambiguity. Introductory psychology students often ask for the “right” answer; they soon learn that answers usually aren’t black or white but many shades of gray. Psychology students acquire skills in thinking critically about complex problems. They learn to weigh multiple sources of information, determine the degree of support for each position, and decide which position has more merit and how a problem is best solved.

Reading, Writing, and Speaking Skills

Psychology students develop reading, writing, and presentation skills for effective oral and written communication. They learn to think critically about what they read and comprehend and present arguments from a psychological standpoint. Moreover, their understanding of human behavior aids students in constructing arguments that are easily understood by others. Information from psychology regarding cognition, memory, listening, persuasion, and communication enhances psychology majors' ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

Psychology students develop the ability to communicate their ideas and use their knowledge of human behavior to devise persuasive arguments. Successful students can lead, collaborate with others, and work effectively in groups. Psychology students are primed to be effective communicators because they are trained to be sensitive to issues of culture, race, class, and ethnicity. Students of psychology also develop intrapersonal awareness or self-knowledge. They can monitor and manage their own behavior, which is critical in succeeding in academic and interpersonal tasks.

Adaptability

Psychology students quickly learn that the perfect experiment is an unattainable goal toward which all researchers strive. Students learn how to design the best research studies possible, given limited resources. The capacity to evaluate and adapt to changing circumstances is highly valued in a volatile economy and workplace.

All of these skills emphasized by undergraduate education in psychology will help you grow into a well-rounded and educated person who is marketable in a variety of fields. The psychology major satisfies the objectives of a liberal arts education, which include critical and analytical thinking, independent thinking, leadership skills, communication skills, understanding how to learn, being able to see all sides of an issue, and understanding human diversity (Roche, 2010). However, the training in research design and statistical analysis, as well as human behavior, makes the psychology major unique among liberal arts degrees.

Psychological Literacy

The transferrable skills developed with education in psychology enable graduates to view the world more complexly. Sure, they understand facts and theories about human behavior, but their competence goes well beyond memorized facts. They learn how to discriminate relevant from trivial information and how to gather, organize, and analyze information from various sources, which professors often call *synthesis*. They develop psychological literacy, the ability to apply psychological knowledge in everyday life to improve lives, their own and others' (Cranney et al., 2012; McGovern et al., 2010). Individuals who are psychologically literate

- Have basic knowledge and vocabulary of psychology
- Value and apply critical thinking and creative problem-solving
- Apply psychological principles to address issues at home, work, and in the community
- Act ethically
- Can gather and effectively evaluate information
- Can use technology effectively
- Can communicate effectively with different audiences
- Demonstrate sensitivity and understanding and foster respect for diversity
- Are self-reflective

Psychological literacy develops as individuals progress from learning facts about psychology to applying bodies of knowledge and modes of thinking. It includes the ability to (a) critically analyze psychological phenomena and research findings, considering biases or limitations; (b) use scientific methodology and principles to investigate real-world issues, drawing upon an understanding of human behavior and cognition; and (c) communicate an understanding of psychological processes to others with concise, evidence-based solutions to real-world issues (Newell et al., 2022). The undergraduate psychology curriculum provides students with opportunities to develop psychological literacy.

Psychological Literacy, Transferable Skills, and Your Career

As you consider the range of skills and competencies that psychology majors develop, you might find it helpful to categorize them into two broad competencies that employers seek: research skills and interpersonal skills (commonly referred to as “people skills”). Research skills include the ability to identify problems and locate, analyze, and apply information to solve them; carry out research; conduct statistical analyses; and write reports. Interpersonal skills include relational, communication, and self-management skills, such as understanding psychological principles, communication skills, group dynamics, and adaptability. All jobs entail both sets of competencies, research and interpersonal, in differing amounts. The psychology curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop and integrate both sets of skills, setting psychology majors apart from other graduates.

So what can you do with a degree in psychology? Table 1.3 lists common job titles psychology majors have obtained after graduation, organized by setting (business-related and human services-related) and occupation. It is not a complete list; many other opportunities are out there waiting for you.

