Career Research

Directorate: Counselling and Career Development

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Finding career information

What is career research?

Making effective career decisions requires having access to relevant and reliable information, and the ability to integrate this information with your self-knowledge, career vision, and goals. You will explore various career options, understanding the job market, and identifying the skills and qualifications needed for your desired career path.

Why career research?

Career research helps you to:
- Answer questions related to your career choices.
- Expand your understanding of the opportunities aligned to your career vision.
- Identify "hidden" career paths that you may not have previously considered.
- Plan how to pursue specific career goals.

Before you begin…

Before beginning your career research, identify your needs.
- What are you not sure about?
- What questions do you still have to enable you to make a career decision?

As you do your research, record the information you find and set reminders to follow up on specific details. If you find yourself overwhelmed with information and unable to make a decision, consider contacting a counsellor to discuss your options.

You must be able to critically evaluate the information you find. Use the following questions to guide your evaluation:
- Who wrote the information? Look at the domain name - is it educational (.edu, .ac.za) or commercial (.com) or government (.gov, .gov.za) or nonprofit (.org, .org.za)?
- Check the "About us" or "Bibliography" sections to verify the author(s), the date the page was last updated and the author's credentials.
- Review further links: what does this page link to? Does the author mention the sources for the information provided?
- Determine the purpose of the page: is it to inform, sell, convince, share, or entertain?

Online search

How?

Use a search engine like Google to find information related to your career questions.

For example, if you need to learn about career opportunities in your field of study, you can start by using keywords such as "careers in [insert your field of study, e.g., accounting]".

To further contextualise your findings, use additional keywords such as "careers in [insert your field of study] Africa" or "careers in [insert your field of study] South Africa".

Use this information to compile lists of job titles relevant to your field of study, organisations that hire in your field, and professional associations you can join. Be sure to bookmark useful pages for future reference.

Steps for effective online search

Scan results: Look through the brief descriptions of the first ten search results and choose the most relevant website to explore first.

Skim read: Start by reading the headings and subheadings on the website to get an overview of the content.

Evaluate links: Check for links to other reputable websites that can provide further information.

Activity

1. Use a search engine (e.g. Google) to find specific job titles related to your field of study.
2. The following are some search terms you could consider: "job titles [insert your field of study] graduates"; "job titles [insert your field of study] graduates South Africa"; "jobs for [insert your field of study] graduates with bachelor degree".
3. Make a list of the job titles you find.

Occupational information websites

List of occupational websites

- National Career Advice Portal https://ncap.careerhelp.org.za/occupations
- Career Planet http://www.careerplanet.co.za/
- O*Net http://www.onetonline.org/
- Prospects http://www.prospects.ac.uk/

Occupational information websites are valuable resources for anyone seeking to understand the intricacies of various careers. These websites can help answer a range of questions, such as:

- What are the typical responsibilities associated with specific job titles?
- What qualifications and skills are required for particular roles?
- What is the expected salary range and job outlook for different careers?
- What industries and sectors employ individuals in these roles?
- How can you leverage your major or field of study in different career paths?

Activity

1. Go to any of the above occupational information websites and search for the job titles you identified during the Google search activity.
2. Summarise what you have found for each of the job titles you explored:
   Job title (e.g. computer programmer)
   Website (e.g. http://www.careerhelp.org.za)
   Related job titles (e.g. software developer, coder)
   Pros (e.g. high earning potential)
   Cons (e.g. need to travel a lot)

Job search portals

List of job search portals

- PNet
  http://www.pnet.co.za
- CareerJunction
  http://www.careerjunction.co.za
- LinkedIn
  http://www.linkedin.com
- Careers24
  http://www.careers24.com/
- Indeed
  http://www.indeed.co.za
- Government positions
  https://www.dpsa.gov.za/
  newsroom/psvc/

Job search portals are valuable tools for researching specific job titles within various career fields and industries. Exploring job advertisements, even if you are not currently applying for jobs, can provide significant insights. Although you might not yet be eligible for your dream job, you can gather crucial information to help you prepare for future opportunities.

