Career Decision-Making Guidebook

Yale Office of Career Strategy
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Office of Career Strategy (OCS) offers programs that help students and alumni of Yale College define and further their career goals. Our role at OCS is to help you learn about yourself, learn about career options, and make informed decisions about your future in order to realize your goals. We do this through individual and group meetings, through the provision of research materials, and through the coordination of programs that put you in direct contact with professionals and organizations in a wide variety of fields.

We encourage you to begin connecting with our office early in your Yale career; by starting early, you may take advantage of all the programming available, adding interesting internship experiences and making valuable networking connections. Building toward a career decision is much less stressful than trying to do it all in one year, one semester, or one week.

All Yale College students – freshmen through alumni - are invited to visit OCS to learn about our services, programs and resources.

**Services and Resources**

**Advising**

OCS offers individualized career and professional school advising appointments and mock interviews to Yale College students and alumni. In addition, you can take advantage of our same-day walk-in appointments available Monday through Friday for quick questions and application material critiques.

**Events**

OCS offers workshops, information meetings, career fairs and career panels on campus during the academic year and collaboration with alumni in various cities during the summer.

**Job and Internship Resources**

OCS coordinates on- and off-campus job and internship interviews, and directs summer internship programs in the U.S. and abroad. OCS also maintains peer mentoring and can assist you with identifying and developing job and internship opportunities that fit with your specific goals and interests.

**Website**

OCS maintains a website with a wealth of career information in addition to internship and job postings. You can explore this site at ocs.yale.edu. On our website you can explore various careers, view webinars on career search strategies and learn more about creating your application materials.
CHAPTER 2: 
CAREER DECISION-MAKING

Deciding on your career direction is one of the most important decisions you’ll make. This decision should not be taken lightly, nor should you rush through it. Start early and make time to learn about yourself, explore your options, test them out, and make an informed decision on which career options are the best fit for you. Your time at Yale is a period of self-discovery, exploration and intellectual growth that will help you lay the foundation for your future. What you build on that foundation is up to you.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

The career decision-making process can be broken down into five steps, each important on its own and leading into the next. The keyword is process. Career decision-making is ongoing, and something you will be doing throughout your life. With new experiences, and at different stages of your life, you may find yourself beginning this process again. Even during your four years at Yale you may find yourself re-evaluating career decisions you made as a Freshman or Sophomore. This is OK and actually quite normal. But the important piece is to continue to reflect on your direction, how it fits with who you are, and to make informed decisions on the direction that is best for you.

5 STEPS IN THE CAREER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The following sections will break these steps down and provide you with activities and action items in each area. This information is not meant to replace the individualized guidance you will receive from a OCS Career Advisor, but should supplement and help guide the conversations you have with your Advisor as you navigate this process.
Step 1: Who Are You? The Self-Assessment Process

Self-assessment is the first step in the career decision-making process. Before you can evaluate which career options would be the best fit, you must know who you are. There are four key pieces of this puzzle – interests, skills, personality, and values. It’s essential to take time to reflect on each of these four areas, as they all contribute to career satisfaction.

As you go through this process, please know that there is no right or wrong answer, no “best” answer or anyone telling you what you “should” do – that is up to you. It’s essential to take ownership of this process and define a path that reflects your unique combination of interests, skills, personality and values. Your individual motivations, what drives you and inspires you, and your unique passions, should all be factored in. You are the driver of this process, and you are determining the direction that you want to go; we are here to support and coach you through this process, helping you reflect on every step and stage, but ultimately, you are in control.

4 KEY COMPONENTS OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

Career satisfaction comes when you pursue careers that utilize your skills, fit with your interests and personality, and are in line with your values – the area on the diagram where all four components converge.

Use the information and activities in the following section to begin identifying and reflecting on your skills, interests, personality and values. Take notes throughout; these notes will be helpful as you work with a career counselor to discover how these fit with career options.

1. Skills

Skills are what you do well. The skills that come naturally to you are commonly referred to as your aptitudes or talents. Skills are developed through applying your natural aptitudes and/or through training and experience. For example, you may have a natural aptitude for playing a musical instrument, but without practice and training to develop this aptitude you may struggle to be a star musician. Someone without this same natural aptitude may find it challenging to achieve the same level of success as a musician, even with an equal amount of practice.
Some skills are transferrable – meaning they can be used across a wide range of work environments and applied in many functional areas. For example, communication skills are valued in nearly all industries and roles, making them highly transferrable. Other skills relate to specialized knowledge that is typically acquired through training and education. These include technical skills, such as computer programming or use of laboratory equipment.

We all have skills that we’ve developed. It’s important to take the time to identify what yours are, and how those may connect with career options. Start this process by reflecting on the hard and soft skills listed below; which skills do you have? Are there areas where you have natural aptitudes that could be developed into skills? What other skills have you developed that are not listed here?