TABLE 1.3 ■ Jobs and Careers Obtained With a BA in Psychology

Business Settings	Human Service and Related Settings
<p>Advertising, Marketing, and Public Relations Advertising sales representative Advertising coordinator/specialist Customer relations Information officer/communications specialist Media buyer Market researcher Public relations specialist</p> <p>Communications and Media Events coordination Media relations specialist News writer/reporter Social media specialist Writer</p> <p>Human Resources, Administration, and Management Administrative assistant Benefits manager Employee recruitment specialist Employee/Labor relations specialist Human resources generalist Personnel administrator Team leader/manager Staff training and development</p> <p>Information Management and Technology Computer programmer Computer support specialist Data management specialist Information specialist Job analyst Systems analyst Technical writer Technical support specialist</p> <p>Sales and Retail Management Claims specialist Customer relations specialist Loan officer Real estate agent Sales representative Retail manager</p>	<p>Program and Service Administration Program development and evaluation Fundraising Program implementation Clinical coordinator Patient resources/reimbursement agent</p> <p>Counseling and Mental Health Assistant behavior analyst Career counselor Certified alcohol and drug counselor Child life specialist Counselor assistant Mental health counselor Neuropsychological technician Psychiatric technician</p> <p>Social Services and Community Outreach Activities coordinator/recreation specialist Case worker/social worker Child protection worker Community outreach worker Residential counselor Youth counselor</p> <p>Education and Academia Admissions evaluator Career counselor Childcare provider Coach Student life/activity coordinator/director Elementary/Secondary school teacher Financial aid counselor Lab coordinator Preschool teacher Research assistant Resident director Vocational training teacher</p> <p>Law Enforcement and Corrections Conservation officer Corrections officer Correctional treatment specialist Information analyst Parole officer Police officer Polygraph examiner Probation officer Special agent Victims' advocate</p>

Adapted from (American Psychological Association, 2013; Appleby, 2016).

Learning About Careers: *Occupational Outlook Handbook*

The U.S. federal government recognizes nearly 1,000 different occupations. How many can you name? How do you learn about these opportunities? Your first stop is the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor and available online as a searchable database (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides information about hundreds of careers. Details include training, job outlook, wages, related careers, and websites to help you explore further. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* can help you identify job titles you can Google to learn more about.

The U.S. Department of Labor also sponsors a career exploration and job analysis search tool: O*NET OnLine (<http://www.onetonline.org/>). O*NET includes much of the information from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* as well as information on key attributes of workers. Most notably, job seekers can search for jobs by skills, interests, knowledge, work contexts, and other factors. As you read through the chapters of this book, take a moment to review O*NET entries for careers that you find interesting. It's an excellent source of information that can help you decide if a particular career is for you and can assist you in devising a plan to achieve your goals.

Finally, the U.S. Department of Labor's CareerOneStop (<http://www.careeronestop.org>) and California CareerZone (<http://www.cacareerzone.org>) are two other sources for free online tools, information, and resources on a wide variety of employment paths. Each site provides self-assessments, career videos, salary, and education requirements to help users determine their fit for specific jobs based on their skills, interests, and values. These are helpful places to begin exploring careers, especially for students who are just starting the career search process and prefer access to an extensive selection of options (Golding et al., 2018).

As we will discuss throughout this book, a bachelor's degree in psychology offers a range of opportunities. Is the psychology major right for you? The first step in choosing a major—any major—is to understand yourself.

UNDERSTAND YOURSELF AND CHOOSE A MAJOR VIA SELF-ASSESSMENT

Who are you? Your ability to answer this question will shape your life, although your answer to this question will likely shift over your lifetime. Choosing a college major that's right for you requires understanding yourself and identifying your career goals. Self-assessment is the process of examining your skills, abilities, interests, values, and experiences. Understand yourself and you'll be more likely to choose a major that fits you. It's easier to succeed in college when you like what you're studying.

How do you determine your interests and skills? The following written exercise can help you think about what you like, what you do well, and what matters to you.

Writing out your answers will permit you to put them aside to review later, even years later, to consider how your views have changed (or not).

Identify Your Skills

What do you know about your abilities? What are you good at? One way to gain insight into your abilities is to write an experiential essay or journal entry. Write about any times you can think of when you encountered a problem and took action to solve it. Write freely, letting all of your achievements flow onto the page. Don't edit. This assignment is for your eyes only. The problems that you list don't have to be huge or life-changing. Learning to play a song on your guitar or managing your annoying roommate are accomplishments. In other words, the successes you list can be small and don't have to be acknowledged by anyone else. This is your list composed of what is important to you. Write as much as you can, and don't stop when it becomes challenging. Instead, probe further. Even writing about the difficulty of thinking about additional accomplishments might jog your memory.

Once you have completed your list of accomplishments, closely examine it and analyze the skills needed for each achievement. For example, sorting out problems with your roommate taps interpersonal skills. Also, identify specific skills you've learned, like using computer programming languages or speaking a non-native language. List your skills on a separate page. After you have considered your accomplishments and noted the related skills and abilities, review the skills listed in Table 1.4. Check off additional skills as needed.

