

What's Next?

Thinking About Jobs and Careers

Do you ever fantasize about what you'll be doing to support yourself when you're older? Or does it just give you a headache to think that far ahead?

Are you worried that your next decision has to be the "right one" for the rest of your life?

What makes you tick?
What do you really like to do?

Here are some ideas to take the mystery out of thinking about your future!

- ◆ **Choosing a Career: Questions You Might Have**
- ◆ **How Much Do You Know About Yourself?**
- ◆ **Ideas for Finding a Job or Planning a Career**
- ◆ **How Will You Use Your Skills?**
- ◆ **The Economy: What Does It Have to Do With You?**
- ◆ **25 Fastest Growing Jobs in North Carolina**

Choosing a Career: Questions You May Have

(See Intro for reference to AFSC, Southern CA)

Do you know now what career you want? If your answer is, “No,” you’re not alone. At your age, you’re the “norm,” not the exception. In fact, most adults haven’t ended up in careers they planned on, or even knew about, when they were 17.

So take some time to think about what might be next. You don’t need to feel pressured just because you don’t have a plan. The times in our lives when we don’t know what’s next can be important times—times to explore, to daydream, to try out different roles, and to find out our values, interests, and goals.

Not knowing what’s next, however, can make us—and the adults around us—*anxious*. Chill. It’s okay to feel a little anxious. Usually our biggest mistakes come when we decide too fast or decide under pressure.

You’ve probably heard a lot of myths about choosing a career. Luckily, many resources can be found to help make an informed decision. Here are a few questions you may have about choosing a career and, hopefully, some direction guide your thinking:

Q Some people make choosing a career look easy. Is it?

A Actually, choosing a career is a process that usually evolves over time and is complicated. So you should give it the time it deserves. Take the time to learn about yourself and the occupations you’re considering. You may go through many steps, many jobs, and many times without the “exact right” job before you feel you’ve “found” a career you want to stick with.

Q But shouldn’t I know by now?

A No, not necessarily. Sometimes the kids who feel they know now where they’re going find out in the next few years that they want to do something very different. A new term is “quarter-century crisis.” It refers to the crisis many young adults in their mid-twenties find themselves in when they didn’t take the time to explore or really think about what they wanted to do but leapt into a career too soon. The important thing now is to keep open to new ideas, search out new information, and keep “trying on” different ideas or jobs to see what brings out the best in you and what fits best with your deeper values.

Q Isn't it true that if I choose a career, I'll probably be stuck in it?

A Not true at all. You can always change jobs. Most people change careers several times over during the course of their lives. Just make sure that what you do will give you some skills that you can use later on. You will be surprised at how many skills are transferable and, in many cases, will augment what is needed in your new job.

Q But won't my skills go to waste if I change careers?

A Your skills are yours to keep. Older workers are often amazed at how their experience in the seemingly unrelated jobs they had when they were young comes in handy in their current work. You get valuable life experience in any work. Skills like learning to work or get along with others on the job are useful in any job.

Q Why waste time going to school to learn more? Is there much I can learn about an occupation without actually working in it?

A It's true that on-the-job training is invaluable; but there are many ways to learn about whether an occupation may be right for you, and sometimes that means taking some courses to see if anything about it appeals to you. You never know what you'll pick up that you didn't expect! Of course, you can also read about the occupation, on-line or at the library, or talk to people about what they like and don't like about their jobs.

Q If my best friend is happy in a particular type of job, won't I be happy in that kind of job, too?

A What works for someone else won't necessarily work for you, even if it's someone with whom you have a lot in common. If someone you know has a career that interests you, look into it, talk with him or her about it, and talk to other people in this career, also. But if it doesn't feel right, even if it's a good fit for your best friend, it may not be right for you.

Q Why don't I just ask a career counselor to tell me what occupation to pick?

A A career counselor can definitely provide you with guidance and resources and even suggest direction during your career search, but no one can tell you what career is best for you. Counselors can help direct you to some assessment tools, however, that may help you identify your own strengths, interests, and skills, so you can evaluate better what might work for you.

Q Should I try to choose a career from a "Best Careers" list?

A Every few years, articles and books list what "the experts" predict will be "hot jobs." Take a look at those lists to see if any of the careers appeal to you, but don't let the list rule your choice. Sometimes the "hot jobs" don't pan out—things change. What's hot this year may not be hot a few years from now. Remember, the most important part of choosing a career is your own interests, values, goals, and skills.

Q I have some really cool interests and hobbies, but I know I can't make a living from them. Or can I?