### Analytical & Technical
- Budgeting & managing finances
- Quantitative
- Synthesizing
- Interpreting data
- Assembling
- Mechanical abilities
- Programming
- Researching
- Reasoning
- Repairing
- Analyzing

### Communication/Interpersonal
- Advising
- Providing constructive feedback
- Editing
- Persuasive Speaking
- Interpersonal communication
- Public Speaking
- Explaining concepts
- Facilitating discussions
- Languages/translating
- Negotiating
- Listening
- Mediating
- Writing
- Teaching/training
- Coaching

### Managerial/Leadership
- Directing
- Making decisions
- Delegating
- Influencing
- Dealing with Pressure
- Comfort with ambiguity
- Strategizing
- Mentoring
- Team building
- Motivating others
- Problem solving
- Adapting to change

### Creative/Design
- Photography
- Performing
- Drawing/Sketching
- Visualizing
- Conceptualizing
- Designing

### Planning/Administrative
- Coordinating and arranging events
- Planning and organizing
- Implementing
- Expediting
- Improvising

2. Interests
Interests are the things you enjoy doing or learning about. You may have a wide-ranging set of interests or a few activities from which you derive a great deal of pleasure. Your interests may change over time as you’re introduced to new areas of study and experiences, and as you progress through different stages of your life. Whatever your interests may be, they have a huge impact on your career decisions. Keep in mind that some of your interests will be personal while others are more career-oriented. It’s important to identify both types of interests, as there may be ways to incorporate your personal interests into your career, directly or indirectly.

Reflecting on your interests, in conjunction with your skills, personality, and values, is an important step in the self-assessment process. One way to begin thinking about interests is to ask yourself questions about what you’ve enjoyed doing in the past and what you’re drawn to currently. Use the questions below to begin your reflection.
• What extracurricular activities do you gravitate towards? What specifically appeals to you about those activities? What roles do you tend to fill? Are there type of work or projects you enjoy taking the lead on?
• What issues or causes are important to you? If you’re involved in volunteer work, what types of organizations do you volunteer with and why? What roles do you tend to take on and why do you take those specific roles on?
• Have you ever been so immersed in a project, task or activity that you lost track of time or didn’t want to stop? What were you doing?
• If you could do anything – all obstacles removed – what would you be doing?
• When have you been happiest in life? What were you doing?
• What careers were you interested in as a child? (What did you imagine you’d be when you grew up?) Why? What appealed to you about those careers?
• What are your hobbies? How do you spend your free time?
• What classes have been your favorites in high school and at Yale? What appealed to you about those classes?
• If you could take classes on any topic, what would you take and why?
• Who do you admire most and why?
• When reading newspapers, magazines, websites or watching TV, what types of shows, topics or issues are you naturally drawn to? What appeals to you about those?
• If someone was awarding you a lifetime achievement award, what would you like him/her to say about you?

3. Personality

Personality is your unique combination of characteristics that influence your thoughts, behaviors, decisions, and how you engage with the world around you. This includes where you direct your energy, the kind of information you do and do not naturally notice, how you make decisions, and preferences towards living in a more structured way or a spontaneous way. A job that is perfect for one person can be totally wrong for another; your individual attributes and preferences that make up your personality have a lot to do with this.

How much interaction with others do you need in your work? Are you energized by being around a lot of people, or do you prefer working in small groups, or working alone?

Do you prefer imagining possibilities and being inventive, or do you enjoy handling practical matters, details, and work that is measurable?

These are some of the many questions that will help determine your personality type. The most commonly used personality type assessment is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, referred to as the MBTI. The MBTI has 16 different personality types, made up of a combination of 4 letters, each representing a specific aspect of personality. Determining your 4-letter personality type can give you insight into career areas where others who share your type have found satisfaction. Type is not meant to limit your career exploration, nor will it pinpoint careers that you should pursue. People can find success and satisfaction in all fields, regardless of personality type; but the understanding of personality type can help you gauge what type of jobs within your fields of interest may be the best fit. Remember, personality is only one of the components to consider in the career exploration and self-assessment process.

OCS Career Advisors can assist you with identifying and learning about your personality type, and discuss how you can use this knowledge and understanding of your preferences to focus your exploration on areas where your natural inclinations can be applied.
4. VALUES

Values are principles, standards, or qualities that influence your choices throughout your life and provide guidance when evaluating options. Examining your values and making choices that are consistent with them is a key component of career satisfaction.

It’s also essential to define what your values mean to you. For example, the desire to make a difference is a career-related value that many people share. But what that means to each person can be very different. In what way do you want to make a difference and to whom? Do you want to make a difference in conservation of natural resources, access to healthcare, food security, or immigration reform? Would you prefer to draft legislation, raise funds to support programs, educate the public on issues, or provide direct services to those impacted by issues? The list is endless. Take time to reflect and define these values for yourself.

Below are a few of the many career-related values that may come in to play when you are deciding on which career options to explore and pursue. Use the list below to begin identifying your career-related values. Are there other values not included here that you want to add? Rank your career-related values in order of importance, prioritizing which values you must have fit with your career and which values would be nice to have if possible.