TABLE 1.4 ■ Assess Your Skills

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acting or performing | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administering | <input type="checkbox"/> Implementing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Improving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing data | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiating with strangers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applying | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arranging social functions | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting | <input type="checkbox"/> Interviewing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calculating | <input type="checkbox"/> Investigating problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Checking for accuracy | <input type="checkbox"/> Judging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collecting money | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing |

(Continued)

TABLE 1.4 ■ Assess Your Skills (Continued)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compiling statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> Measuring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conceptualizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinating events | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating new ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> Observing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decision-making | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Designing | <input type="checkbox"/> Painting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dispensing information | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatizing ideas or problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editing | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertaining people | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating | <input type="checkbox"/> Programming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expressing feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finding information | <input type="checkbox"/> Proofreading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Generalizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Reasoning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handling complaints | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identifying problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Record keeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching or training |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Researching | <input type="checkbox"/> Team building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduling | <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking logically |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Selling | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerating ambiguity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Singing | <input type="checkbox"/> Translating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sketching | <input type="checkbox"/> Troubleshooting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supervising | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing information | |

Review your list and the skills you have checked. Can you identify examples of how each skill has developed or how you've used it to achieve a goal? Based on your consideration, what are your top three to five skills? Why? These skills are your strengths. Next, consider the other skills you checked. Do any of these skills need further development?

Which of these skills do you prefer using? Why? Do you dislike engaging in any of your skills? Why?

Are there any skills you don't currently have but would like to develop? We tend to enjoy and be drawn to activities in which we excel. Is that true for you? You may not be skilled in a particular area, but if you find it interesting, you can seek the education and training to acquire those skills. Don't let your current level of competence dictate your choices. With dedication and hard work, you can make great strides and learn many skills to help you meet your career goals.

Identify Your Values

Review your list of accomplishments and skills. Which are most personally relevant to you? Why? Which are most satisfying? Identifying the skills and achievements you cherish will help you understand your interests and values, which can help you choose a major.

Next, consider your values in more depth. Values are the things that are important to you and that you see as desirable in life (Table 1.5). Spend time thinking through your priorities. How do you define success? What do you believe matters in life? What experiences do you hope to have? What do you hope never to experience? How should your work mesh with your personal life? Are personal time and flexibility necessary for you? Financial success? Job security? Would you rather live in a city or a rural area? Would you like a family (and if so, large or small)? While choosing a major does not tie you to a particular career, it is helpful to consider your career aspirations and life goals to seek the educational experiences that will prepare you for them. What do you want out of life?

TABLE 1.5 ■ Values

Service	Adventure	Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/> Active in community	<input type="checkbox"/> Excitement	<input type="checkbox"/> Influence people and opinions
<input type="checkbox"/> Help others	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taking	<input type="checkbox"/> Supervise others
<input type="checkbox"/> Help society and the world	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel	<input type="checkbox"/> Power, authority, and control
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Work with and help people in a meaningful way	<input type="checkbox"/> Drama	<input type="checkbox"/> Make decisions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Exciting tasks	<input type="checkbox"/> Direct work of others
	<input type="checkbox"/> Good health	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership
	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel	<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate people, data, and stuff
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hiring and firing responsibility

(Continued)

TABLE 1.5 ■ Values (Continued)

<p>Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetic appreciation <input type="checkbox"/> Artistic creativity <input type="checkbox"/> Creative expression <input type="checkbox"/> Develop and express new ideas <input type="checkbox"/> No routine <input type="checkbox"/> Work on own or as creative team <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible working conditions 	<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> Work friendships <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Work with others, teamwork <input type="checkbox"/> Public contract <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly work atmosphere <input type="checkbox"/> Work with people you like 	<p>Financial Reward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> High earnings <input type="checkbox"/> Commission-based work <input type="checkbox"/> Material possessions <input type="checkbox"/> Very high salary <input type="checkbox"/> Extra pay for extra work <input type="checkbox"/> Long hours
<p>Prestige</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition <input type="checkbox"/> Status <input type="checkbox"/> Respect stature <input type="checkbox"/> Professional position <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility and pay are related to education and experience 	<p>Meaning and Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality <input type="checkbox"/> Personal fulfillment <input type="checkbox"/> Work-related to ideals <input type="checkbox"/> Make a difference <input type="checkbox"/> Express inner-self in work <input type="checkbox"/> Integrate belief system into work 	<p>Variety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Changing work responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity of tasks <input type="checkbox"/> New projects <input type="checkbox"/> Varied tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Meet new people <input type="checkbox"/> Range of settings and situations
<p>Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stability <input type="checkbox"/> Predictably <input type="checkbox"/> Low pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Job assurance <input type="checkbox"/> Guaranteed annual salary in a secure, stable company <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Live in a familiar location 	<p>Independence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Time freedom <input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy <input type="checkbox"/> Work alone <input type="checkbox"/> Set your own pace and working conditions, flexible hours <input type="checkbox"/> Choose a team or work alone 	<p>Physical Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor work <input type="checkbox"/> Physical challenge <input type="checkbox"/> Physical fitness <input type="checkbox"/> No desk job
<p>Intellectual Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address challenging problems <input type="checkbox"/> Pursue/obtain knowledge 	<p>Productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Competence and proficiency <input type="checkbox"/> Fast-paced work 	<p>Advancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Promotions <input type="checkbox"/> Work under pressure

