

Where can I learn about careers?

# Chapter 4

## Learning About Careers

### Key Terms

*traits*  
*education*  
*training*  
*skills*  
*entry-level jobs*  
*advanced training*  
*internship*  
*promotion*  
*fringe benefits*  
*cost of living*  
*job shadowing*  
*cooperative education*

### Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **list** factors to consider when choosing a career.
- **describe** sources for obtaining career information.

### Key Concepts

- Choosing the right career will affect your future.
- Various sources of information can help you explore careers.

## Basic Job Factors

What do you want to do when you grow up? This is a question you probably began hearing very early in life. It may have inspired you to picture yourself at work in various jobs. Maybe you have already made a mental list of jobs that sound interesting and others that do not.

Choosing the right career is important to your future happiness and success. Making the right choice involves considering several factors. See 4-1.

## Job Duties and Responsibilities

The first factor to consider about a job is its duties and responsibilities. These will determine how you will spend your workday. Job duties are often described by the tasks that must be done. Does the job require you to file reports, take photos, or drive a truck? Maybe you would be required to mix chemicals, use power tools, or conduct research.

The duties of common jobs, such as truck drivers and cashiers, are easily described by their tasks. Getting these jobs may depend on previous experience with similar tasks.

Job duties and responsibilities are sometimes described by worker traits. **Traits** are noteworthy characteristics. They are often seen in want ads. The following traits are examples of some common job responsibilities:

- ability to plan and organize
- memory for details
- desire to help people
- ability to persuade

**traits**  
Noteworthy characteristics.

### Basic Job Factors

- Job duties and responsibilities
- Job prospects
- Education, training, and skills
- Salary and fringe benefits
- Advancement opportunities
- Work location and environment

#### 4-1

For any career you explore, review these basic job factors.

New or service-oriented jobs are usually described in terms of the traits required. For example, the job responsibilities of a director of customer satisfaction might be described by all four of the traits just listed. Jobs that stress jobholder traits generally do not require previous experience in a similar job. However, you would need to demonstrate that you possess the required traits.



## Community Connections

Collect classified sections of the newspaper to answer the following questions: What career areas advertise the most job ads? How many job prospects are there for part-time jobs? What kind of training is required for the most numerous job openings? Share your findings in class.

### education

Gaining knowledge to live and work in today's society.

### training

Applying knowledge through practice.

### skills

Abilities that result from education and training.

### entry-level jobs

Jobs that require no previous training.

## Job Prospects

After you identify a career choice, determine your chances of finding a job in that field. By examining job prospects, you learn about long-term opportunities predicted for the field. What is the outlook for jobs in the next 10 to 20 years for the career you have selected? Will there be openings for job seekers in that field by the time you are ready to enter it? Will this career area grow so you can advance? Only so many teachers, salesclerks, and mechanics are needed at any given time. Many Web sites have information on careers and job opportunities locally, in your state, or even nationally and internationally.

You would not want to prepare for a career field in which jobs are quickly disappearing. The Department of Labor continually examines the outlook for all types of U.S. jobs. It reports that manufacturing jobs are declining, which you learned in Chapter 1. Consequently, you might not want to plan on a life-long future in factory work.

## Education, Training, and Skills

You will need to prepare yourself to be ready to handle whatever job you choose. This requires knowing what education, training, and skills are required for the career you seek.

**Education** is gaining knowledge to live and work in today's society. **Training** is applying that knowledge through practice. **Skills** are the abilities that result from education and training. Education and training requirements for jobs are generally divided into the following three levels.

### Entry-Level Jobs

**Entry-level jobs** require no previous training. These are jobs that are easily learned, 4-2. Training for these jobs may

**4-2**

Working as a check-out clerk is an example of an entry-level job.

be provided on the job. A high school diploma is usually required. These jobs usually pay low wages and can be phased out as an employer's workforce requirements change.

### Jobs Requiring Advanced Training

Jobs requiring **advanced training** mean that some job skills are needed. These skills may be obtained in high school through a career or technical program. Skills may also be obtained after high school by attending a community college, public technical school, or private trade school. Some companies operate their own training schools where employees are sent for training. An apprenticeship program is another way to acquire skills.

**advanced training**  
Special skills and training  
required for a specific job.

### Jobs Requiring a College Degree

Jobs requiring a *college degree* mean that a student completes a college or university program of study. College degrees are available for two-year programs, four-year

programs, and more advanced studies. Usually when a college degree is a requirement for a job, a four-year degree is assumed. (The types of degrees available are discussed in further detail in Chapter 9, “Options for Education and Training.”)