- Achievement
- Advancement
- Adventure
- Community
- Competition
- Creative Expression
- Creativity
- Diversity
- Exercise competence
- Family
- Financial Security
- Friendships
- Helping Others
- Honesty & Integrity
- Humor
- Independence
- Influencing Others
- Intellectual status
- Leadership
- Location
- Making a Difference
- Mental Challenge
- Moral fulfillment
- Personal Development
- Physical Challenge
- Power
- Public Contact
- Recognition
- Self-Expression
- Spirituality
- Stability
- Status
- Structure & Predictability
- Teamwork
- Time Freedom
- Tradition
- Variety
- Wealth
- Work alone
- Work Environment
- Work under pressure
- Work/Life Balance

As you explore career options it’s important to evaluate how careers fit, or don’t fit, with your values. It may be challenging to find a career that is a 100% match for all your values, but it’s important to find one that fits with the values that are a high priority for you in order to find satisfaction.
Tying It All Together

Use the information you’ve learned about yourself through this process to evaluate how possible career fields you’re exploring fit – or don’t fit – with who you are. Look for areas where the four components of self-assessment converge. Neglecting one or more component may leave you with an incomplete picture of elements that contributes to career satisfaction. For example, skills are only one piece of the larger puzzle. You may excel at something and not enjoy doing it. Also, keep in mind that self-assessment is an ongoing process. As you learn more about yourself through experiences – educational, extracurricular, personal and work – you may discover new interests and skills, and your values may also change at different stages of your life. This is normal; this process is fluid and flexible.

Sometimes well-intentioned people, such as friends and family, may point out skills, interests or aspects of your personality that they’re most familiar with and suggest careers based on those, but they may or may not be the best option for you, as they may not be seeing the whole picture. Remember, you are unique and complex, with motivations, interests, inspirations, and passions that only you may know. It’s important to think about what you want. Though others want to be helpful by suggesting that you should be an accountant because you’ve always done well in math classes, this may not be the career you see yourself in or one that fits with your interests. Avoid the noise – people can tell you what’s important to them in a career and where they’ve found satisfaction, but only you know what is important to you and what you’ll most enjoy doing.

It’s easy to fall into the trap of listening to the suggestions of others without fully examining what you really want to do. Let’s face it, going through all of this self-assessment and career decision making is work. Connecting your skills, interests, personality and values can seem like putting together a challenging puzzle. It may not initially seem like the pieces fit together, but in fact they all connect in some way. When the puzzle is complete it forms a compelling and insightful picture. It takes time and effort, and when you’re juggling many other responsibilities, academic and extracurricular, this may seem like a long and burdensome process. We don’t want you to skip this. Take the time now to make well-thought out, informed and intentional decisions on your career direction.

Career Assessments

OCS offers a number of career assessments that can supplement the self-assessment process. Assessments are tools utilized by career counselors to help you gain further insight into your interests, skills, personality and values. These can be powerful and useful tools when used in conjunction with other self-assessment exercises and career exploration activities, but there are limitations to career assessments. They cannot and do not define you, nor do they tell you what you should do. They may suggest areas for further exploration, and give you a place to begin further research and evaluation. Assessments can be a valuable resource, but they can also be misleading if you are not ready to accurately and honestly assess yourself.

Meet with a OCS Career Advisor to discuss where you’re at in the self-assessment process and whether or not a career assessment would be the next logical step in your self-assessment process.
STEP 2: IDENTIFY AND RESEARCH OPTIONS

EXPLORE

We’ve all heard about jobs such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, but there are thousands of job titles and fields you may never have heard of, with more being created every day as industries and career areas evolve and adapt to new technologies. It’s important to take time to explore and educate yourself on the range of career options, and not limit yourself to careers you’re familiar with.

Use the resources recommended below, to begin exploring and learning about the diverse range of industries and career fields. You should also schedule an appointment with a OCS Career Advisor to discuss how your skills, interests, values and personality may fit with various career areas you’re exploring, and to discuss additional resources you can use to explore your specific interests in greater depth.

Resources for Exploration:
• Career Roadmaps found in the Explore Careers section of the OCS Website
• Career Insider (also known as the Vault Guides) found in the Samples and Tools - Research Industries section of the OCS Website
• Yale Career Network
• LinkedIn
• O-Net - www.onetonline.org
• Occupational Outlook Handbook - www.bls.gov/ooh

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Professional associations are nonprofit organizations focused on particular career fields. They serve a variety of purposes, such as connecting members, establishing best practices, and keeping members informed of industry trends and developments. They also organize professional conferences, training seminars, and may publish professional journals. Professional Associations such as the American Bar Association, American Medical Association and American Psychological Association maintain oversight of the legitimate practice of a profession.

Many professional associations have extensive information for students about particular fields and career paths. This information is written by professionals in the field and gives valuable inside tips, perspectives and information that you may not be able to get anywhere else. The Career Roadmaps found in the “Explore Careers” section of the OCS website have information on professional associations specific to different fields. In addition, the Career Search tool found in the “Samples/Tools – Research Industries” section of the OCS website has a database of professional association searchable by industry.