<input type="checkbox"/> Constant updating of information and ability to deal with new ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Work with creative and intellectually stimulating people <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledged expert <input type="checkbox"/> Research and development	<input type="checkbox"/> Efficient work habits <input type="checkbox"/> Hard work is rewarded <input type="checkbox"/> Quality and productivity rewarded by rapid advancement	<input type="checkbox"/> Competition <input type="checkbox"/> Limited only by energy and initiative
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As you evaluate careers and life choices, return to these checklists of skills and values to remind yourself of your perspective on yourself. It's easy to lose focus on our values when an opportunity arises. You will encounter many opportunities throughout life. Not all promising opportunities will be right for you. You are more likely to identify and choose opportunities that will make you happy if you keep your own perspective in mind.

Identify Your Occupational Interests

Another way to use what you know about yourself to choose a major and career is to identify your occupational interests. Holland (1959, 1997) proposed that people's interests and the matching work environments can be loosely categorized into six themes or codes: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. The six categories are presented in Table 1.6. Most people find that they are a combination of several personality types.

TABLE 1.6 ■ Identify Your Holland Personality Type

<p>Realistic</p> <input type="checkbox"/> I am mechanically inclined. <input type="checkbox"/> I am athletically inclined. <input type="checkbox"/> I like working outside with tools, plants, or animals. <input type="checkbox"/> I like creating things with my hands. <input type="checkbox"/> I am practical. <input type="checkbox"/> I like to see direct results of my work. <input type="checkbox"/> I am a nature lover. <input type="checkbox"/> I am systematic. <input type="checkbox"/> I am persistent. <input type="checkbox"/> I am calm and reserved. <input type="checkbox"/> I am independent. <input type="checkbox"/> I dislike vagueness and ambiguity.	<p>Someone with a realistic personality type is athletically or mechanically inclined. They would probably prefer to work outdoors with tools, plants, or animals. Some traits that describe the realistic personality type include being practical, candid, a nature lover, calm, reserved, restrained, independent, systematic, and persistent.</p>
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(Continued)

TABLE 1.6 ■ Identify Your Holland Personality Type (Continued)

<p>Investigative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I like learning, observing, problem-solving, and working with information. <input type="checkbox"/> I like solving abstract, vague problems. <input type="checkbox"/> I am curious. <input type="checkbox"/> I am logical. <input type="checkbox"/> I am reserved. <input type="checkbox"/> I am introspective. <input type="checkbox"/> I am independent. <input type="checkbox"/> I am observant. <input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in understanding the physical world. <input type="checkbox"/> I like working alone or in small groups. <input type="checkbox"/> I like to be original and creative in solving problems. <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy intellectual challenges. 	<p>The investigative type enjoys learning, observing, problem-solving, and analyzing information. Traits that describe the investigative type include curious, logical, observant, precise, intellectual, cautious, introspective, reserved, unbiased, and independent.</p>
<p>Artistic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I am imaginative and creative. <input type="checkbox"/> I like to express myself by designing and producing. <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer unstructured activities. <input type="checkbox"/> I am spontaneous. <input type="checkbox"/> I am idealistic. <input type="checkbox"/> I am unique. <input type="checkbox"/> I am independent. <input type="checkbox"/> I am expressive. <input type="checkbox"/> I am unconventional. <input type="checkbox"/> I am compassionate. <input type="checkbox"/> I am bold. <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to work alone. 	<p>Imaginative and creative, the artistic personality type likes to work in unstructured situations that allow for creativity and innovation. Personality characteristics of the artistic type include intuitive, unconventional, moody, nonconforming, expressive, unique, pensive, spontaneous, compassionate, bold, direct, and idealistic.</p>
<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I am compassionate. <input type="checkbox"/> I like helping and training others. <input type="checkbox"/> I am patient. <input type="checkbox"/> I am dependable. <input type="checkbox"/> I am supportive. 	<p>The social personality type enjoys helping and training others. Characteristics that describe the social type include friendly, cooperative, idealistic, perceptive, outgoing, understanding, supportive, generous, dependable, forgiving, patient, compassionate, and eloquent.</p>

