

# How to Pick a College Major

Choosing a college major is an important decision. Your major can significantly shape your future. Some people prefer to follow their passions by selecting a major that makes them happy and enthusiastic. Others examine more practical...

Method 1 of 3:

## Following Your Passion

1.



**Follow your interests.** Try to think about things that interest you as a person. Chances are, there is at least one major centered around a particular interest of yours. When it comes to selecting a major, start by evaluating your own interests.<sup>[1]</sup>

1. Think about how you took to high school. Were there any subjects you really looked forward to? For example, maybe you loved your history, philosophy, and political science courses. A political science degree could be great for you.
2. You don't just have to think scholastically either. Pay attention to what you're interested in outside the classroom. For example, maybe you always loved animals and volunteered at your local animal shelter all through high school. A degree like Zoology may benefit you.
3. You should also consider what kinds of classes you wish you had a chance to take. Create a list of your interests so you can see how they line up with potential majors.

2.



**Think about what makes you happy.** When it comes to passion, happiness is key. If you want to pick a major you feel passionate about, evaluate when and where you feel the happiest. Try to pick a major that you think will bring you happiness.<sup>[2]</sup>

1. Make a list of things that make you happy. If you see items on that list that include things like reading, writing, and watching movies, a degree in something like English or film studies may benefit you.
2. You should also look into research regarding the happiest majors. Some studies indicate those in STEM fields, which stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, tend to be the happiest after graduation.

3.



**Pay attention to what inspires enthusiasm.** If you want a major you're passionate about, think about when you feel enthusiastic. Think about the classes you were fully engaged in during high school. Think about what activities excite you. Enthusiasm is very linked to a sense of passion.<sup>[3]</sup>

1. Maybe certain courses always demanded your full attention. You may have gotten a thrill out of solving difficult equations in math or chemistry classes. You may love studying something like mathematics or chemistry.
2. Think about what you're enthusiastic about outside the classroom. If you love watching historical documentaries and reading books about history, you may love being a history major.



**See if your college offers any assessment tools.** If you have a wide range of interests and passions, it can be tough to nail down one major. Talk to your college's career counseling center and see if they offer any assessment tools. Many schools have questionnaires you can fill out that will help direct you to relevant areas of study for you.<sup>[4]</sup>

1. You can also make an appointment with a career counselor at your school. They can help you pinpoint a major that's relevant to your personal interests and passions.
2. Keep an open mind throughout this process. You may end up taking a roundabout route to find the best major for you.

Method 2 of 3:

## Thinking Practically

1.



**Recognize your natural abilities.** If you're taking the practical route, assess what you're good at. If you have particular skills already, it may be wise to build upon them in college. Think about what your strengths and weaknesses were in high school. This can help you identify areas where you're likely to excel.<sup>[5]</sup>

1. For example, maybe you got high scores on standardized tests for areas like math and science. A degree in a STEM field may benefit you. You already know you're adept at the kind of thinking required for such a degree.
2. Maybe you never took to math and science, but did very well on fields like writing and reading comprehension. You may do better in a field based in the humanities.

2.



**Identify your dream job.** Where do you see yourself after college? If you could have any job in the world, what would it be? Answering these questions can help you identify a major that will help you on your career path.<sup>[6]</sup>

1. Some career paths give you very specific guidance in terms of the degree you should pursue. If you want to, say, be a teacher, you will need a teaching degree. If you plan to become a doctor or a lawyer, you'll need a pre-law or pre-med degree.
2. Other paths are less obvious. If you want to, say, work for a grassroots political organization, there are a variety of degrees that may help. Something like political science, history, journalism, or communications may pay off. You could also go for a degree related to the organization's interests. For example, if you want to work for somewhere like Greenpeace, opt for a degree related to the environment.
3. Meeting with a career counselor can help you plan a degree path related to your chosen career.