For example, you are interested in IT but unsure of the specific job titles linked to this field or the qualifications and skills needed to become a software developer. Job portals can provide these details. This information can help you set career goals and strategically develop experiences to meet more of the selection criteria in the future.

Activity

1. Use one (or more) of the job portal websites to search for job advertisements linked to your field of study.
2. Make a list of job titles you find.
3. Read through at least three advertisements and summarise the information:
- Job title (e.g. graduate programmer)
- Salary (e.g. R450000 per year)
- Organisation (e.g ABC Bank of South Africa)
- Responsibilities and tasks (e.g. troubleshooting and programming, performing full diagnostic checks, working with clients)
- Requirements (Experience) (e.g. 2 years in a banking environment)
- Requirements (Qualifications) (e.g. BSc in Computer Science)
- Requirements (Skills) (e.g. problem-solving, C# language, attention to detail, working under pressure)

LinkedIn

Activity

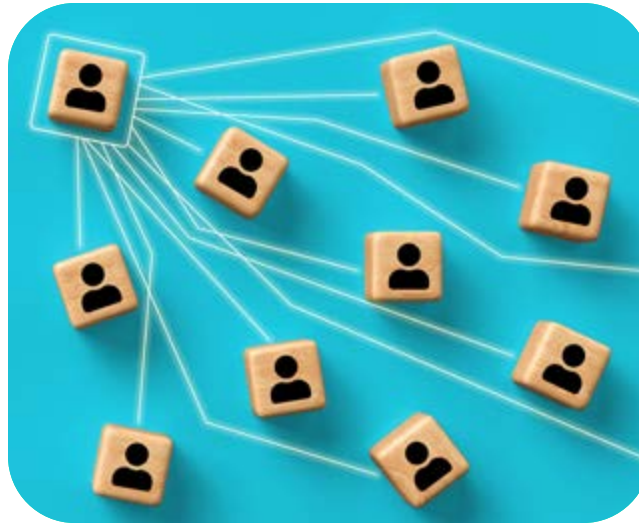Make notes about what you found on LinkedIn: What stood out for you? What did you learn?

LinkedIn is an essential tool for career research and networking. If you haven't already, start building your professional network on LinkedIn today! Register for a free account and begin connecting with professionals in your field. Here's how LinkedIn can help you with career research:

Networking: Connect with peers, industry leaders, and potential employers.

Groups: Join groups related to your career field to participate in discussions, ask questions, and share insights.

Research: Investigate companies and their employees to identify job opportunities, understand organisational cultures, and gain insights about career paths and trends.

To get started with LinkedIn, visit LinkedIn. For more tips on using LinkedIn effectively, check out this guide.

Use LinkedIn for career research

1. Create and complete your profile: Go to LinkedIn Alumni and sign in to your LinkedIn account. If you don't have an account yet, create one and ensure your current or previous studies at Unisa are included in your profile.

2. Explore alumni insights: Navigate to the LinkedIn Alumni page, which displays headings and graphs (e.g., Where they live, Where they work, What they do).

3. Type your field of study, e.g., "accounting" or "psychology," in the Search box.

4. Observe how the graphs adjust to filter information about Unisa graduates.

5. Analyse the data: Review the data to see:

- How many graduates are on LinkedIn?

- Where do they work?

- What skills do they possess?

- Other relevant details about their career paths.

6. Make notes: Document any interesting findings and insights that can help you in your career planning.

AI
(Artificial Intelligence)
Tools

Large-language model (LLM) AI tools like [ChatGPT](#) and [Google Gemini](#) are powerful resources for conducting career research. These AI-driven platforms can provide personalised advice, answer specific career-related questions, and offer insights based on vast amounts of data. Leveraging these tools can help you make informed decisions about your career path.

How does it work?

Interacting with LLMs like ChatGPT and Gemini involves providing text prompts (your questions or requests) as input and receiving generated text as output, essentially having a conversation with an advanced language AI.