INDUSTRY VS. JOB

As you begin to research options, it’s important to recognize the difference between an industry and a job. Industry refers to a particular field, often named after its primary product or service, such as the Aerospace Industry, Publishing Industry, or Entertainment Industry.

Jobs are specific functions or roles within an industry, such as Engineers, Editors, or Producers.

Within industries, there are a variety of jobs. Some jobs are more specialized and concentrated in a particular industry, while others are found across all industries. For example, marketing professionals can be found in all industries, while teachers are primarily - though not exclusively - concentrated in the education field.
On-Campus at Yale

There are many opportunities at Yale for you to interact with professionals in a wide range of career areas. Master’s Teas, employer information sessions, alumni panels, and other workshops happening on campus are great opportunities to explore and further research career options, as well as to begin developing connections that can be useful in later steps of the career decision making process. Don’t forget your faculty, administrators, and campus visitors such as the World Fellows; all of these individuals have a wealth of knowledge and advice they are happy to share with interested students.

Your fellow Yale students are also a wonderful resource. many of your peers have interned and been involved in a wide range of activities; if asked, they are very willing to share their experiences. They may also have recommendations or contacts they can pass on to you as you explore further. OCS maintains a peer networking database, accessible through the OCS website and through the Yale OCS Symplicity database, to help you identify classmates who have interned in the fields you’re exploring. There’s also the Class List available in the Yale OCS Symplicity database, which has information on where graduating seniors are headed once they leave Yale. Take advantage of the opportunity to connect with your peers to get their insights and benefit from their experience.

Informational Interviewing and Job Shadowing

Overview

Once you’ve researched careers and have narrowed down your career interest areas, informational interviewing and job shadowing are the next steps to determine if a career is right for you.

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is when you speak with professionals in your field of interest to gain a better understanding of the profession, the day-to-day responsibilities, and the skills necessary for success. This is an opportunity to gather first-hand accounts about working in a particular area, trends in the industry, how it’s changing, and have any specific questions answered. This step is important and one that should not be skipped. To determine if an occupation is the right fit for you, you can’t rely only on what you’ve read, seen on TV, or heard from others who aren’t in the profession. Reality, in some instances, may be a stark contrast.

The purpose is to gather information; this is not a job interview, though there are similarities, specifically in the need to prepare for the conversation and to treat it as a formal interaction. The alumni and professionals you contact will expect that you’ve done preliminary research on the field and that you have specific questions prepared to guide the conversation. They will also expect that you call or arrive on time and, if in person, that you are dressed appropriately for that type of work environment, even if this is only a brief 30-minute informational discussion.

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing, similar to informational interviewing, gives you the chance to speak with professionals in your areas of interest and to gain short-term exposure to the work environment. Job shadowing involves spending a set period of time, typically anywhere between a half-day to two weeks, shadowing a professional in a field of interest. This can be extremely valuable as you narrow down your options, as it goes beyond simply talking with someone about their career and allows you to better imagine yourself working in that setting.
When shadowing you may have the opportunity to get involved with projects, sit in on meetings, and generally get a sense of what the average day on the job is like. Most job shadow hosts will set aside time during the experience for questions and to get to know you. Be sure to have your questions ready and be prepared to discuss your interests and background.

The OCS Job Shadowing program provides opportunities for students to shadow alumni during winter and spring breaks; more information on this program is available on the OCS website. Though you don’t need to wait for the breaks to begin shadowing; you can establish your own opportunities to shadow at any time throughout the year. OCS Career Advisors can assist you with this process.

**Getting Started**

The first step is to identify professionals in your field of interest who you can ask for an informational interview or to shadow.

There are multiple ways to do this. Start by considering the four primary segments of your network and brainstorm potential contacts in each of these areas.

- **Academic network**: Professors, Deans, Masters, Advisors
- **Alumni network**: Yale alumni, high school alumni
- **Personal network**: family, friends, personal connections
- **Professional network**: former supervisors (internship, summer job, on-campus employment, volunteer work)

There are networking databases, such as the Yale Career Network and LinkedIn, that you can use to help you connect with alumni and other professionals in your areas of interest; OCS Career Advisors and Peer Advisors can assist you with accessing and utilizing these resources.

**Making Contact**

Email is the most common way to initially make contact with professionals in your areas of interest to ask for informational interviews or job shadow opportunities. See Appendix A for sample emails. In addition, OCS Career Advisors and Peer Advisors can help you draft professional emails to your networking contacts.

Keep in mind you may need to be flexible with your schedule. Your contact may only be able to meet with you at lunch or after work, or may only be available for a short phone conversation. Though alumni and other professionals are typically open to conversations, their busy schedules may limit their flexibility.