<input type="checkbox"/> I am understanding. <input type="checkbox"/> I am perceptive. <input type="checkbox"/> I am generous. <input type="checkbox"/> I am idealistic. <input type="checkbox"/> I am cheerful and well liked. <input type="checkbox"/> I am people-oriented and friendly. <input type="checkbox"/> I am concerned with the welfare of others. <input type="checkbox"/> I am good at expressing myself and getting along well with others.	
<p>Enterprising</p> <input type="checkbox"/> I like to work with people. <input type="checkbox"/> I like persuading people. <input type="checkbox"/> I like managing situations. <input type="checkbox"/> I like achieving organizational or economic goals. <input type="checkbox"/> I am a leader. <input type="checkbox"/> I am talkative. <input type="checkbox"/> I am extroverted. <input type="checkbox"/> I am optimistic. <input type="checkbox"/> I am spontaneous and daring. <input type="checkbox"/> I am assertive. <input type="checkbox"/> I am energetic. <input type="checkbox"/> I am good at communicating. <input type="checkbox"/> I am good at selling and persuading. <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer tasks that require quick action.	<p>The enterprising personality type likes to work with people in persuasive, performance, or managerial situations to achieve goals that are organizational or economic in nature. Characteristics that describe the enterprising type include confident, assertive, determined, talkative, extroverted, energetic, animated, social, persuasive, fashionable, spontaneous, daring, accommodating, and optimistic.</p>
<p>Conventional</p> <input type="checkbox"/> I am good with numbers. <input type="checkbox"/> I like to work with data and carry out tasks in detail. <input type="checkbox"/> I am persistent. <input type="checkbox"/> I am practical. <input type="checkbox"/> I am conforming. <input type="checkbox"/> I am precise. <input type="checkbox"/> I am conscientious. <input type="checkbox"/> I am meticulous. <input type="checkbox"/> I am adept.	<p>The conventional personality type is well organized, has clerical or numerical ability, and likes to work with data and carry out tasks in detail. Characteristics that describe the conventional type include meticulous, numerically inclined, conscientious, precise, adept, conforming, orderly, practical, frugal, structured, courteous, acquiescent, and persistent.</p>

(Continued)

TABLE 1.6 ■ Identify Your Holland Personality Type (Continued)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am practical. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am frugal. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am stable and dependable. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am well controlled. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer tasks that are structured. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to know what's expected. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer a well-defined chain of command. | |

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966, 1997).

Although they were created half a century ago, the Holland Occupational Codes remain a commonly used assessment of career interests (Ruff et al., 2007). Another option is the O*NET Interest Profiler, a self-assessment inventory that applies Holland Codes to help individuals identify their work-related interests (Lewis & Rivkin, 1999). The O*NET Interest Profiler is a free computer program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration and the American Job Center Network (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2024). A short version of the O*NET Interest Profiler is also available (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2024). These tools are a good start, but an accurate Holland career assessment is conducted by a career professional using specialized tools. The career development center at your college can help you determine and interpret your Holland Code.

Understanding your career interests may make it easier to choose a major because some majors are better suited to particular constellations of interests than others. Table 1.7 lists college majors, organized by Holland Code. Remember that this is simply a guide. Not all possible careers are listed, and the categories are much more fluid than they appear. Notice that many college majors fit more than one Holland Code. College majors tap multiple interests and abilities—and foster similar skills in students, such as critical thinking and communication skills.

Use Career Assessment Tools

While you can learn a lot about yourself through reflection and surveying your own interests, a visit to the career center at your college can provide you with an objective and detailed profile of your interests. A career counselor can administer several inventories to help determine what career path is right for you. The two most commonly administered inventories are the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong et al., 2004) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers et al., 1998).

