

Overcoming obstacles to career decision-making

Introduction to this workbook

Do you feel 'stuck' when it comes to making a career decision? ¹

This workbook can help you:

- ✓ Identify obstacles that are getting in the way of your decision-making
- ✓ Learn a little more about your obstacles
- ✓ Choose activities to try to overcome your obstacles

Step 1: Reflect on what's true for you right now

Read each statement, and tick 'yes' if the statement is true for you right now, and no if it isn't. If you don't know, tick 'no'.

There are 10 categories, each with 3 statements. Tick one box on each line.

Category 1

Statement	Yes	No
<i>Either</i> I believe choices are all just luck <i>or</i> I believe you have to be really certain because your choice is crucial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe that other people should decide for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe some options aren't open to people like me, even if I had the skills required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹ This workbook is based on research into career decision-making by Professor Itamar Gati and team who hypothesised and tested the idea of different categories of career decision-making. - Gati, Itamar, Krausz, Mina & Osipow, Samuel. (1996). A Taxonomy of Difficulties in Career Decision-making. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43(4), 510-526.

Category 2

Statement	Yes	No
I find talking or thinking about careers boring – I'd rather be doing something else	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't think a job or career is going to help me get what I want in life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I only do what I think is important for right now – I don't think about the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 3

Statement	Yes	No
There's so much to consider it's hard to know where to start	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know how people make career decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You have to choose even though you don't know anything, and then see how it turns out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 4

Statement	Yes	No
I can't list the features of a good option for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm not sure what I'm really interested in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't really know what my skills or values are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 5

Statement	Yes	No
I'm not sure what options are out there that might suit me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have many facts about options, just general ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know a few options, but I don't know many alternatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 6

Statement	Yes	No
I don't know how to find reliable information about my options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know how to learn more about myself and what's important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know where to look if I need more help with careers stuff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 7

Statement	Yes	No
There are contradictions in what I know about myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are contradictions in what I know about my options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know the facts about my options and myself, but what I believe deep down is different	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 8

Statement	Yes	No
I can't find a way to get what I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Either</i> I am equally attracted to all my options <i>Or</i> I don't like any of my options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the options I like there are some things that really bother me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 9

Statement	Yes	No
People around me don't agree with what I want to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Different people who are important to me are giving me different advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I want doesn't seem to fit with what the important people in my life need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Category 10

Statement	Yes	No
It is usually really difficult for me to make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try hard to not make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel I need help from people that I trust to make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Step 2: Identify your obstacles to decision-making

Researchers² have suggested 10 potential categories of obstacles that might make it difficult to make decisions relating to your career. The statements in Step 1 are organised in these 10 categories.

Add up how many 'yeses' you had for each category and record it in the table below.

Categories with scores of 1 or more are likely to be worth investigating in Step 3.

Category number	Obstacle category name	Your score
1	Unhelpful myths	
2	Lack of motivation	
3	Lack of information about how career decision-making works	
4	Lack of information about yourself	
5	Lack of information about your options	
6	Lack of information about how to find information	
7	Conflicting information you hold	
8	Conflicting feelings you have	
9	Conflicting ideas between you and other people	
10	General indecisiveness	

² Gati, Itamar, Krausz, Mina & Osipow, Samuel. (1996). A Taxonomy of Difficulties in Career Decision-making. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43(4), 510-526.

Step 3: Choose activities to explore and overcome obstacles

For each category where you scored 1 or more

1. Read the guidance and the different suggested exercises
2. Tick at least one of the exercises to try
3. Try the exercise and decide if you found it useful. If it didn't help, try an alternative.

You might want to use the online [Padlet](#) to share your feedback – if it proved helpful vote it up and if not, vote it down. Feel free to browse too, to see what other people found most helpful.

1. Unhelpful myths

These are beliefs that we hold about ourselves, other people or the world. You might think they're true and they can feel true, but they're usually unhelpful assumptions.