Why use AI tools for career research?

These AI tools can assist you in several ways:

- **Explore career options:** Identify potential career paths based on your skills and interests.
- **Job market trends:** Gain insights into industry trends and job market conditions.
- **Skill development:** Learn about the qualifications and skills needed for different roles.
- **Application guidance:** Receive advice on CV writing, cover letters, and job applications.
- **Networking tips:** Get strategies for effective networking and building professional relationships.

Activity

1. **Choose an AI Tool:** Decide whether you will use ChatGPT or Google Gemini for your research.
2. **Conduct Your Research:** Use the AI tool to gather information. Use the example prompts above to find the information you need. Remember that you can ask follow-up questions based on the information shared with you.
3. **Record Your Findings:**
   Career Paths: Note any new career paths or job titles that match your skills and interests.
   Job Requirements: List the common qualifications, skills, and experiences required for these roles.
   Industry Trends: Summarise key trends, such as in-demand skills or emerging opportunities in your industry.
   Reflect on Your Insights: Think about how these findings align with your career goals. What steps can you take to acquire the necessary skills or experiences? Are there new career paths that interest you?

Example prompts

Career Exploration:

"What are the best career options for someone interested in environmental science?"

"What are some high-paying careers in the mining industry?"

"What career options are available for someone with a degree in psychology?"

"What are the emerging job trends in the IT industry?"

Deep dive into specific roles:

Get detailed information about particular job titles and their requirements. For example:

"What skills are needed to become a data analyst?"

"What is the typical career progression for a marketing specialist?"

"I am searching for more information about working in environmental sustainability. How do I go about setting up informational interviews with industry professionals and what questions can I ask?"

Job market insights:

"What is the job outlook for data scientists over the next five years?"

"What industries in South Africa are currently experiencing the most growth?"

Skill development:

"What certifications are valuable for a career in cybersecurity?"

"What are essential skills for a career in digital marketing?"

"What are the best free online courses for learning Python programming?"

"How can I improve my public speaking skills for professional settings?"

"Design a realistic 30-day study plan for [skill you want to learn], considering I have [X hours] available to study [daily/weekly]. Include specific activities and resources for each study session."
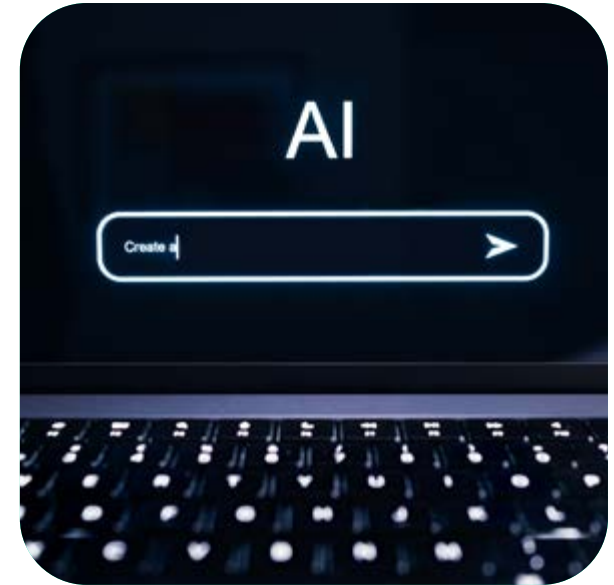
Networking Strategies:

"How can I effectively network on LinkedIn?"

"What are some tips for attending industry events?"

"What are effective ways to network with alumni from my university?"

"How do I follow up with a professional contact after a networking event?"

Informational interviews

Once you have conducted some initial research on specific career options, the next crucial step is to engage in informational interviews. These conversations with professionals in your desired job or industry are invaluable for exploring career paths, expanding your network, building confidence, accessing firsthand information, and identifying your strengths and areas for development.

Why informational interviews?