TABLE 1.7 ■ Careers by Holland Personality Type

<p>Realistic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture/Forestry Architecture Criminal Justice Engineering Environmental Studies Exercise Science Geology Health and Physical Education Medical Technology Plant and Soil Sciences Recreation and Tourism Management Sport Management 	<p>Investigative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal Science Anthropology Astronomy Biochemistry Biological Sciences Chemistry Computer Science Engineering Geography Geology Mathematics Medical Technology Medicine Nursing Nutrition Pharmacy Philosophy Physical Therapy Physics Psychology Sociology Statistics 	<p>Artistic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertising Architecture Art Education Art History Communications English Foreign Language Graphic Design History Interior Design Journalism Music Music Education Speech/Drama
<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audiology Counseling Criminal Justice Elementary Education History Human Development Library Sciences Nursing Nutrition Occupational Therapy Philosophy Physical Education Political Science Psychology Religious Studies Social Work Sociology Special Education Urban Planning 	<p>Enterprising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertising Broadcasting Communications Economics Finance Industrial Relations Journalism Law Management Marketing Political Science Public Administration Speech 	<p>Conventional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accounting Business Computer Science Economics Finance Mathematics Statistics

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966).

Administered at your college's career center, the Strong Interest Inventory contains 291 items that survey your occupational interests and values. It takes about 40 minutes to complete and yields a detailed report that includes your Holland Code, a list of your top interests and what you find most motivating and rewarding, and comparisons of your interests with those of people working in 122 occupations. The Strong Interest Inventory also lists occupations where people whose interests most closely match your work. Finally, your values (preferences regarding work style, learning environment, leadership style, risk-taking, and team orientation) are listed. A summary provides a graphic representation of your results. The career counselor will discuss your results with you. Remember that although a number of compatible careers are listed, you are free to pursue whatever career appeals to you. The Strong Interest Inventory provides a more detailed look at the aspects of career assessment discussed in this chapter. It's especially useful if you have tried the activities in this book and still find yourself puzzled about what really interests you.

Another assessment option available in your college's career center is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). With over 100 items, the MBTI assesses individuals' perceptions, preferences, and judgments in interacting with the world (Myers et al., 1998). Created by mother and daughter, Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, the MBTI is based on Carl Jung's theory that there are 16 personality types into which people may be categorized based on their preferences along four dimensions or subscales. The MBTI contains several subscales. The extraversion/introversion subscale refers to the degree to which you turn outward or inward—that is, the degree to which you are oriented toward people and actions or the internal world of thoughts and ideas. The sensation/intuition subscale examines how you prefer to understand information: Do you focus on the facts or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? Do you focus on logic and reasoning when making decisions or do you first look at circumstances and people (thinking/feeling)? Your preference for structure is assessed by the judging/perceiving scale, which examines whether you prefer to make decisions or remain open to new ideas and options. Finally, the measure categorizes takers into a “personality type,” suggesting their own set of preferences. If you choose to take the MBTI, remember that it is simply a tool to help you learn about yourself. In fact, some psychologists argue that despite its popularity, there is insufficient research to conclude that the MBTI is an effective measure of personality (Pittenger, 2005). Ultimately, it's up to you to determine if the results make sense to you.

The happiest and most successful students choose majors that they find engaging and that match their skills, values, and interests. Self-assessment is a process. Allow yourself opportunities to explore. Exploration is a critical part of career development because it allows you to become aware of and test options for career paths that you might take. Some students decide on a major before they understand themselves. They take courses for a semester or two and then realize they've chosen a major in

which they have little interest or ability. Engaging in self-assessment early in your college career can save you from changing majors and potentially extending your time in college.

HOW TO CHOOSE A MAJOR

Now that you've learned some principles of self-assessment, apply what you have learned to narrow your choices of college majors. Lots of students find career planning stressful and confusing. Sometimes it seems like everyone else but you knows what they want to do with their lives. Finding the right major and determining your career goals doesn't require magic, innate abilities, or luck. What does it take? Choosing a major that is right for you requires the willingness to do the hard work of looking deep within and disentangling what you think you should do, what others want you to do, what you genuinely want to do, and what you realistically can do. Several general principles should guide you through choosing a major, as follows.

Be an Active Participant in Choosing Your Major

Choosing a major that is right for you entails more than filing papers with the university registrar's office. Being an active participant means that you recognize that the process of considering and narrowing down possible majors must be your own. Frequently students feel subtle pressure to select particular majors from family members or friends. Maybe your parent majored in finance and everyone's always told you you're just like them. Or perhaps several of your friends have decided to major in communications or theater arts and take classes together. We all face subtle expectations from others. Regardless, the process of choosing and your choice of major must be your own. You must actively participate, perhaps even struggle, in the decision. No one cares as much about your major as you do because you are the only person truly affected by your choice.

Your College Major Will Not Determine Your Career

Choosing a major is not the same as choosing a lifelong career. For example, many assume that students majoring in humanities, sciences, and social science fields, including English, history, biology, sociology, and psychology, are qualified only for careers in those areas. This isn't true. A history major does not have to become a historian, a biology major does not have to become a biologist, and a psychology major does not have to become a psychologist to be gainfully employed. This is especially fortuitous because each of these professions requires years of graduate study beyond the baccalaureate degree. Your college major is simply a starting point. It will not limit you to one career choice because every major provides training in many skills. Choosing your

college major is a big decision, but it is not a high-pressure decision that will irrevocably shape the course of your life.