It’s important to remember that in asking for an informational interview, you are asking for a favor of one’s time and expertise, and you need to take this seriously. When asking to shadow, that’s an even more significant commitment for professionals, and not everyone will be able to host you; ability to host will depend on many factors, but can be limited by company regulations, especially if their work involves confidential information or client interactions. Though often times, if someone is unable to host you for a job shadow, they may be willing to have an informational interview with you to still give you the chance to learn about their career.
Preparation

As the interviewer, it is critical that you be prepared by researching the field and preparing questions to ask. Focus on what you want and need to know. You also need to be prepared for your contact to ask you about your background and interest in their field so don’t forget to prepare your story.

For job shadowing opportunities, you also want to have questions prepared, as well as your story. Most job shadow hosts will set aside time to speak with you and answer your questions, similar to what you would do during an informational interview. As you spend time in the work environment, observing the day-to-day activities, make sure to write down additional questions you may have. This will help you get the most out of your shadowing experience, guide conversation with your host, and may even determine the activities you are able to get involved with during your shadowing experience. Asking questions helps your host understand what your interests are and determine what types of activities or observations you may benefit from.

You can find sample informational interview questions in Appendix B. These questions are equally applicable to job shadowing. These questions are only a starting point; take the time to develop additional questions geared towards the field and the background of the person you’re interviewing or shadowing.

Research and learn about the career field before your interview or shadowing. These are not a starting point for your career research, but should supplement what you’ve already learned. You may also want to prepare a copy of your resume and bring that with you when conducting informational interviews or when shadowing. Though you may not need it or be asked for it, you want to be prepared just in case.

Preparing Your Story

“Tell me about yourself.” This seemingly innocuous question is – in one form or another – one you may be asked during an informational interview, job shadowing experience, or at the start of a job or internship interview. If you’re not prepared, this question can be challenging to answer.

The information in Appendix E will walk you through how to craft a well-thought out networking story. Also, plan to attend a OCS workshop on “Telling Your Story” to get additional guidance and practice.

During the Interview or Shadowing Experience

Make a positive first impression by dressing appropriately. Whether you’re meeting in a coffee shop or spending the day at their office, consider the standard of dress in your contact’s workplace and field. The formality of your dress should match or exceed that of your interviewee or host’s workplace. If you’re not sure what professionals in the field or that specific workplace typically wear, ask. This will show that you are conscientious and respectful of workplace norms.

Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early for your scheduled meeting. If shadowing, make sure to confirm the time your host will be expecting you, and how long they expect you will be able to observe. Make sure you know where you’re going, and plan for traffic.

If shadowing, remember you are there primarily to observe and learn. You may be invited to sit in on client meetings or staff meetings; this is not an invitation to participate. Unless asked for your thoughts or contributions, it’s best to not participate in the discussions. In some instances, you will be given projects to work on to help you get a better understanding of the work. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn and to showcase your strengths.
Follow-Up

After every informational interview and shadowing experience, you must send a thank you note to everyone you interview or come into significant contact with during your shadowing. Ask for business cards at the end of your meeting or when wrapping up your shadowing. Craft tailored thank you notes, mentioning specific topics you discussed or something you learned from that person, and thank them for their time.

Informational interviewing and job shadowing are valuable steps to help you confirm your career choice. For some people, informational interviewing and/or shadowing will help them discover that their dream job is not all they imagined; for others it increases their confidence in their career choice. Either way, it’s beneficial. Additionally, both will allow you to expand your network of contacts and develop mentoring relationships with professionals in a potential field of interest. Investing time and energy now to get a wide-ranging look at a career field before you enter it will save you from devoting time and energy later to a career that’s totally wrong for you.

Yale Career Network and LinkedIn

Resources such as the Yale Career Network and LinkedIn can be powerful tools that can be used in multiple steps of the career development process.

The Yale Career Network is a database containing profiles of over 14,400 Yale alumni who are willing to network with current students and share information on their career paths.

LinkedIn is a professional networking website used by over 200 million users worldwide and over 70,000 Yale alumni.

These can be used to explore career options, identify alumni contacts for informational interviews and job shadowing opportunities, and as a networking tool when looking for jobs and internships. Viewing profiles of professionals in your areas of interest can also give you a picture of where and how these professionals got their start, and how they’ve progressed in their careers.

You can email Yale alumni directly through the Yale Career Network to begin developing a relationship with them and to ask questions on their career path.

On LinkedIn you can create a profile and join alumni and industry-specific groups. You can use the site to reach out to alumni and other professionals, as well as post questions on group discussion boards. LinkedIn also contains company profiles and can help you explore the range of jobs within specific companies or industries. Appendix D has additional information on building your LinkedIn profile to get you started.
Step 3: Evaluate And Prioritize

The next step is to reflect on what you've learned through your research, conversations, informational interviews and job shadowing experiences. It’s important to undergo a reality check for each career area you’re exploring, weigh the pros & cons and honestly evaluate how well it matches up with who you are and what you want. Use the following questions to guide your reflection.

Post Informational Interview or Job Shadow Reflection Questions

What is your initial reaction to the career field after your interview/shadowing experience?

What appealed to you about the field? What didn’t appeal to you? List the pros and cons.

Did any information surprise you? Did you learn something about the field that you didn’t know before? Does this new knowledge impact your opinion of the career field?