## Other Educational Requirements

Some jobs require you to have a license or the appropriate certification. The local, state, or federal government issues licenses. Certification is obtained through the association that represents the profession. To obtain a license or certification, you generally must meet specific educational requirements. Sometimes you must also meet specific experience requirements, too.

### internship

An occupational training program during which a person works at a job, learning from a more experienced person. It can be paid or unpaid, lasting for several weeks, months, or for a year.

Some occupations require you to serve an internship as part of training. An *internship* is an occupational training program during which a person works at a job, learning from a more experienced person. An internship can be paid or unpaid. It can be for several weeks, months, or for a year. Medical doctors or teachers are examples of people with occupations requiring internships.

Getting the right education, training, and skills is a big part of career preparation. Because it requires time and effort, it is usually accomplished in steps. For example, a dental hygienist must get a state license in order to work. To get the license, he or she must pass a test that measures knowledge and skills. That person must also be a graduate of a recognized dental hygiene school. However, being accepted by a dental hygiene school requires one or two years of college first. See 4-3.

Some careers require more education and training steps than others. You will need to know what your career choice requires in order to prepare yourself for the job.

## Salary and Fringe Benefits

The starting salary for a job depends on the job specifications and the experience of the applicant. Entry-level jobs usually pay minimum wage, which is set by law. This is the lowest hourly wage that employers are permitted to pay. Your state employment office will be able to tell you what the minimum wage is at the present time. Most unskilled jobs pay minimum wage.

### Education and Training Requirements for Dental Hygienists

You must have a license from the state in which you will practice, which requires:

- a passing grade on a national written and clinical examination, which requires:
- proof of graduation from an accredited dental hygiene college program, which requires:
- one or two years of study at the college level before being accepted by a school of dentistry



#### 4-3

To understand the education and training required for a specific job, outline the steps needed to fill the requirements. These steps are needed to become a dentist's assistant.



## Community Connections

Invite speakers to class to represent unions. Ask the speakers to describe how they operate. Ask them to explain the benefits of belonging to a union. Prepare a list of questions ahead of time.

Union wages are set by contract between the employer and the union. If you take a job covered by a union contract, you will receive the pay scale established for that job. The same union jobs in the company will have the same hourly wage scale. Raises are uniform for everyone in the same job category. The size and timing of raises are covered by the union contract.

In most jobs, you will receive an annual review. Your annual review should allow for a raise for satisfactory performance. Check to see how the organization has handled worker reviews in the past. Read the company handbook and talk to employees to learn more.

The best way to make more than the minimum wage is to get a promotion. A **promotion** is a move up to a higher position that has increased job responsibilities and requires increased skills and knowledge. Promotions generally result in higher pay. The more promotions you receive, the better your paycheck will look at the end of the week.

A regular hourly wage is normally paid for the first 40 hours of work. Overtime pay usually applies to time worked beyond 40 hours. There also may be a pay difference for evening hours and shift work. Working overtime is usually

#### promotion

A move up to a higher position that has increased job responsibilities and requires increased skills and knowledge.



paid at a time-and-a-half rate, which is 50 percent more. Therefore, a job that pays \$8.50 per hour would pay \$12.75 per overtime hour. ( $\$8.50 + \$4.25 = \$12.75$ )

As you conduct your research, check the organization's policy regarding overtime. Depending on the job, you may be exempt from overtime pay. Check to see if you can receive future time off for working extra hours in a week. Receiving future time off is called *compensatory time* or *comp time*.

Salaried workers are paid an annual salary. They normally work a 40-hour week. However, they may work evenings and weekends with no overtime pay. The extra hours are figured into their annual salary. Salaried workers may receive bonuses and raises based on their performance and the company's earnings. See 4-4.

#### fringe benefits

Extra rewards given to workers in addition to salary or wages, such as insurance coverage and paid vacation time.

**Fringe benefits** are financial extras received in addition to salary or wages. Fringe benefits include such benefits as paid vacation and sick time, health and life insurance, and pension contributions. When you begin working, company-paid pensions and health benefits may not seem important to you. You will probably be more concerned with your paycheck. As you get older, fringe benefits become as important as your paychecks, if not more so.

#### 4-4

Project managers are examples of salaried workers. If they need to arrive early or stay late, they do so without receiving overtime pay.