**Look into the financial payoff of certain majors.** If you want to make a decent living after graduation, look into the ultimate pay off. This may be particularly important if you're taking on a lot of debt to get your degree. Think about which degrees tend to pay the highest.<sup>[7]</sup>

1. Things like business, architecture, engineering, computer, math, and science degrees tend to pay the highest.
2. Degrees in areas like health, social sciences, and public law tend to offer midrange pay.
3. Degrees in the humanities and areas like communications and journalism tend to pay lower.

4.



**Weigh in whether you're on a very specific career path.** If you're already on a specific career path, your major may already be somewhat decided for you. If you plan on going straight to medical school, for example, there may be a very specific pre-med track you need to follow. Try talking to a career advisor at your school to make sure you've selected the right major for your chosen career.<sup>[8]</sup>

1. When you're asking, make sure to address your specific concerns. For example, say something like, "I plan to go to medical school after graduation. Is there a specific major I should declare to make sure I get into a good college?"

5.



**Be aware of prerequisites.** Some majors require you to complete specific courses prior to signing up for the major. Some majors you can simply declare, while others have an admissions process. Prior to selecting a major, review the prerequisites. Make sure you're able to fulfill any prerequisites before getting your heart set on a major.<sup>[9]</sup>

1. Talking to a relevant college advisor can help you make sure you get the prerequisites down. You may have to spend your freshman year taking certain classes in preparation for declaring a certain major. Ask questions like, "If I want to study music, is there an audition process?"

Method 3 of 3:

## Keeping Your Options Open

1.



**Look into minors and double majors.** If your passions are very wide-reaching, you can see if a double major is an option. You may be able to choose more than one major so you're able to study everything that interests you personally. You also may be able to declare one or two minors, allowing you to explore multiple interests.<sup>[10]</sup>

1. Remember, a double major may require a great deal of extra work. Before declaring a double major, make sure that you're able to commit to the demands required.

2.



**Avoid a highly specialized major.** You may want to choose a major that closely reflects your future job description. However, keep in mind tastes and passions change over time. While your dream job now may be to work for a grassroots environmental organization, majoring in something too specific to that field limits your options upon graduation. This can make your job search more difficult if you start looking into different careers.<sup>[11]</sup>

1. It's particularly important to keep your major open if you're not sure about your future career at all. You could, for example, look into majoring in a general field like biology or psychology. This gives you the opportunity to pursue a variety of careers, or graduate programs, upon graduation.

3.



**Explore some courses before selecting a major.** There's no need to select a major before your freshman year if you're truly unsure. Instead of immediately selecting a major, give yourself a couple of semesters to explore your options. Get your general education requirements out of the way while taking a few classes that interest you. This can help you figure out what you want to study more specifically in the future.<sup>[12]</sup>

4.



**Remember that you can always change your major.** Nothing is set in stone, especially early on in college. Many students change their majors at least once during the course of their college career. If you're stressed out about picking a major, don't be. You can always switch majors sometime in the future if you dislike the path you chose.<sup>[13]</sup>

EXPERT TIP

Picture 14 of How to Pick a College Major

Christopher Taylor, PhD  
Adjunct Assistant Professor of English

Christopher Taylor is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of English at Austin Community College in Texas. He received his PhD in English Literature and Medieval Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 2014.

Picture 15 of How to Pick a College Major

Christopher Taylor, PhD  
Adjunct Assistant Professor of English

**Christopher Taylor, a Professor of English, notes:** "A 2017 study from the National Center of Education Statistics reports that 33% of undergraduates who entered a 4-year college in 2011 changed majors at least once by 2014."

5.



**Seek advice from others.** You can always ask around if you're not sure. In addition to college advisers, talk to people you trust who've gone through the college experience. Friends, family members, and professors can all help guide you.

1. If you have parents and older siblings who completed college, ask them how they chose their major. They may be able to offer you some guidance.
2. If you know other students in a major you're interested in, ask them about it. For example, "Hey, you're an English major? Can we get coffee and discuss what that entails? I'm thinking of studying English as well."
3. You can also ask a professor. If your goal is to, say, teach biology at the university level, ask your biology teacher about what they majored in during college.

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