

CHAPTER 1: Paths to Employment



Did You Know?

Earnings and unemployment are directly linked to educational attainment. In 2018, workers with only a high school degree earned on average \$730 per week and had an unemployment rate of 4.1%. Those with an Associate's degree earned \$862 per week and had an unemployment rate of 2.8%. But those with a 4-year college degree earned \$1,198 per week and had an unemployment rate of only 2.2%.¹

As you move through high school and on toward adulthood, choosing a career and mapping a path to success are among the most important decisions you will make. The occupation you choose will occupy 80,000 hours of your adult life and can determine **earning potential** and **lifetime earnings** — which will affect everything from where you live to the kinds of hobbies and leisure activities you can afford to pursue. In addition, building a career is usually a slow process and can require a significant financial and/or emotional investment, so it requires careful consideration and planning.

Career Planning Basics

Ultimately, you want to select an occupation that you will find fulfilling and that will provide you with the income necessary to support you throughout your adult life. The first step is identifying areas of interest. Key considerations are:

- **Career aptitude and skills:** Identifying subject areas you enjoy in school, and in which you do well, is a good place to begin your career exploration. For example, if you are good at math and problem solving, then perhaps a career focused on numbers, such as actuarial science or accounting, would be worth considering.
- **Lifestyle:** What kind of work environment do you prefer — an office full of cubicles or physical activity outdoors? Do you prefer to travel or stay close to home? Typical 9 to 5 hours or more flexibility?
- **Employability:** It's important to find your work fulfilling, but personal preferences don't always lead to good

careers. For example, you may love sports or acting, but if there aren't a lot of jobs available in these fields, they will make risky career choices. Instead, you may choose a profession that provides you with the free time or income to enjoy sports or acting on your own time. Or you can look for a career, like sales or public relations, that carries across many **industries** and set a goal of landing a position with a sports network or film studio.

Getting Started

- Once you've chosen areas of interest and researched opportunities for employment, reach out to people in the field to conduct informational interviews. Ask questions about what a typical day or week is like, what they like about their job, key skills they use regularly and how they acquired those skills (in school, on the job, etc.), challenges, frustrations, and anything they wish they'd known starting out.
- Personal experience is also a critical part of choosing your vocation. Arrange for **job shadowing** experiences or **internships** that allow you to see firsthand what someone in a specific career field does on a daily basis.

Career Link

Bright Outlook² careers are professions that are expected to grow rapidly and/or offer numerous job opportunities. They fall across a broad range of skill sets and areas of interest, from actuaries to acupuncturists, and carpenters to climate change analysts. For example, rapid growth is expected for Educational, Guidance, School, and Vocational Counselors, who assist young adults with such needs as navigating social and emotional situations in school and choosing and mapping a career path. This line of work typically requires a Master's degree and has a median salary of over \$55,000 annually.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm
² See www.onetonline.org/find/bright

Activity 1

PART 1: CAREER RESEARCH



Career clusters are one tool you can use to identify potential occupations that utilize your talents and require varying levels of additional training and education. The Department of Labor's O*NET OnLine is the place to get started.

- Visit O*NET OnLine at www.onetonline.org/find/career and check out the 16 different Career Clusters.
- Choose a cluster that interests you and view the list of occupations.
- Select one of the occupations from the list. Scroll through the entire entry and note the vast amount of information available about the occupation in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, and aptitudes.
- In the Wages and Employment Trends section, select your state under State and National and click on Go. Note the median wages, percentage of change, and number of job openings in the nation compared with your state.
- Use the information you find to complete the first row of the chart. Then research two more occupations in your career cluster, and use the information to fill out the remaining rows.
- When your chart is complete, answer the questions below.



TIP: This Bright Outlook symbol highlights occupations listed on the O*NET site where there will be rapid growth, large numbers of openings, or new and emerging fields.

CAREER CLUSTER _____



Occupation	Education Required	Median Wage, U.S.	Median Wage, My State	Employment Growth/Decline, U.S. (%)	Employment Growth/Decline, My State (%)
1		\$	\$	%	%
2		\$	\$	%	%
3		\$	\$	%	%

For each of your chosen occupations, how do median wages and employment trends in your state compare to those for the U.S. as a whole? Calculate the differences using the formulas.

Median Wage U.S. - Median Wage in My State = Median Wage Difference

1. \$ _____ - \$ _____ = \$ _____
2. \$ _____ - \$ _____ = \$ _____
3. \$ _____ - \$ _____ = \$ _____



Employment Growth/Decline U.S. (%) - Employment Growth/Decline My State (%) = Employment Growth/Decline Difference (%)

1. _____ % - _____ % = _____ %
2. _____ % - _____ % = _____ %
3. _____ % - _____ % = _____ %



Activity 1

PART 2: WEIGHING YOUR OPTIONS



Research is only the first step in choosing a career. Use the questions below to start weighing your options and making some decisions.

1. Based on what you learned about wages in your state, would you still be interested in any or all of these careers? Why or why not? _____

2. Why do you think there is a difference between the national median wages and the median wages for your state? _____

3. Based on what you learned about the employment trends for these careers, both in your state and nationally, would you still be interested in any of them? Why or why not? _____

4. Are there any states where the median wage is higher and/or the employment trend more promising? Why do you think that is? _____

5. Would you be open to relocating for a job? Do you think it's more important to choose a career path or decide where you want to live first? Why? _____



Earning and Learning

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, there is a direct connection between earnings and the amount of education you receive. However, since additional education can be expensive, examining the **return on investment** for obtaining additional schooling is an important step to take in the career planning process.