## Advancement Opportunities

Advancement opportunities play a major role in selecting a job. Very few people start at the top of the pay scale. Your goal should be to move upward at a steady and reasonable pace. The best way to do that is to get promotions for doing an outstanding job. When you research your job choices, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there opportunity for advancement inside the company, or is it limited?
- Does the company fill openings by promoting its employees, or by hiring outsiders?
- Is there opportunity for advancement outside the firm due to rapid growth in the field?

Look at the opportunities for advancement inside and outside the company. As you master each job function, you become a more valuable worker because of your additional skills and experience.

## Work Location and Environment

Another major factor to consider when exploring a career is location and environment. How far must you travel to get to your work location? How much time will it take and what will it cost? Will your salary enable you to live comfortably after paying for travel to the job?

When considering jobs in different areas, compare the differences in the cost of living. The *cost of living* includes rent, food, travel, and other everyday expenses. Living costs may be much higher in a large metropolitan area than in a small town or rural area. Another very important consideration is the quality of recreational facilities and educational opportunities that are available.

Even if you like a job itself, you may still choose not to pursue it if you dislike the day-to-day work environment. The sights, smells, sounds, physical demands, and working conditions of the workplace make up the work environment.

Sights may range from a windowless office to sunlight and outdoor views. Smells could involve food cooking, wet paint, or hospital disinfectant. Sounds may include the roar of jet engines or the quiet of a computer keyboard. Physical

**cost of living**  
Amount of money needed for rent, food, travel, and other everyday expenses.





## Your Reading

Why should you consider basic job factors as you choose a career?

demands could involve carrying a few lightweight files to lifting heavy bags or boxes. Working conditions may involve a comfortable office or the extremes of outdoor weather.

You can't always know in advance if you will like the location and the work environment. You can, however, ask yourself some questions that can lead to a better decision. See 4-5.

## Obtaining Career Information

Your next step in exploring careers is to look for facts about the jobs that interest you. Begin your search by checking the most complete, up-to-date information from the Department of Labor. Then talk with your school counselor. Also, search for more information on the Internet.

## Department of Labor References

Perhaps the best material on careers is provided by the Department of Labor. Some of the following references exist as publications. Helpful references are available online, too.

### 4-5

Finding answers to these questions will help you determine if the career you are considering is right for you.

### Concerns About Work Location and Environment

- Will I enjoy this type of work?
- Where will I be employed? Is it close to where I live? Can I easily relocate?
- How will I get to work? Can I afford the transportation costs and travel time?
- What is the daily routine of people working in this career?
- Am I compatible with the culture of the company?
- Do I like the working conditions? If not, do I like the job enough to tolerate the conditions?
- Does the work require much travel? Are many evenings and weekends spent away from home?
- Will the work responsibilities match my family/caregiving responsibilities?
- Will the pay support the lifestyle I choose to live?
- Is the work stressful or do stressful conditions exist only with certain employers?
- Is there frequent turnover with personnel?

- The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, updated every two years, is designed to help with decisions about your future work. The *Handbook* describes what workers do on the job, the working conditions, and the training and education required. It also includes earnings information and expected job prospects. The publication's Web site is [bls.gov/oco](http://bls.gov/oco).
- The *Guide for Occupational Exploration* is designed to help people understand what traits are required for certain occupations. The *Guide* categorizes occupations into 12 interest areas that are further divided into work groups. Each work group describes jobs that require the same worker traits. The *Guide* makes it possible to determine how suited you are for a job, based on how well your abilities and interests match job requirements.
- The Occupational Information Network, called the O\*NET, is an excellent online resource from the Department of Labor. O\*NET can be used to explore careers, related job skills, and trends. It also provides tools for assessing a person's abilities and interests. O\*NET's job-classification system links to other labor market information. Consequently, it is the most complete occupational resource available. Access O\*NET at <http://online.onetcenter.org/>. (O\*NET replaces the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*.)

The Department of Labor offers career information for youth and adults through its Education and Training Administration. The site also links with other helpful sources of career information. Access the Web site at [doleta.gov](http://doleta.gov).

## School Counselors

Guidance and career counselors are professionally trained to assist you in researching careers. They can save you a great deal of research time by directing your efforts to areas that provide useful facts. Your counselor can help you explore the following areas:

- careers and their educational requirements
- colleges and trade or technical schools offering specific programs

- government service and recruiting information
- local opportunities to observe jobs in your career field, 4-6

In addition, your school counselor can provide career counseling on a one-to-one basis. Try to schedule a conference early in the school term to speak to the counselor about your career interests.