- **Explore career options:** Gain insights into different roles and industries.
- **Expand your network:** connect with professionals who can offer guidance and support.
- **Build confidence:** become more comfortable discussing your career interests and goals.
- **Access information:** obtain detailed information that might not be available through other sources.
- **Identify strengths and areas for development:** understand the skills and experiences needed to succeed in your chosen field.

Activity

1. Make a list of people you know who may work in the fields you are interested in. For instance, do any of your parents' friends work in any of the fields you are considering? In addition, note the names of other people who you think could give you information about any careers you are considering.
2. Identify one person you want to talk to and use the guidelines provided to prepare for and conduct the informational interview.

Further resources

Informational Interview Guide: This guide provides additional tips and sample questions for conducting informational interviews.

The Dos and Don'ts of Informational Interviews: Watch this video to learn more about how to conduct effective informational interviews.

Step-by-step guidelines for informational interviews

1. **Identify potential contacts:** Start with your existing network: friends, family, neighbours, colleagues, lecturers, tutors, and fellow students. Use online social networks like LinkedIn to identify professionals in your field of interest.

2. **Prepare for the interview:** Research the person you will be speaking with and their role in the industry. This will help you formulate specific questions and show your genuine interest. Think about what gaps you need to fill in your understanding. For instance, if you read an article about a new addiction treatment program, you might be curious about how the researchers evaluated the program. You could reach out to one of the authors to ask about their evaluation methods.

3. **Initiate contact:** Send a polite and concise message or email introducing yourself and explaining why you are reaching out. Be clear about your interest in learning more about their career and industry.
   Example message: "Hi [Name], my name is [Your Name], and I am a student at [Your Institution] studying [Your Field]. I recently read your article on [Topic] and found it fascinating. I am very interested in pursuing a career in [Industry/Field] and would love to learn more about your experience and any advice you might have. Would you be available for a brief informational interview at your convenience?"

4. **Conduct the interview:** Be punctual and respectful of their time. Prepare a list of questions to guide the conversation. Ask open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses. **Some example questions** include:
   "Can you tell me about your career path and how you got to your current position?"
   "What do you enjoy most about your job, and what are some of the challenges you face?"
   "What skills and qualifications are essential for success in this field?"
   "How do you see this industry evolving in the next few years?"
   "Do you have any advice for someone looking to enter this field?"

5. **Follow up:** Send a thank-you note expressing your gratitude for their time and insights. Mention specific points from the conversation that you found particularly helpful.
   Example follow-up message: "Thank you for speaking with me today. I truly appreciate your insights into the [Industry/Field] and your advice on [Specific Topic]. Your guidance has been invaluable, and I feel more confident about pursuing a career in this area."

6. **Keep track of your progress:** After each informational interview, document the following:
   Information gathered: Summarise the key points and insights from the conversation.
   Understanding: Reflect on how this information impacts your career decisions.
   Remaining questions: Note any questions that still need answers.

7. **Next Steps:** Identify actionable steps to further your career research and development.

Attend careers fair events

Attending a careers fair event is a valuable opportunity to engage with representatives from various industries. Even if your current qualification doesn't seem to have a direct link to the exhibitors or presenters, remember that they all have one thing in common: they employ people. Their organisations engage with a wide range of suppliers and services, where your qualification could fit into the value chain as a customer, employer, or employee.

Preparation

- **Dress appropriately:** Choose professional attire to make a good impression.
- **Practice your introduction:** Develop and rehearse a brief self-introduction. Practice a firm handshake.
- **Update your CV:** Ensure your CV is current and prepare to discuss your experiences, studies, and career goals.
- **Research participating organisations:** Start with the organisation's website to understand their business and values.
- **Prepare questions:** Based on your research, formulate questions to ask recruiters. Examples include: "What kind of person are you seeking for this position?" "What specific skills do you value most in a candidate?"