A If you've got a hobby, chances are you know a lot about it, and you've gained some skill with it. It also means *you like to do it*. That means you'd be a great person to hire in a field related to that hobby. You might also benefit from some entrepreneur classes on how to start your own business in this field. If you have the motivation to have a hobby and be an "expert," you may have the motivation and energy to start your own business and actually make a living at it!

Q It seems to me that if I make a lot of money in whatever I choose, I'll be happy?

A Having money doesn't hurt, but while salary is important, it isn't the only factor you should look at when choosing a career. Many studies have shown that job satisfaction is not always related to the amount of money you make. For many people, enjoying what they do at work is much more important.

How Much Do You Know About Yourself?

Do you like to help other people? Would you like to serve your community? Want a flexible work schedule? Like outdoor work? Want as much leisure time as possible? Are interpersonal relations what you thrive on? Or do you like autonomy and working alone? Is prestige, security, or a high salary most important to you?

Several free tools are on-line or at most job counselors' offices that can help you learn about yourself and what kind of job you might enjoy. These "self-assessment tools" can be an important step in your journey of self-discovery and thinking about what you want to do.

Basically, self-assessment tools help you understand your values, interests, personality, or skills. Some tests **help you figure out your likes and dislikes**. The idea behind these tools is that people who share similar interests also enjoy the same type of work. Examples of interests are reading, running, playing basketball, and music.

Other tests **help you understand your personality**. A personality inventory looks at your individual traits: what drives you, what strong needs you have, and your attitudes. The most frequently used personality inventory is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

Also, other tools **assess your learning style**. Several are listed at www.ulc.arizona.edu/assessments.htm.

For a great selection of fun tools, go to www.queendom.com. Another source of free assessment tools is the NCCareers website: www.nccareers.com/

Useful Guides to Self-Discovery

Here are some great books you might want to check out. Try the library or go to www.amazon.com:

- *The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People*, by Carol Eikleberry
- *Discover What You're Best at: The National Career Aptitude System and Career Directory*, by Linda Gale
- *The Best Work of Your Life*, by Patricia V. Alea and Patty Mullins
- *Career Intelligence: The 12 New Rules for Work and Life Success*, by Barbara Moses
- *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2000*, by Richard Nelson Bolles and Dick Bolles
- *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It*, by Barbara Sher and Barbara Smith

Taking the Mystery Out of What's Next Ideas for Finding a Job Or Planning a Career

“What’s Next?” seems like a simple enough question, but answering it can be a complex process. After you think about your interests, your skills, your education and training options, and your resources, you need to match those with job options and training opportunities.

The perfect job for you may be one you haven’t yet heard of; the career path you think is too hard or costly may actually be within reach; the job you thought you wanted may not be a good fit at all. Exploring options is an important first step down any path. If you need help, you’ll find many resources for learning about jobs and careers.

In-Person Help

It’s best to **talk with people who are “in the know”** – school counselors, people at job fairs, ministers, parents, or friends of parents. You can go on-line, as well, to career websites, but there’s no substitute for talking with professional job counselors.

- The **Durham Center for Employment Training** is a nonprofit organization that trains people for jobs in the community. It is located at the Golden Belt Center, 807 E. Main Street, Bldg 4, Durham (**Phone: 919-686-4050**).
- If you just don’t know what to do, need help finishing school, and need some basic skills, contact **Youth Employed and Succeeding (YES)** (**Phone: 919-402-9400, ext. 420**). If you’re between 14 and 21, are in a “low income” category, need help because you’re pregnant or are currently parenting, or if you’re homeless, are a foster child, or an offender, they’re happy to help you.
- Staff at your local **JobLink Career Centers** can assist you with your job search. A list of the locations of JobLink career centers is on the web at **www.ncjoblink.com**.
- If you need computer training but don’t have the cash to take a course, try the **GCF Global Learning Center** on 321 W. Hargett Street in Raleigh. Classes are taught in both English and Spanish. Call **919-828-7490** or visit **www.gcflearnfree.org**.
- The **National Student Partnership** office in Durham, 331 West Main Street, Durham (**Phone: 919-956-2824**) has an AmeriCorps volunteer who can talk to you about where to get career counseling and vocational assessments, take

job search workshops, and get help on writing your resumé and preparing for an interview. While you're there, ask about AmeriCorps.

On-Line Help

Many websites have information useful for exploring job opportunities and training programs. Some provide general information and guidance; others list specific job openings. Browse!