## The Internet and Your Career

The Internet is one of the most valuable sources of career information. Many computers connected to the Internet have all-in-one career sites built into their Web browser. By clicking on the careers block, dozens of online career sites are available. Some of the most popular career Web sites follow:

- Job Bank USA ([jobbankusa.com](http://jobbankusa.com))
- America's Job Bank ([ajb.dni.us](http://ajb.dni.us))
- Career Magazine ([careermag.com](http://careermag.com))
- Career Resource Center ([careers.org](http://careers.org))

You can also search the Internet for job information provided by many sources. These include unions, professional associations, employment agencies, and companies. Other sources include colleges, universities, government agencies, and hundreds of newspapers and periodicals.

### 4-6

Observing the work of others is a good way to learn about job tasks and responsibilities.



A popular method for getting career and job information from the Internet is through newsgroups and electronic message boards. Newsgroups are special interest groups composed of people with similar interests. Using newsgroups to search for career information helps you limit your Internet search.

Online Internet chat groups and electronic message boards are also useful in gathering career information. Through them, you can talk with others who share your interests.

## Additional Ways to Investigate Careers

There are many other ways to learn more about careers. These include researching other sources, talking with people, volunteering, working in career-related jobs, and attending career events.

### Research

Researching careers means gathering information about your career choices before you commit to a specific career. It means weighing the pros and cons of the career. You can use many combinations of the following sources to gather information:

#### Libraries

Your school and local libraries carry a wide selection of books, CDs, and videotapes on careers. Classified ads in newspapers, trade magazines, and professional journals provide additional information. Most libraries offer Internet access, too.

#### Trade Unions and Professional Associations

These organizations offer a great deal of information on jobs in their specific career fields. If you seek a highly specialized career, this is one of the best information sources.

#### Public Employment Services

These employment service centers exist to help people find employment. You can locate the nearest site by looking in the state government listing of a telephone directory under *Job Service*.



### Your Reading

What methods can you use to obtain career information?



### Community Connections

Visit both your school library and community library. Ask librarians at each library about career resources they offer. Ask them to highlight the trade and professional magazines that each library has. Learn how to access career-related references at both libraries.

## Interviewing Workers

After narrowing your list of career considerations to two or three, contact people who work in these fields. Ask them questions about their careers. A good starting point is your family, teachers, and friends. Do any of them work in a career field that interests you? Ask them to introduce you to anyone they know who works in an area you are investigating.

Generally, people are very eager to talk about their jobs and give advice to interested listeners. Be prepared to ask career-related questions whenever you have an opportunity to discuss a person's job. This opportunity may arise when talking with individuals or when taking part in a career study tour. See 4-7.

## Job Shadowing

### job shadowing

Accompanying a person to his or her job to learn about that person's job.

One of the best ways to investigate a career choice is to accompany workers on the job. This is called *job shadowing*. Job shadowing usually lasts for a short time, only a few days to a week or two. This period is long enough to experience the work environment firsthand and get your career questions answered. You also witness the type of duties commonly performed.

Your school counselor might be able to schedule a job-shadowing experience for you. You would stay with a worker at his or her job site during normal work hours. The experience would help you know if a career in the field is worth exploring.

### 4-7

Some of the most helpful career information you can get is from workers themselves.

### Career Questions to Ask Workers

- Do you enjoy your work?
- What skills and abilities are needed?
- How would you describe a typical day?
- Is there room for advancement in this career?
- What working conditions would you like to change?
- Do you recommend this career to others?



## Community/Service Learning

If your dream career involves working with community or service organizations, gaining firsthand experience will be easy. These groups always have work for willing volunteers.

Your school can arrange learning experiences with cooperating agencies in the community. These often include hospitals, senior centers, YMCA/YWCA centers, food pantries, and nursing homes. Through community/service learning, you have an opportunity to use classroom knowledge while performing a service for others. The following activities are just some of the many available to explore:

- Community service agencies need help with their office work.
- Hospitals and health care agencies need helpers to run errands and deliver food to patients.
- Peer tutoring uses students to help other students with their studies. See 4-8.



### 4-8

Helping other students with their studies develops interpersonal and information skills that you can later use in your career.





## Making a Difference

Create (or update) a list of service agencies in the community that need volunteers. Contact the agencies and find out what types of volunteers are needed, for what tasks, and during what hours. Consider filling a position and to report back to class on the experience.

### cooperative education

A program between schools and places of employment that allows students to receive on-the-job training through part-time work.

- Assistants are needed in parks and recreational facilities to serve as referees, camp counselors, and craft instructors.
- The Habitat for Humanity organization builds homes for those who cannot afford shelter. Youth volunteers are needed to help carry supplies, food, and water to the workers, and litter to trash bins.