Thinking about them can help you change what you tell yourself. This in turn can lead to you feeling more motivated about making a decision for your future. Choose one of these exercise to start the process:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Do the <i>Decision-making Myths</i> workbook</p> <p>It's workbook 2 in this mini-course in career decision-making.. It gives you the opportunity to explore the myths that matter to you and come up with a revised opinion of them.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ 'Take the thought to court'</p> <p>First, write down what you believe. Next, write down evidence that it's true and evidence that it's not true. Be open minded – we want to give it a fair trial. Finally, decide if it's a thought worth believing, or if it needs letting go of or updating.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Get a second opinion</p> <p>What feels true to us can be tricky to see clearly ourselves. Think about someone you know who has the information and experience to be able to give you good feedback. This might be someone who has supported lots of students or employees themselves. Ask them for their take on it, with an open mind.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Read about unhelpful thinking styles we can fall into when we're stressed</p> <p>It might be that the myths form part of a habit of negative thinking we fall into when we're stressed. Read more about these Negative Automatic Thoughts. Resource from Off the Record (Bristol-based mental health movement by and for young people).</p>

2. Lack of motivation

This is feeling like making choices for your career doesn't really matter, or that it's not worth bothering about. This might be because you can't see yet what the benefits could be, or the downsides of doing nothing. Choose one of these to help:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Do the <i>Possible Selves</i> workbook</p> <p>It's workbook 1 of this mini-course in career decision-making. It helps you think about three versions of yourself – who you hope to be, who you expect to be, and who you really don't want to become.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Role models</p> <p>Who do you know that represents the kind of future that you'd like to have? You don't have to know them in person - they might be someone who you've read or heard about. See if you can learn more about them. How did they get started? What's their story? What steps did they take? What are some similar steps you could do now? Learning how someone got to where they are can make it feel more 'do able' and this can make you feel more motivated.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Visualisation</p> <p>This is the same technique that athletes use to prepare for their next competition. They visualise success, imagining it with lots of detail, including how it looks, sounds, feels (even smells or tastes!). This can lift motivation by literally putting the eyes on the prize! You don't need to have a specific 'prize' in mind for it to be helpful. Get someone to say the following slowly, read them a sentence at a time, or listen to our recording. Shut your eyes and visualise...</p> <p><i>Imagine that it's this time next year and things are going really well. And somehow, magically, you're transported forward in time. You wake up in the morning and look around – what's different that you see? You start getting ready, following the habits of future you: what would you do? What do you eat? What do you wear? It's time to start the productive part of your day. Again, you're following the habits of future you, amazed that things are going so well. Where do you go? Who do you see? What do you do? How does it feel? As the day goes on, you're increasingly pleased with how things turned out. What's been particularly satisfying. You end your day feeling very pleased with how the future has turned out.'</i></p> <p>Now ask yourself:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you could make that visualisation of a year's time happen, would you do it? If not, try it again - remember that this all about a best-case scenario vision of the future. 2. Is there anything from your visualisation that you could do in your real day tomorrow? Even something small. 3. What could you do in the next week that would make that vision of the future more likely to happen?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Cost-benefit analysis</p> <p>Consider two options – carrying on as you are now and doing something about it. For each, ask yourself what are the costs (the downsides) and what are the benefits? Make a list for each.</p> <p>This helps you spot the consequences of doing something about it and staying as you are. Looking at the positives and negatives for each can help you make a balanced conclusion. Is it worth doing something about your situation? See the example cost-benefit analysis grid that follows.</p>

Example cost-benefit analysis grid

Costs (downsides) of carrying on as you are now ...	Costs (downsides) of doing something proactive ...
Benefits of carrying on as you are now ...	Benefits of doing something proactive ...

3. Lack of information about how career decision-making works

If you're unclear about the process, making a career decision can seem like a confusing and tangled topic. Choose one of these exercises to help:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Do the <i>What stage am I at?</i> workbook</p> <p>It's workbook 3 of this mini-course in career decision-making. It introduces you to the DOTS model – a flow chart that describes a step by step process for career planning.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Do the <i>Decision-making styles</i> workbook</p> <p>It's workbook 4 of this mini-course in career decision-making. It helps you analyse your decision-making habits and spot if they need to change.</p>

4. Lack of information about yourself

Not knowing your own skills, values and interests (which make up what you might be looking for in a good option) can make the process of choosing what to do really tricky.

There are lots of exercises in our [career help toolkit](#) to choose from.