- **Employment Securities Commission:** www.ncesc.com
- **Career and Tech School Finder:** www.khake.com. You can also find any community college in any state on this site: www.aacc.nche.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCommunityColleges/CommunityCollegeFinder1/Community_College_Finder.htm
- **NC Careers:** The www.nccareers.org website is a good place to start.
- **North Carolina State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee:** www.soicc.state.nc.us/soicc/
- **America's Career InfoNet:** To find out about wages and employment trends, occupational requirements, state-by-state labor market conditions, employer contacts nationwide, financial aid information, and the most extensive career resource library online, visit America's Career InfoNet website: www.acinet.org/acinet

Websites with Local Job Openings

- www.trianglejobs.com
- www.employmentguide.com
- www.heraldsun.com
- www.thestreetsatsouthpoint.com
- www.northgatemail.com
- www.co.durham.nc.us
- www.ci.durham.nc.us
- www.indyweek.com
- www.trianglehelpwanted.com

Library Help

Look at *Careers After High School: 251 Jobs for High School Graduates*, by Tim Haight. New York, Collier Books [1970] or check this website:

www.worldcatlibraries.org

Think About It . . .

Once You Have the Skills

Where Will You Use Them?

Having or getting skills isn't the end of your search. Where will you use them? To what end? For example, computer skills are helpful in many jobs and necessary in some. But if you're skilled with computers, don't grab just **any** computer job.

The **content** of the work should fit with your values and goals as well. That's work satisfaction: contributing to something you believe is worthwhile. Computer work for a firm that is doing work you don't approve of—like causing pollution or cheating helpless people—would leave you dissatisfied, however skillfully you performed the job.

The Economy: What Does It Have to Do With You?

North Carolina used to be an agricultural and manufacturing state: tobacco, textiles and apparel, and furniture manufacturing. But in the past 15 years, 85 percent of the jobs in these areas have been lost. Most of the new Tarheel jobs are in **service** industries—businesses that don't manufacture items, but sell them, such as businesses that develop new medicines or vaccines (biotechnology companies) or move people (tourism) or money (banking) around. Some of the new service jobs pay as well or better than the old manufacturing jobs, but others do not.

Understanding the new "global economy" can explain where the jobs have gone and what kind of jobs you're likely to find. Most of the new jobs are being created outside of the U.S. due to trade agreements like NAFTA and cheaper labor abroad.

Because cheap labor is producing so many goods in China and across Asia, and our country is bringing in more of these goods than it's producing and selling overseas, many jobs are at Wal-Mart and at the other "big box" stores that sell the imported goods.

What's left for many Americans are jobs in "service," which usually does **not** mean "service to country," but instead means retail jobs. That's why it's not hard to find low-paying retail jobs, especially in North Carolina. But careers in retail can be a dead end,

Note: Many Service Jobs Can Mean a Financial "Dead-End"

In her book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich described how she worked at Wal-Mart and in other low-paying jobs. After paying for transportation and rent, Ehrenreich's income barely covered her expenses if she worked seven days a week at two jobs (one of which included free meals).

depending on what other training you get and whether you will be able to rise in the ranks quickly enough to offset the initial low wages.

To land a different type of "new North Carolina job" that pays on the higher end usually means getting specialized training and

skills. So pay attention to your career path early on so you will be able to land jobs that can support you and your family. A good idea, in this economic climate, is to "job shadow" (go with an adult friend to his or her job, ask questions, watch what that person does, or look for an internship or apprentice opportunity). Start to learn what people do in different jobs.

Once you see actual possibilities, you'll have a better idea of what you'll want to do. There *are* **choices**; you'll have to look around to see them!

25 Fastest-Growing Jobs in North Carolina

Job	Percentage Increase Expected
1 Medical Assistants	61%
2 Dental Hygienists	54%
3 Dental Assistants	53%
4 Fitness Trainers & Aerobic Instructors	48%
5 Medical Records & Health Information Technicians	48%
6 Social & Human Service Assistants	48%
7 Physical Therapist Assistants	47%
8 Physician Assistants	47%
9 Respiratory Therapists	47%
10 Occupational Therapist Assistants	46%

The numbers of openings in these jobs are expected to grow the fastest during the next 7-8 years.

Remember: "Hot" jobs may or may not be a good choice for you. And today's "hot" job may not be plentiful four years from now. So learn about yourself first and explore the jobs that fit you!

11 Respiratory Therapy Technicians	46%
12 Cardiovascular Technologists & Technicians	45%
13 Home Health Aides	45%
14 Network Systems & Data Communications Analysts	45%
15 Self-enrichment Education Teachers	45%
16 Biomedical Engineers	44%
17 Physical Therapist Aides	44%
18 Occupational Therapist Aides	43%
19 Environmental Engineering Technicians	42%
20 Database Administrators	40%
21 Microbiologists	40%
22 Occupational Therapists	40%
23 Psychiatric Technicians	40%
24 Personal Financial Advisors	39%
25 Physical Therapists	38%

SOURCE: Employment Security Commission