Career Planning Is a Process

Career planning is not a one-time event. It is not begun and finished quickly in a single session or over a short period, say in your first semester or first year in college. Instead, career planning is a lengthy process that may begin in college but persists throughout life. You likely will not decide what you want to do for the rest of your life suddenly and definitively—and your decision will probably change throughout your life. Most people have many careers over their lifetimes. To determine your life path, you must be willing to engage in the process and do the work of looking within and evaluating your aspirations, expectations, and opportunities.

Every Major Has Value

As you begin the process of selecting a major, remember that there is no wrong choice. Every college major offers opportunities to develop competence in communication, information management, and critical thinking skills. However, majors differ in the specific set of competencies emphasized. For example, the emphasis on scientific reasoning and problem-solving, coupled with a focus on understanding how people think and behave, is what makes psychology unique among majors.

Learn About Your Options

Before you make any decisions, learn about your options. What majors does your college offer? Some majors, such as psychology, English, and economics, are available at all colleges and universities. Other majors, such as engineering, can be found only at some institutions. What options does your college offer? One way of learning about these options is to review the student handbook and website. Every college has a student handbook, typically found on the “students” tab of the school’s homepage or through the search function. The handbook lists the available majors at your school.

Another way to learn about your options is to examine each academic department (our preferred option—it’s thorough!). Navigate to your school’s homepage and locate the section listing academic departments or use the search function to find this page. Scroll through and review each department, one by one. You’ll probably want to do this in more than one sitting because you’ll scan many pages. Take a moment to review each department’s program, even if, at first glance, you think it isn’t exciting or right for you.

You might spend a few minutes studying most programs, but some will likely strike your interest and cause you to probe further. Review a wide range of programs—even those

that you think you might not like. Sometimes we have preconceived biases and incorrect information about a discipline or major. For each major, ask yourself the following questions and quickly note your responses to easily revisit your work and compare majors later.

- What are some of the required classes?
- Are any clubs or activities listed?
- Who are the faculty? What are their research interests? Does it look like students are involved in their research?
- What other experiences do majors typically obtain (internships and research experiences)?
- Is any information available about graduates' employment?

After you've scanned each academic department and major, list all the majors that sound interesting to you, without making judgments.

Seek Information From Current Students, Graduates, and Professors

Internet research can get you only so far. To learn about majors and career options, it's essential to gather information from knowledgeable people. Students, graduates, career counselors, and professors can offer invaluable information and perspectives.

Current Students

Talk with students in your general education classes. What are their majors? What do they think about their courses, the topic, professors, and opportunities after graduation? What are the required courses like? Every major has its most challenging set of courses: What are those courses? Why are they considered challenging? What about the professors? Do students have out-of-class interactions with faculty? What kind? What out-of-class experiences are available? Is there a student club? If the major sounds interesting, informally interview several students to get different perspectives on the major.

Recent Graduates

Ask recent graduates about their experiences. Ask them some or all of the questions you asked current students. Also ask about their experiences after graduating. If you don't know any recent graduates, visit the department and/or your college's career center. Most college career centers maintain records of recent graduates and may be able to put you in contact with a few graduates to help you learn more about their work and career experiences.

Professors

Don't overlook the insight professors can offer. Visit during the office hours of a professor who teaches a class in which you are enrolled, seems approachable, or works in a field of interest to you. Ask questions about the undergraduate major and what kinds of jobs recent graduates hold. Do some homework beforehand to ensure that your questions are informed. For example, read the department website to learn a little bit about the major; basic course requirements; and, if possible, what courses the professor teaches. Visit the professor's website to learn about his or her courses and research. It will be easier to know what to ask if you know a little bit about the program and professor. You might begin by explaining that you're thinking about becoming a major and would like to know more about the field. Students sometimes feel uncomfortable approaching a professor, but remember that office hours are times specifically allocated to interacting with students. Take advantage of this time to ask the questions that will help you determine if a given major is for you.

As you can see, there are multiple sources of information about any given major. Approach the task of choosing a major as if you were solving a puzzle. Each source provides a unique bit of information and perspective. Sources may disagree about particular qualities or characteristics of a major. Compile all of the information and weigh it based on the person's perspective (as a student, graduate, or faculty, for example), perceived accuracy (Does the information seem accurate? What is the source's perspective?), and perceived similarity (How similar are your and the source's views?). What are the most commonly mentioned positive and negative features of this major? How well do you think you could overcome any challenges?