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... understand what my skills are' – in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... understand what my values are' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... understand what my interests are' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>

5. Lack of information about your options

Knowing about your main options gives you confidence and accurate information for decision-making.

There are lots of exercises in our [career help toolkit](#) to choose from.

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find career ideas using quizzes' - in the career help toolkit</p>

	I picked this exercise:
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find career ideas linked to my favourite subject' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find the facts about my career ideas' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find out about people's experiences of different careers' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find out more about different courses and qualifications' – in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... find out more about apprenticeships and school leaver jobs' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>

6. Lack of information about how to find information

If you need more information, the first twenty results on Google may not be the most reliable way to get it.

Choose one of these ideas instead:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Use site: in your search terms</p> <p>Add use site: in your online searches to find results from official or highly credible sources.</p> <p>Examples: starting a business site:gov.uk – searching UK government sites only “veterinary science” site:ac.uk – searching UK university sites only accountant salary site:nationalcareers.service.gov.uk – searching a specific website</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Explore recommended resources from reliable sources</p> <p>Our career help toolkit has curated resources in many different categories, all of which we recommend for those in Years 11-13 or at college. Also recommended are careers resources on local council or government websites, school college or university careers pages, or careers information on employer webpages.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Use advice published by relevant professional bodies</p> <p>Professional bodies are usually charities and many have a Royal Charter. They should have a mission to help people get into their line of work. You can check in the about us section on their websites.</p> <p>Find them by searching 'society' or 'association' or 'institute' and the area of work.</p> <p>Examples: Engineering UK, The Law Society, Royal Society of Chemistry, Chartered Institute or Marketing</p>

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Testing for CRAAP</p> <p>Here's a great guide to using the CRAAP method for evaluating any information you find online.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Asking for help at school or college</p> <p>Your school or college should have a named career leader, who has responsibility for coordinating careers education and support. If you're not sure how to find information, they should be able to point you in the right direction.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ National Careers Service help</p> <p>You can contact the National Careers Service for more help. It has a phone line and webchat service.</p>

7. Conflicting information you hold

Sometimes it's possible to end up with information that seems to contradict.

This could be about options. For example, one website says you don't need specific GCSEs but job ads want certain grades.

It could be about yourself. For example, you feel that sometimes you are a great communicator but other times you find it hard. Or, you're looking at low grades in Art and Design, but you get good marks in other subjects for work using design skills.

These kinds of contradictions can be confusing when you're trying to make decisions for your future. Choose an idea below to work on this obstacle:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Design an experimental test</p> <p>If you're not sure what's true, try the scientific method and design an experiment. Not sure if you <i>can</i> get into that field with your grades? Email a few employers to ask their opinion on whether it's possible. Not sure if you're really a good communicator? Volunteer for something that involves communicating and reflect afterwards on how it went. Not sure what to believe about your design skills? Design something and collect feedback.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Seek further sources of information</p> <p>Maybe this contraction is just a one off? Before taking it too seriously, see if you can get more information.</p> <p>Ask other people who can give you honest feedback or research more online (maybe use our career help toolkit).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Add 'when/where' into the information</p> <p>Sometimes conflicting information looks that way because the context is missing. Try adding a 'when' or 'where' in to help.</p> <p>For example, you might have two contradicting statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'You need GCSE at 4 or better' and • 'It's possible to do this whatever your GCSE results' <p>Adding a when into these means that they no longer contradict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'You need GCSE at 4 or higher when the job's advertised as a permanent role at this particular company with a good salary and free training.' and • 'It's possible to do this whatever your GCSE results, when you're proactive and ask for internships and work experience to get started.'

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Ask someone with experience and insight</p> <p>You don't necessarily have to figure this out on your own. Do you know anyone who knows more about this and could offer you an informed opinion?</p> <p>For example, perhaps you could ask your art teacher for their opinion about your skills (maybe they think you have good skills but your low grades are just because you're not always doing what's required for the course?).</p>
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8. Conflicting feelings you have

You might be finding it hard to compromise between the different aspects that are important to you, or between what you want and what's available right now.

There are lots of exercises in our [career help toolkit](#) to choose from.


Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ An exercise from 'I want to... decide what I'm going to do next' - in the career help toolkit</p> <p>I picked this exercise:</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Accept what you cannot change</p> <p>Sometimes we have to accept reality, even if it involves frustration or a compromise that we don't want to make. To figure out if you need to accept it, ask yourself honestly if there's anything you can possibly do about it right now?</p> <p>If not, then it's about accepting it and making your expectations realistic. For example, you might want to be a doctor as soon as possible, but you just need to accept that training takes a long time.</p> <p>Or, if there is something you can do about it, channel your feelings into doing something about it. For example, if you want to be an actor, you could just worry about how competitive drama school is. Or you could use that energy to go to open auditions or take part in amateur or independent productions.</p>

9. Conflicting ideas between you and other people

Maybe you're finding that other people have conflicting advice or opinions. Or perhaps you're finding it hard figure out how to work with other people's needs or opinions.

Choose an idea below to work through this obstacle.

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Evaluating advice: evidence for and against</p> <p>Advice you're given by other people might be fair and helpful, or it might not. Other people could have their own biases or information that's out of date, inaccurate or incomplete.</p> <p>Check their advice with proactive research and two lists: the evidence in support of what they're saying, and evidence against. Use the resources in our career help toolkit in your research.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Talk to a third party</p> <p>Do you know anyone else who could know more about this and could offer you an informed opinion? Perhaps a teacher at school or college could help, or recommend someone to talk to?</p> <p>Perhaps you could attend an open day or taster day to find people with a different perspective? Could you ask the people who might disagree or have different ideas to join you for one of these conversations?</p>

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Try things out and report back</p> <p>Sometimes a great way to resolve a difference in opinion with other people is to agree to a trial.</p> <p>If it's about a job, work experience is a great way of doing this. If it's about a course, you could see if there's a free online course you could do in your spare time (FutureLearn, Coursera or EdX have good quality mini courses developed by universities) or see if there's a Taster Course offered. You could set yourself a deadline for the trial, and build a list of things you want to test out or find out during this time. Reporting back to those who weren't sure about your idea can be a good way to help them learn with you.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Identifying people's needs and generating options</p> <p>Every human has needs. Part of having relationships with the important people in our lives involves balancing their needs and our own. One famous way that human needs has been described is Maslow's Pyramid of Needs;</p>  <p>Maslow's Pyramid of Needs. Source: Wikimedia Commons, CC by SA 4.0</p> <p>It can be helpful to identify the underlying needs in a situation.</p> <p>For example, if you're keen to move away from home to pursue your ambitions and your parents want you to stay, these two things look incompatible. But if we focus on the needs – your need for <i>self-actualisation</i> and their need for <i>love and belonging</i> – it's possible to generate options which balance both. Options might look like you moving away but with regular visits and phone calls, you moving a 'shorter distance away, or staying at home but with more freedom.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Accept that sometimes you can't please everyone</p> <p>If you've tried the other ideas here, but there's still conflict, you might need to accept that you can't control what other people think. You can only control what you do about it. That means weighing up the pros and the cons of doing what you want to do, including the impact it would have on your relationships.</p>

10. General indecisiveness

If you feel that you struggle with decision-making in general, then career decision-making can seem daunting. However, there are different ways to look at it, and things to try:

Your choice	Suggested exercises
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Think about it differently</p> <p>Making decisions relating to your career is a chance to learn and grow in your decision-making skill. If everyone waited until they were a great decision-maker before they made any decisions, no one would ever learn to make decisions! We learn by doing, and if you're here you're already on the way.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Reflect on what helps, and build on what works.</p> <p>Think back on the kind of decisions that <i>you have</i> made recently. They might not be big things – perhaps just choosing what to do or where to go in some free time. What's a decision you made that went well. How did you decide? Even if it was quite a simple thing, there were probably still steps that you went through. Maybe you thought about what you enjoy, and what was do-able, and picked what was both enjoyable and do-able? Maybe you decided to try something, and were prepared to adapt if necessary. Spot what decision-making strategies that you could use again.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>➔ Find more help if you need it</p> <p>If how you feel about decision-making is really getting in the way of you living your life, you can ask for more help. Asking at school or college to see what help is on offer. A careers advice appointment might be really helpful.</p> <p>If how you feel is related to your mood, then talk to your GP or take the NHS Mood self-assessment quiz to learn more about the further help available.</p>