What skills, knowledge or experience will you need to be competitive for entry in this field? Are you interested enough in the field to develop these skills or knowledge?

With every new career there is a learning curve, knowledge and skills that will need to be developed in order to excel. Are you willing to put in the necessary time and effort to be successful and advance in the career? Is your interest sustainable or fleeting?

Consider what you learned about yourself through the self-assessment process, your interests, skills, personality and values. Are there aspects of the career that fit better than others?

Do you think you would be satisfied in this field or position? Why or why not?

How much adapting will be necessary for you to be satisfied in this career area? No career is going to be a 100% perfect match; with all careers there are aspects that aren’t going to be exactly what you want, but is the percentage of less desirable components at an acceptable level or will it impact your long-term satisfaction?

If you didn’t get a strong impression either way, you may need to conduct additional interviews or shadowing to get a more complete and concrete impression. Look for areas of consensus across the interviews and don’t let one person’s perspective or opinions dictate your decisions. Remember, they are only sharing their knowledge, experience and advice; it’s up to you to evaluate that information and decide if you want to move forward in pursuing that career.

Keep in mind that, in some cases, entry-level positions may have a greater percentage of less desirable components, but if that will be a stepping stone into the career that allows you to achieve a higher level of desirable components, then that may be worth it. You need to think beyond just the first job, and look at the positions on the subsequent rungs of the career ladder.

If after an informational interview or job shadow you find that a career field is not for you, that’s fine. After all, the point of the interviews and shadowing is to help you clarify whether a career field is a good fit or not. You can check that area off your list and move on to exploring the other career areas. But first, before you move on,
think about what you learned from the experience. Are there specific aspects of the career that you liked and/or didn’t like? As you consider what you want to explore next, factor this information in. Evaluate how other areas on your list fit with these new insights into your likes and dislikes.

If you’re reasearching and conducting interviews with professionals in mutliple career fields simultaneously, take time to compare your areas of interest and determine which, if any, most align with your interests, skills, personality and values. Prioritizing may involve eliminating options that no longer fit, or simply choosing which of the options you want to take action on first. Don’t feel as though you’re closing doors by prioritizing; you can always go back and change directions, as many people do throughout their working lives.
Step 4: Take Action

Now that you’ve researched various career opportunities that interest you, narrowed down your options, and confirmed your interest through informational interviews and job shadowing, it’s time to gain some experience. Gaining experience will help you solidify your career choice. Reading about a career can definitely give you valuable insight, as can talking with professionals in that field, but taking this research a step further and trying this area out through internships or extracurricular involvement will give you a first-hand perspective to help you best evaluate your fit and determine if this is a field that you want to devote your time and energy to building a career in. In addition, gaining experience will allow you to develop marketable and transferrable skills that will help you as you pursue full-time opportunities in your field of interest, smoothing your transition into the workplace.

Jobs and internships on- and off-campus will give you a chance to test out a career field of interest. Start your search for internships by making an appointment with a OCS Career Advisor and exploring the internship programs and resources on the OCS website. OCS runs summer internship programs in cities across the US and around the world, and also maintains a database of opportunities. In addition, Advisors can work with you on identifying employers and opportunities that fit with your unique goals. Many employers also have internships throughout the year; OCS Career Advisors can help you navigate the process of finding and applying for these opportunities.

There are many ways to get involved at Yale, in the New Haven area, or at home during breaks that will allow you to try out your interests and gain skills in a particular area. The range of career fields represented at Yale mirrors those found off-campus; Yale has staff working in areas ranging from real estate development to media production, publishing to art conservation. In addition, research centers affiliated with Yale College departments and the professional schools further extend the possibilities for gaining experience while on-campus.

Experience isn’t limited to internships or student employment; extracurricular involvement and volunteer work can be equally enriching and valuable. Student organizations and nonprofits have a variety of roles you can fill. For example, consider all the different roles with the many publications on campus. Beyond the need for writers/reporters, they also need staff to manage the finances, develop multimedia content, create illustrations and take pictures, oversee design and layout, liaise with the printer and manage distribution of the publication, maintain the website, solicit sponsorship, and generate ad revenue. The same holds true for nonprofits who are not only looking for volunteers to assist with delivery of services, but also need assistance with everything from fundraising to website development. Don’t limit yourself – get creative in thinking about the many ways to test out your interest through extracurricular involvement on-and off-campus.

In addition, courses that have a fieldwork, research, capstone project or other practical component may also allow you to gain relevant experience and apply the knowledge and skills you’re gaining in the classroom. These types of courses can be just as valuable as internships in helping you develop your skill sets and exposing you to...
STEP 5: REFLECT AND RE-EVALUATE

Every experience is a learning opportunity. During and after an internship or extracurricular experience, take time to evaluate the experience. What was enjoyable? What was not? Were there aspects of the experience that were challenging and aspects that you excelled at?