During the event

- **Engage with all exhibitors:** introduce yourself and take note of the representatives and their companies.
- **Communicate clearly and confidently:** speak loudly and clearly, especially if the venue is noisy.
- **Take notes:** bring a notebook and pen, or use your cell phone/tablet to jot down important information.
- **Network with other students:** engage with peers but prioritise conversations with employers.
- **Avoid asking obvious questions:** don't enquire about information that is readily available on the employer's website.

After the event

- **Make detailed notes:** Summarise the conversations you had and the information you gathered.
- **Connect online:** reach out to company representatives you met, such as through LinkedIn.
- **Reflect on your experience:** consider how effectively you used this opportunity. were you able to connect your skills and qualifications with what was offered at the fair?

Join a professional organisation

Many professional bodies offer student registration categories to enable those who are still studying towards a qualification in the field, to join and receive specific benefits such as training, development and networking opportunities.

The professional bodies' websites are also valuable sources of information should you wish to do research related to specific occupations.

Many professional websites also list practitioners or organisations in the field and allow you to identify individuals who you could contact for further conversations about your career.

- Search for recognised Professional Bodies and Professional Designations here: http://pbdesig.saqa.org.za/
- List of professional organisations linked to Unisa fields of study

Explore your field of study

Explore what your field of study is by watching and listening to free online lectures and reading free open textbooks. These resources will enhance your understanding of your field of study and the various opportunities related to it:

- Coursera.org
  http://www.coursera.org/
- EdX
  https://www.edx.org/
- Udemy
  http://www.udemy.com/
- Saylor Academy
  https://learn.saylor.org/
- Khan Academy
  http://www.khanacademy.org/
- MITOpenCourseware
  https://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm
- Open Culture
  http://www.openculture.com/
- FutureLearn
  https://www.futurelearn.com/

Volunteering

Volunteering can be a powerful tool for career development, helping you to:
- Determine if a specific field of work is right for you.
- Gather information about a particular industry or profession.
- Network with professionals and others in your field of interest.

Here are some questions to consider:
- Which organisations or communities could benefit from my skills and knowledge?
- How can this organisation or community contribute to my career development?
- What professional conduct is expected within this organisation and in my future career?
- What do I hope to gain from my volunteer activities?

Important

Remember, while volunteering, you are also building your reputation (your "brand"). It's important to maintain a professional image and avoid being perceived as unreliable or exploitative.

Activity

1. Search for volunteer opportunities in your community:
- Use a search engine, e.g. "volunteer in Pretoria".
- Visit the forgood or GreaterGoodSA websites to help you identify opportunities aligned with your interests.
- Talk to local schools, faith-based organisations, clinics and police stations about possible volunteer opportunities.
2. Write down your answers to the questions on this page and use these answers to narrow down the organisations you wish to contact.

Career Learning Plan

Your next step is to plan how you will get the information you still need to make an optimal career decision. Use SMART goals to help you plan your career research.

What do I still need to find out?

Make SMART goals

Specific (include who, what, where, why)

Measurable (what? how many? how will I know it's complete)

Actionable (what actions are needed? can I achieve this?)

Realistic (do I have what I need to do this (time, skills, support)?)

Time-based (by when?)

What steps will I take to get the information I need?	When?	What/ who do I need?	Check after the due date: Have I done this? What else do I need to do?

Counselling and Career Development support

The Unisa Directorate: Counselling and Career Development is dedicated to provide students with confidential and professional counselling, guidance, and academic support services that add value to your career choices and learning and that are relevant within an open and distance learning context. Our services are free of charge.

Talk to us

Send an email to counselling@unisa.ac.za

Book an online appointment (MSTeams)

Contact us at a Unisa regional centre

How can we support you?

Career guidance

Career plans
Understand yourself
Career exploration

Preparing for job opportunities

Job searching
CV writing
Interview skills

Academic skills

Adjusting to Unisa
Time management
Study skills
Exam preparation

Personal development

Self-confidence
Relationships
Loss and grief

Mental health

Depression
Post-traumatic stress
Anxiety
General clinical conditions

Self-help resources

Self-help resources on our website

Visit our YouTube channel and subscribe