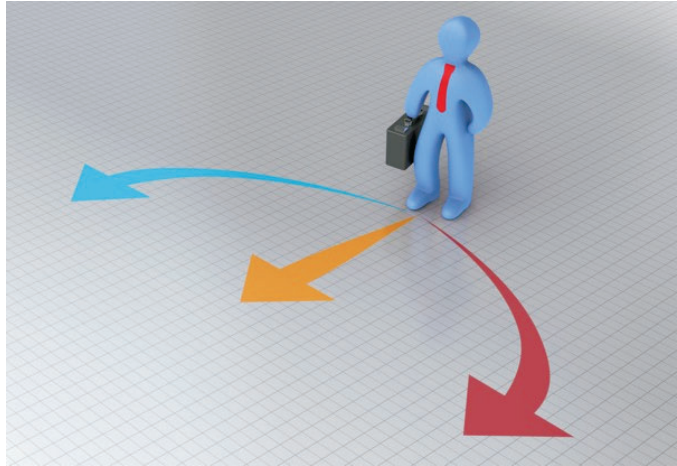


Decision-Making Tools

NO MATTER what the job or the task, if you have the right tools and you know the process, the mission is a great deal easier. This is true for decision making as it relates to the career exploration process, too. Just apply the right tool at the right time, and you'll be heading in the right direction in no time.



Objectives:



1. Identify career counseling tools.
2. Apply career counseling tools to decision-making tasks.
3. Explore career pathways using data from career counseling tool administration and decision-making efforts.

Key Terms:



career clusters
career pathways
knowledge and skills
occupation / career specialty
personal plan of study
program of study (curriculum framework)

Discovering Your Future

Career exploration is an exciting adventure during which you will learn more about yourself and the limitless number of exciting career options that exist. While some may find the topic confusing or overwhelming, it need not be. Typically this emotion is triggered by a lack of information rather than too much information. Today you will increase your knowledge of the tools available and the process by which you can begin to discover your personal career future. You will discover that certain high school classes can serve as pathways to incredible career-focused programs, postsecondary educational options, and the dreams of your future.

FINDING CAREER COUNSELING TOOLS

Many helpful career counseling tools are available. To be effective, however, they must be used properly and in the right order. The order referred to is the career exploration process itself.

Observation of Aptitudes

It is important to observe your aptitudes for the kinds of skills needed for a given type of career. Various instruments are available to help you identify and measure your aptitudes.

Survey of Interests

You will be asked to take an interest survey to identify and confirm your interests. These interests are associated with 16 career clusters. Typical results will offer your top three cluster interests.

Research

Next, you will research the actual **career clusters**—groupings of occupations / career specialties used as an organizing tool for curriculum design and instruction. Occupations / career specialties are grouped into the career clusters based on the fact that they require a set of common knowledge and skills for career success.



FIGURE 1. The career exploration process does not have to be mysterious or intimidating.

Web Resources

The number of web resources helpful for career exploration is almost unlimited. Those receiving high marks from experienced counselors are:

- ◆ Career Clusters—<http://www.careerclusters.org/list16clusters.php>
- ◆ What's Next Illinois—<https://secure.whatsnextillinois.org/Default.aspx>
- ◆ Career and College Planning Resources—<http://www.khake.com/page51.html>
- ◆ Career Exploration Tools at O*NET®—<http://online.onetcenter.org/>
- ◆ Career Click—<http://www.workforceinfo.state.il.us/>
- ◆ CareerOneStop—<http://www.acinet.org/explore/View.aspx?pageID=1>
- ◆ National Sample Definitions—<http://www.careerclusters.org/definitions.php>
- ◆ *Occupational Outlook Handbook*—<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>

Library Resources

Libraries provide excellent resources for career exploration. Your local school librarian may have prepared a list of reference resources and helpful websites. The library may have career resources located in a specific section. Your school librarian can introduce you to the materials.

You may also want to check with your local public library and librarian. As with your school, they may have resource guides and worksheets prepared to usher you through the career exploration process.

Textbooks and References

Your teachers and school counselors may have some career exploration textbooks available, or they may be able to point you to reference materials organized by cluster or profession.

APPLYING CAREER COUNSELING TOOLS TO DECISION-MAKING TASKS

Once you have completed your assessments and discovered your clusters of interest, it is time to begin applying the next set of career counseling tools.

Aptitudes and Interests Point to Clusters

Now is the time to begin to explore the top three career clusters of interest as indicated by in-house assessment tools, the websites listed above, or the interest survey on the Career Clusters website: <http://www.careerclusters.org/ccinterestsurvey.php>. This decision to research these clusters is the first real step toward identifying a career interest.

Research cluster **knowledge and skills**—industry-validated statements that describe what learners/employees need to know and be able to do for career success within a cluster and/or pathway. The knowledge and skills for each cluster can be found by clicking on the specific cluster located on the drop-down menu of the “16 Career Clusters” tab at <http://www.careerclusters.org/resources/web/ks.php>.

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is another excellent resource for researching job descriptions, conditions, and industry forecasts. It is located at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>.

Carefully review the cluster descriptions and related jobs using other websites, including search engines such as Google and Yippy.