IS A PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR FOR YOU?

The psychology major offers many opportunities, but only you can decide what major is right for you. Carefully consider your skills, values, interests, and options. Each chapter in this book describes a different subdiscipline of psychology and careers that are appropriate for individuals with bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees in psychology. These possibilities are simply a starting point. At the end of this reflective process, you may find that psychology is the major for you or you may make another choice. Listen to yourself and make the decision that is right for you.

As a final piece of advice, be open to new possibilities. Flexibility is a life skill critical to coping and optimal development throughout adulthood. Employers rate adaptability as highly desired in new employees (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2022). Adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity are characteristics for psychology students because science, like life, isn't always clear-cut and obvious. As you read through the chapters in this book and explore various career opportunities, practice being open to new possibilities. Actively consider each subdiscipline and career opportunity to assess its match to your interests and aspirations, even if you first think

it isn't a good fit. Stretching your mind to consider what a particular career might be like is a helpful exercise in flexibility and may help you consider a career differently. You might be surprised at what you learn about yourself. Above all, keep an open mind and explore multiple possibilities. You will be more likely to find a job and career that you will love. Throughout this book, we discuss tips for students who are interested in careers related to specific areas of psychology and provide suggestions on helpful experiences to obtain for various jobs.

CHECKLIST 1.1

IS PSYCHOLOGY FOR YOU?

Do you . . .

- Have an interest in how the mind works?
- Want to learn how to think critically?
- Have an interest in research?
- Feel comfortable with computers?
- Want to learn how the brain works and its effect on behavior?
- Have an interest in mental illness?
- Like mathematics?
- Have an interest in how we grow and change over the lifespan?
- Have an interest in personality and what makes people unique?
- Wonder how we perceive stimuli in our environment?
- Have an interest in learning how research findings can be applied to solve real-world problems?
- Want to learn how to work well with others?
- Want a well-rounded education?
- Have an interest in biology and how physiology influences behavior?
- Have the ability to be flexible and deal with ambiguity?
- Want to help people?

Scoring: The more boxes you checked, the more likely it is that you're a good match for the psychology major.

EXERCISE 1.1

USING O*NET AND THE *OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK* TO IDENTIFY CAREERS

O*NET (<http://www.onetonline.org/>) and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023) provide current data about careers in the United States. This exercise requires you to run several O*NET searches to identify jobs that match your interests and capacities.

1. Search by interest. Use the advanced tab on O*NET to search by interests. Note that the interests listed are Holland Codes (see your responses in Chapter 2 to view your specific interests). List two occupations that you find interesting.
2. Search by skills. Use the advanced tab to search by skills. List two occupations that you find interesting.
3. Search by one other means. Use another search option under the advanced tab (e.g., abilities, knowledge, work activities, and so on). Discuss the option you chose and list two resulting occupations.
4. Choose two of the six occupations you identified in this exercise. Look up the two occupations in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. For each, answer the following questions:
 - a. What duties are performed in this occupation?
 - b. What education or training is needed?
 - c. What is the typical salary?
 - d. What is the projected job outlook for this occupation?

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Burnett, B., & Evans, D. (2016). *Designing your life: How to build a well-lived, joyful life*. Knopf.
- Geher, G. (2019). *Own your psychology major! A guide to student success*. American Psychological Association.
- Helms, J. L., & Rogers, D. T. (2022). *Majoring in psychology: Achieving your educational and career goals* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kuther, T. L. (2025). *The psychology major's handbook* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Morgan, B. L., Korschgen, A. J., & Basten, B. (2022). *Majoring in psych?: Career options for psychology undergraduates*. Waveland Press.
- Shatkin, L. (2020). *Quick guide to choosing your college major*. Meyer & Meyer Sport.

SUGGESTED VIDEOS

A passion for psychology

<https://youtu.be/pHAKHi6JgaY?si=wU9QWaCBKil3uFl6>

Several members of the American Psychological Association discuss why they became psychologists and what they enjoy about psychology.

5 steps to designing the life you want

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SemHh0n19LA>

In this TED Talk, Dr. Bill Burnett introduces life design, a process for personal and career development.

RESOURCES

American Psychological Association: Careers in Psychology

<https://www.apa.org/education-career/guide/careers>

Career Key

<http://www.careerkey.org>

College Board: The Ultimate Guide to Choosing a Major

<https://blog.collegeboard.org/the-ultimate-guide-to-choosing-a-major>

Occupational Outlook Handbook

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

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