Make a list of what you liked and didn’t like about your experience, and then evaluate why. Was it the work itself, or maybe something to do with the people that made it enjoyable. If your enjoyment had to do with the people you worked with, and not the work itself, it’s important to recognize this, as you may not have the same experience in a similar role at a different organization. When evaluating whether a career is right for you or not, you need to consider aspects that may be consistent from one employer to the next verses factors that will vary widely, even if you’re in the same role.

It’s important to not only reflect, but also to discuss your experience with a OCS Career Advisor to make sure you’re thinking through all angles.

Final Thoughts

There are times in this process that you may feel frustrated or overwhelmed, like you are no closer to finding direction. If you’re going through the process, you are making progress, whether it feels like it or not. Each area of interest you explore and check off your list takes you one step closer to narrowing down your choices and identifying options that are a good fit. If you’re taking time to reflect on this process, you’re also learning more about the type of work and environment you will find most satisfying.

Remember, this is a process, and can take time.
Appendix A: Sample Informational Interview Request Emails

Dear Mr. Silliman,

I’m currently a sophomore at Yale pursuing an English degree. I saw your profile on LinkedIn and would like to learn more about the work you’re doing in the marketing division at ABC publishing house. Last summer I interned in the editorial department of a small independent press, and though I enjoyed this experience, I’m looking to learn more about working a marketing capacity in the publishing industry, as I feel it may be a better fit for me. My involvement with marketing a new literary magazine that will be launched this semester has exposed me to the important role of marketing with in the industry and has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

I would appreciate hearing about your career path in publishing and any advice you may have. Would you be available for a 30-minute informational interview? Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

First Name  Last Name
email
Telephone #

Dear Ms. Morse,

I’m a Biology major who will be graduating from Yale College in May. My goal after graduation is to work at a biotech firm in the Boston area. Right now I’m evaluating different types of work environments. As an alumnus with experience working at large biotech corporations and a small biotech start-up, I would appreciate the chance to hear your thoughts on the differences between the work environments.

I’m from the Boston area and plan to be home March 7th-19th for spring break. Would you be available for a brief conversation or in meeting for coffee and sharing your experiences with me? I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

First Name Last Name
email
telephone #
Appendix B: Sample Informational Interview Questions

In preparation for your meeting, develop a list of topics to discuss. Below are some general suggestions for questions to ask.

- Why did you choose this field?
- How did you get started in this field? Is that typical of most people?
- What is a typical day or week like? Would these duties be the same for anyone with your job title or level within an organization?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important for success in this job?
- How would you describe the professional climate in your office? In your industry?
- What portions of your job involve interaction with coworkers, clients, or vendors?
- How much evening, weekend or overtime work is required? What about traveling?
- What are the greatest rewards of your work?
- What do you enjoy most about your work? What would you change?
- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?
- How is this field likely to be affected by changes in technology and/or globalization?
- What kinds of experiences, classes or specialized training would best prepare me for this field?
- Are there any professional organizations that would help me to build my network in this field?
- How do people find out about job openings or internships in this field?
- Is there anyone you could recommend who may be willing to speak with me as you have?
- What do you wish you had known about this field when you were just starting out?

Do your homework before your meeting; learn about the company or organization, and the person you’re meeting with, and develop specific questions related to the company, organization, or their background.
Dear Dr. Stiles,

I sincerely thank you for taking the time to speak with me on Friday, April 12th about your career in strategic planning at ABC Corporation and sharing the knowledge of the field you’ve gained along the way. Your advice on work experiences and specific areas of study that most benefited you in building your career has helped direct my summer internship plans. Your guidance also influenced me to evaluate my skill set and recognize areas where I need further development.

I found your insights into future industry trends to be intriguing and have since began supplementing my daily reading with the publications you recommended. Also, per your recommendation, I have arranged an informational interview with your colleague Jon Edwards, and will be meeting with him next week. Thank you again for that valuable connection; I will follow-up with you afterwards to let you know how that meeting goes.

I look forward to seeing you at the next Yale club networking reception.

Sincerely,

First Name  Last Name  
email  
telephone #  

Appendix C: Sample Thank You Note
Appendix D: Building Your LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn is the premier professional networking site and is a tool for establishing a professional online image and network. Follow these steps to learn how to develop your LinkedIn profile.

Developing Your Profile:
Your profile should include the following information:

• Professional “Headline”: After your name, this is the first line viewers will see. Try to go beyond simply putting “student” in your headline.
  Examples: Marketing Intern - Teach for America/Yale University Senior
  Yale University Senior Seeking Digital Advertising Positions
  Aspiring Screenwriter and Junior at Yale University
  Junior Environmental Studies Major at Yale University

• Photo: This is the first image a viewer will have of you. Be mindful of the image you want to project and be sure that it is appropriate for the audience who will be viewing it.

• LinkedIn URL: Claim your personalized URL

• Summary: Use this section to highlight your key work experiences and accomplishments.

• Experience: This should include experiences that are relevant to your career goals. You can include activities and leadership roles in this section. Give a brief description of your position, the dates you worked and the name of the organization at which you worked, similar to what you have on your resume.