EXPLORING CAREER PATHWAYS USING COLLECTED DATA

The next step in the process is to examine the career pathways associated with the career clusters. Examine the clusters’ **career pathways**—subgroupings of occupations / career specialties used as an organizing tool for curriculum design and instruction. Occupations / career specialties are grouped into pathways based on the fact that they require a set of common

knowledge and skills for career success. Each cluster has three to nine career pathways associated with it.

Review the **program of study (curriculum framework)**—a sequence of instruction (based on recommended standards and knowledge and skills) consisting of coursework, co-curricular activities, work-site learning, service learning, and other learning experiences. This sequence of instruction provides preparation for a career.

Create and chart a **personal plan of study**—an individual learner’s scope and sequence of coursework, co-curricular activities, work-site learning, service learning, and other learning experiences based on his or her chosen career goals and aspirations. This is a flexible resource designed to change in concert with your interests and needs. The plan of study should be revisited at least annually to make adjustments as your interests and career aspirations change. When you are ready to make a career declaration, this document should become a priority.

It is a very good idea to confirm your career interest by participating in a workplace experience such as job shadowing or an internship. You may want to investigate an **occupation / career specialty**—a particular career or occupation based on advanced knowledge and skills specific to that career or occupation.

Take special note of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) in Illinois Fact Sheet at http://www.isbe.net/career/pdf/CTE_fact_sheet.pdf. (Users from other states can check for CTE information within their states.)

Note the significant high-growth fields that demand highly skilled employees with career and technical training. In Illinois, students who have taken at least three CTE courses earn 18 percent, or \$212, more a month after high school than comparable high school graduates. (Data from the ISBE website: http://www.isbe.net/career/pdf/CTE_fact_sheet.pdf.)

The final step in the high school career exploration process is to follow a specific program of study and then



FIGURE 2. Once a career cluster is identified, examine the career pathways that stem from it.

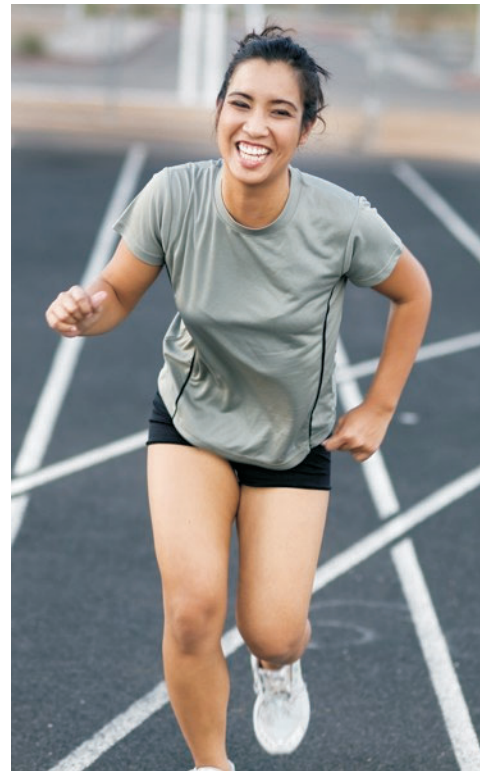


FIGURE 3. When you attain your goal, a personal plan of study in your ICP, celebrate reaching a milestone in the career decision-making process.

personalize it with other learning experiences. Note all the above progress in your Individual Career Portfolio or Plan (ICP) or Senior Project folder.

Summary:



Many helpful career counseling tools are available. To be effective, however, they must be used properly and in the right order. The order referred to is the career exploration process itself.

Tools have been designed to deal with personal information about you, the searcher. They will help identify and measure your aptitudes and interests. Next, you will research the actual career clusters. You can use the Internet as well as library resources, textbooks, and other references. The decision to research clusters is the first real step toward identifying a career interest.

The next step in the process is to examine the career pathways associated with the career clusters. Occupations / career specialties are grouped into pathways based on the fact that they require a set of common knowledge and skills for career success. Each cluster has three to nine career pathways associated with it.

Next, review the program of study and then the concept of a personal plan of study. When you are ready to make a career declaration, this document should become a priority.

Finally, it is a very good idea to confirm your career interest by participating in a workplace experience such as job shadowing or an internship. Remember to record all your career exploration progress in your ICP or Senior Project folder.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe the career exploration process you should employ in order to select a career pathway.
2. Describe the difference between a career cluster and a career pathway.
3. How is a program of study different from a personal plan of study?
4. Why is it important to research the knowledge and skills associated with a cluster?
5. Name three Web resources for career exploration.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Volunteering is an excellent way of researching a field of study and an industry. When you volunteer, you'll find less pressure and more time to observe how people

function within an environment. Volunteering is very rewarding, and it is an excellent way to build experience for your résumé. Check with your counselor, your teacher, your family, or a social service agency for more information.

Web Links:



Internships and Internship Guidance

<http://www.internships.com/>

Federal Internship Directory

<http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalinternships/directory>

USA Intern

<http://www.usaintern.com/>

United We Serve

<http://www.serve.gov/>

Volunteer Match: Where Volunteering Begins

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/>