## Part-Time Jobs

It is not always possible to obtain an entry-level job in the career area you desire. If jobs exist, age or educational restrictions may exclude you. For some career fields, however, entry-level jobs do not exist for teenagers.

You can gain valuable work experience of a general nature by holding a part-time job. You can obtain part-time employment after school, on weekends, or during the summer. You will learn to follow company policies and interact with fellow workers. You will understand more about job performance and expectations. All of these valuable learning experiences will help you find a full-time job when you are ready.

Your school may have a cooperative education or co-op program. **Cooperative education** is a program between schools and places of employment that allows students to receive on-the-job training through part-time work. You work under the supervision of your employer and your co-op teacher. (Cooperative education will be described in greater detail in Chapter 9.)

## Career Events and Job Fairs

Take advantage of career days, job fairs, employment workshops, and tours offered by your school or community. These are excellent ways to investigate specific jobs and employers while learning about different career fields.

Most speakers at career events answer audience questions. They will give you helpful hints on how to learn more about your particular interests. Many presenters bring materials to help you better understand what they do.

Tours to career sites are especially helpful. They let you see firsthand what workers actually do on their jobs. You can also experience the sounds and sights of the work environment.



## Your Reading

List four ways you can investigate careers.

## Summary

Knowing as much as possible about a given occupation will help you make intelligent career choices. Research as much as you can about job duties and job prospects for the careers you are considering. Identify the education, training, and skills necessary. Salary and fringe benefits are very important. Also, consider advancement opportunities, work location, and the work environment.

Begin your career exploration by checking Department of Labor information. Then talk to your school counselor to focus your search.

Check many sources to find out as much as possible. Talk with workers in the career you are considering. Enroll in a job-shadowing program to get a firsthand look at the work environment. To obtain valuable work skills, volunteer for community activities and hold a part-time job. Attend career events to ask questions of the presenters.



## Reviewing Key Concepts

1. List five factors to explore when investigating basic information about a career.
2. In what two ways are job duties and responsibilities described?
3. Name the three basic levels of education and training.
4. List four fringe benefits.
5. Name the five main qualities of the work environment.
6. List three career references from the Department of Labor.
7. Which Department of Labor publication provides career information in terms of worker traits?
8. Why is it a good idea to talk with your school counselor about your career considerations?
9. True or false. Most workers do *not* like to talk about their jobs.
10. Identify six sources of community/service projects to explore.

### Building Academic Skills

1. **Research, writing.** Search the U.S. Department of Labor Web site ([dol.gov](http://dol.gov)) to find out what other career information and assistance is available. Summarize your findings in an easy-to-read, one-page handout.
2. **Writing, Math, and Science.** Select four or five common entry-level jobs. Make a chart showing the job duties plus the school subjects that most directly relate to each job. Write a paragraph about what math, writing, or science skills are needed in each job.

### Building Technology Skills

1. Use a spreadsheet program to create a chart with the job factors listed in 4-1. Save this spreadsheet and add information as you investigate careers.
2. Research the starting pay for three occupations in your preferred career field. Search the Web site of the Occupational Outlook Handbook ([bls.gov/oco](http://bls.gov/oco)) for average monthly incomes. What is it for beginners? for experienced workers? Summarize your findings in a table prepared with a word processing program.
3. Check out two of the popular career Web sites listed to search for a job in your career area of choice. Report the number of jobs and write a reaction to the information you find.
4. If attending a career day at your school is not possible, go into the community to videotape interviews with various local employers. Show the video to the class.

### Building Career Knowledge and Skills

1. Using the O\*NET, research four job titles that interest you. For each, record the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code and write a short job description.
2. Give a two-minute presentation to the class on your top career choice. Describe it in terms of the basic job factors.
3. Listen carefully to your classmates' career presentations (described in the previous item). List the pros and cons about their career choices as they apply to you.
4. Organize a community/learning project involving your school and community.
5. Visit an online source for employment information. Record how many openings were listed for your top five job titles.
6. Interview a person about his or her job responsibilities and the education and training that was needed to qualify for the job.

### Building Workplace Skills

Using online and print resources, research your top career choice. Find out what group or organization represents the profession, and phone or write for the name of three people to contact. Indicate that you would like to interview people with practical experience in the career field. Phone the recommended contact people to schedule a phone interview with each. Prepare a list of questions in advance that will provide information you can't get any other way. Summarize your experience in a report to the class. Are you more or less interested in the career as a result of the interviews? Keep your interview findings for future career reference.