• Education: Include, in reverse chronological order, Yale and any other schools or programs.

• Additional Sections & Information: You can choose to add additional sections to your profile, or incorporate this information in your education, experience or summary sections

• Additional Sections: Languages, volunteer experiences, courses, certifications, publications, honors & awards, personal website, groups and associations, interests, skills and expertise

• Applications: LinkedIn Applications enable you to enrich your profile. Available applications include Creative Portfolio Display, Blog Link, Word Press, Company Buzz

Developing Your Summary:
Summarize your experiences and goals.
Who are you, what direction are you going?
Include specialties and skills. Keep it concise, specific and keyword rich.

Use the following sample summary templates to get you started in writing your own summary.

I have dedicated my undergraduate studies to ______________________ with a focus on ______________. In studying ________________ as well as taking a range of __________ and __________ classes, I have been able to develop my __________ and __________ skills. Courses outside my major have allowed me to explore other interests in __________, __________ and ______________. I am looking for opportunities in ________________ that will allow me to combine my strengths/background in ___________ and ________________.
I am a ______________ at Yale University majoring in ______________ and particularly interested in ______________. I have experience working in/with/for ______________ and ______________, as well as ______________. I am looking for opportunities to apply my strengths in ______________ and ______________ to ______________.

I have devoted my studies to ______________, and am seeking employment in the following areas: ______________ and ______________. My work as a ______________ complemented my academic coursework at Yale University and allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of ______________. I am excited to apply my strengths in ______________ and ______________ to the field of ______________.

JOIN GROUPS
Join as many LinkedIn groups as are of interest to you. You will be included in periodic emails from these groups, and be able to ask questions of and reply to questions of others in the group.

- Industry and Interest Groups – There are groups for every industry and interest area. Use the Search tool to identify ones that fit with your interests

CONNECT
The bigger your network, the easier it will be to connect to others in a broad variety of fields and locations. Start by searching for people you already know in the Advanced Search section and sending them an invitation to connect. Make sure to customize your invitation. Potential people to include in your network:

- Friends, relatives, high school classmates, Yale classmates, current and former professors or teachers, co-workers and supervisors

It’s best to only connect with people you know and/or have met in person. Most people won’t accept an invitation to connect from someone they’ve never met. LinkedIn can be used in the same way as the Yale Career Network to build your network and develop contacts with people in career fields of interest. Use the advanced search tool to find people and ask for an informational interview/conversation to learn more about them and their career path. After you’ve had a chance to get to know them you can ask to connect. Online networking is a supplement to real human contact – it does not replace in-person relationship building.
Appendix E: Telling Your Networking Story

“Tell me about yourself.” This seemingly innocuous question is – in one form or another – one you may be asked during an informational interview, job shadowing experience, or at the start of a job or internship interview. If you’re not prepared, this question can be challenging to answer.

How you respond to this question will vary depending on who you’re talking with, the setting and context, and your goals for the exchange. In the case of informational interviews and shadowing, your interviewee or host is asking this question to gain insight into your background, what sparked your interest in their career field, what you already know about the field, and what you’re hoping to gain from your interaction with them. The story you tell will set the tone for your interaction and will help your interviewee or host to guide the conversation or shadowing experience.

There are three parts to your networking story: your background, your interest in the field, and what you’re hoping to learn from your conversation. Start by considering what information you want your interviewee or host to know about you. Review your resume and choose which pieces of your background you want to highlight. Avoid going into too much depth on your personal history. Though the question is open-ended, your host is not looking to hear about where you were born and how many siblings you have. Focus on conveying information that is important to the relationship you’re looking to build.

Use the questions below as prompts to guide your discussion of your background, interests and goals for the interaction.

- What class year are you? Have you declared a major, or do you know what you intend to major in? What residential college are you in?
- Are there any aspects of your academic background that are relevant to the conversation or the work your host is doing? (Courses or study abroad experiences that sparked your interest? Projects you completed? Faculty research projects you’re assisting with?)
- What have you done during your summers? If you’ve had an internship or job that has impacted your career interests or is relevant to the conversation, highlight what you were able to learn or accomplish during the experience.
- What activities or groups are you affiliated with at Yale? What is your role within the group? What experience or exposure are you gaining from the affiliation?
- What sparked your interest in your interviewee/host’s field? How did you come to the conclusion that your interviewee/host’s field is one that interests you?
- Why did you want to speak with them or shadow them? What have you already learned about the field and what are you hoping to learn from your conversation/shadowing?

There is no set rule as to how long your story should be, though a general guideline is to keep your story under two minutes. Finally, as important as it is to structure and plan how you present your story, it is equally important to practice it, as what is in your mind is often not what is actually communicated in the moment. Your story needs to sound natural, not scripted; each time you present your story it may be a little different, and that’s OK, as long as you are communicating key highlights and content. Avoid writing every word out and memorizing it; this will make your story sound unnatural, rehearsed and overworked. First impressions are made quickly; make sure that impression is a positive one, presenting you as a confident, self-aware young professional.