Different jobs require different types of training:

- Some jobs require **on-the-job training** or an **apprenticeship** or **internship**, where you work side-by-side with a professional until you've mastered the required job skills and can complete the work successfully on your own. Some fields that provide this type of training are construction, auto service, and manufacturing.
- **Vocational education** is industry-specific classroom learning that has a hands-on component. It often precedes apprenticeships, but can be stand-alone training, followed by a certification test that allows you to work at a junior level. This is common in fields like massage therapy, hair/makeup, and computer tech.
- Other jobs require completion of a broader program of study at a college or university. You will need to first earn a high school **diploma**. Each degree then requires a certain number of credit hours in coursework and/or experience in the field. Once you have earned your degree, you may be required to pass a licensing exam, as well.

Associate's degree programs usually take two years and are offered for a wide range of fields. This degree

is typically awarded by community, junior, or technical colleges.

Bachelor's degree programs take four to five years — or an additional two to three years after attaining an Associate's degree — to complete. These degrees are earned at colleges and universities.

Master's degree programs take two to four years to complete and generally require a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite. Some schools offer programs that combine a Bachelor's and Master's degree as part of a longer period of study. Master's degrees are awarded by universities.

Doctorate (Ph.D.) and advanced degree programs, such as those for medical doctors (M.D.) and lawyers (J.D.), can require three to eight years of study after earning a Bachelor's degree, depending on the career. These degrees are awarded by universities and by professional schools that are usually part of a university.

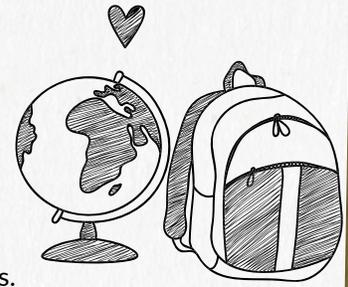
Remember that education and career training are investments in your future. Consider that every type of employment has certain expenses associated with it, whether it is the purchase of a uniform or equipment, a fee for licensing and exams, or the cost of acquiring specific skills through formal education after high school.



Activity 2

EDUCATIONAL ROI

To make a smart investment in your future, estimate the **ROI** – return on investment. This is simply the difference between what you invest and what you can expect to earn over the course of your career. Use the information in this chart to calculate the ROI for five different career options in the construction industry. To estimate lifetime earnings, multiply the average annual income by 40 years.



LIFETIME EARNINGS - COST OF EDUCATION = ROI					
Occupation	Required Education	Cost of Education ³	Average Annual Income	Lifetime Earnings (over 40 years)	Total ROI
Construction Carpenter	1 year apprenticeship	\$0	\$45,170	\$	\$
Civil Drafter	Associate's degree	\$7,140	\$52,870	\$	\$
Civil Engineer	Bachelor's degree	\$52,792	\$89,070	\$	\$
Urban Planner	Master's degree	\$90,000	\$71,490	\$	\$
Lawyer	Doctorate degree	\$167,076	\$125,250	\$	\$

Now answer these questions:

- How important do you think Return on Investment is when choosing a career? Why? _____

- Based on this chart, does more education always mean a greater return on investment? _____

- Taking into consideration the cost and time invested in education and the expected lifetime earnings for each occupation, which career would you select if you were making a decision today? Explain why. _____

- In addition to income, many careers also offer **benefits**. These can include health insurance and dental coverage, retirement plans and pensions, profit-sharing plans, stock options, and even gym membership. For many people, benefits like these are as important as income. How about you? Would you choose a lower paying job with great benefits over a higher paying job without benefits? Why or why not?

The average person will spend around 80,000 hours working in their career, so it's important to find work that is fulfilling and stimulating as well as financially rewarding. Some people call this the Emotional Return on Investment – the emotional investment may include doing rote tasks for a few years while you're in a junior position, working hard at soft skills like communication to help you succeed, and other non-financial investments that you make. The return, or reward, will be achieving success in your chosen field, whether that means climbing the professional ladder to a leadership role, making a difference in others' lives, or solving complex STEM problems. Success looks different for everyone; the key is to find what motivates you.

³www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/what-you-need-to-know-about-college-tuition-costs

Activity 3

PLANNING IT OUT

Now it's time to apply what you've learned to your own future. You are preparing to graduate from high school and need to determine your pathway to a successful career. Use what you have learned about career planning, employment trends, investing in education, and return on investment to explore three possible career paths. Be sure to check out the Fastest Growing Occupations at www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm and the occupations projected to have the Most New Jobs at www.bls.gov/ooh/most-new-jobs.htm as you consider your interests and opportunities.

Choose three different occupations that fit your aptitude, interests, and work-style. Use this chart to gather and analyze your career research. You can download a spreadsheet version of the chart at ymiclassroom.com/byf/byf_book2_job-search.xlsx and continue to explore your options until you find a career goal that's right for you.



REAL-WORLD JOB SEARCH								
Occupation	Median Wage, My State	Job Growth/Decline, My State (%)	Required Education	Skills/Aptitudes	Educational Investment	Annual Salary	Lifetime Earnings (40 years)	ROI
	\$	%			\$	\$	\$	\$
	\$	%			\$	\$	\$	\$
	\$	%			\$	\$	\$	\$
	\$	%			\$	\$	\$	\$

