

# Career research

A guide to different ways you  
can learn about your career



**Define tomorrow.**

**UNISA** |   
university  
of south africa

Making effective career decisions includes having enough relevant and reliable information available, combined with your ability to integrate the information with what you know about yourself, your career vision and goals. Your career research will connect you to others who will help you to:

- answer questions you have with relation to your career choice;
- expand your understanding of the opportunities related to your career vision;
- identify “hidden” career paths that you did not think of previously; and
- think about how you could plan to pursue specific opportunities.

## Before you start...

Before you start with any career research, you need to understand what you need. What are you not sure about? What questions do you still have to enable you to make a career decision?

## Evaluate

It is important that you are able to evaluate the information you find online. Use the following questions to help you evaluate information:

1. 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)?
2. Try to find information under heading such as “About us” or “Bibliography” to verify the author(s), when the page was last updated and what the author’s credentials are.
3. Check for further links - what does this page link to? Does the author say where he or she got the information for this site?
4. Check the purpose of the page: is it to provide information, to sell or convince, to share, or even to be humorous?

>> As you are doing your research, keep record of the information you find and reminders to follow-up on certain information. You also need to be aware that you need to make decisions at some stage. If you find that you are gathering a lot of information but you still find it hard to make a decision, you could contact a counsellor to talk about your choice.



# 1 Online search

Use a search engine such as Google to search for information related to your questions. For example, you need to find out about career opportunities related to your field of study. You could start with using keywords such as “careers in [insert your field of study, e.g. accounting]”, and then to further contextualise your findings, you could search keywords such as “careers in [insert your field of study] Africa” and “careers in [insert your field of study] South Africa”. Scan the brief descriptions of the first ten results and decide which website you would want to explore first. Skim read through the information on the website (start with the headings) to get an understanding of the content of the page and to find information related to your question. Also check whether there are links to other websites that you could further explore.

As you are reading, make a summary of the information. You could use the information you find to make lists of job titles related to your field of study, organisations that employ individuals in these fields and professional organisations. Remember to bookmark pages that you would want to return to and make notes about what you find and what you would still like to find out about.



Use Google to find specific job titles related to your field of study. 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”.. Note the job titles below.

# 2 Occupational information websites

The following websites will help you to learn more about specific job titles:

- National Career Advice Portal (<http://ncap.careerhelp.org.za/>). Find links to descriptions of job titles.
- Career Planet (<http://www.careerplanet.co.za/>). Read about different IT jobs on this page.
- O\*Net (<http://www.onetonline.org/>). Access a list of job titles linked to different industries and read more about what individuals in these fields do.
- Prospects (<http://www.prospects.ac.uk/>). Explore different job titles related to job sectors, as well as what you could do with your major subject.



Go to any of the above occupational information websites and search for the job titles you identified during the Google search activity.

Use the tables below to further explore your top 3 occupational interests.

Job title	Website	Related job titles?	Pros	Cons
Programmer	<a href="http://www.abc.za">http://www.abc.za</a>	Software developer Programmer analyst	Seems related to my interests	Lot of sitting?

# 3 Job search portals

Job search portals are useful in terms of researching specific job titles linked to different career fields and industries. Finding jobs advertisements that interest you is a worthwhile activity, even if you are not currently applying for jobs. You may not yet be eligible to apply for your dream job, but you can still gain a lot of information that will guide you in terms of how you can prepare for future opportunities. For example, you are interested in IT, but you are not sure which specific job titles are linked to this field; or you want to know what kind of qualifications and skills are needed to be a software developer. You can use this information to make career goals, and think strategically about how you can develop experiences that will help you meet more of the selection criteria in the future.

Job search sites include

- PNet (<http://www.pnet.co.za>)
- Careerjunction (<http://www.careerjunction.co.za>)
- Careers24 (<http://www.careers24.com/>)
- Indeed (<http://www.indeed.co.za>)
- Government positions (<http://www.gov.za/aboutgovt/vacancies.htm>)



Use the Indeed website (<http://www.indeed.co.za>) to search for job advertisements linked to your field of study. Make a list of job titles you find.



# 3 Job search portals



Use one of the websites above to search for jobs related to your field of study. Read through at least three advertisements and note the information in the tables below.

Job title	Graduate programmer
Salary	R300000/annum
Organisation	ABC Bank
Responsibilities/ tasks	Troubleshoot and program equipment, Perform full diagnostic checks Assist senior programmers, Work with clients, Provide feedback
Requirements (qualifications)	Computer Science background C advantageous
Requirements (experience)	None
Requirements (skills)	Problem solving, Lateral thinking, Excellent communication skills, Attention to detail, Ability to learn, Valid drivers license, Ability to work to under pressure

Job title	
Salary	
Organisation	
Responsibilities/ tasks	
Requirements (qualifications)	
Requirements (experience)	
Requirements (skills)	



# 3 Job search portals

Job title	
Salary	
Organisation	
Responsibilities/ tasks	
Requirements (qualifications)	
Requirements (experience)	
Requirements (skills)	

Job title	
Salary	
Organisation	
Responsibilities/ tasks	
Requirements (qualifications)	
Requirements (experience)	
Requirements (skills)	

# 4 LinkedIn

If you have not done so already, start building your network on LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) today! Register for a free account and start connecting with your network online. Join groups relevant to your career field so that you could participate in discussions, ask questions and provide answers about specific topics and search for people, organisations and jobs in your field of interest. Do research about companies and employees to help you identify opportunities. To learn more about using LinkedIn effectively, go to <http://bit.ly/2gyOAzS>.



Follow the steps below to use LinkedIn to search for information about a career related to your field of study.

- Go to <https://www.linkedin.com/edu/alumni> and sign in to your LinkedIn account. If you do not have an account yet, then create one. Make sure that you have captured your current or previous studies at Unisa on your LinkedIn profile.
- You will now be presented with a page with Headings and graphs beneath the headings (e.g. Where they live, Where they work, What they do).
- Type in the name of your field of study, e.g. “accounting” or “psychology” in the Search box.
- You will notice that the graphs adjust. You have now filtered the information to contain information about Unisa graduates.
- You can now see how many graduates are on LinkedIn, where they work, what they’re skilled at, etc.
- Make some notes about the interesting things you find.

A decorative header image featuring several wooden blocks arranged to spell out the word 'SEARCH'. The letters are in a serif font, and the blocks are scattered across the top of the page. Below the blocks, the main title '5 Talk to others (informational interviews)' is displayed in a large, bold, black sans-serif font.

# 5 Talk to others (informational interviews)

Once you have done some research about specific options, your next step is to talk to individuals in the type of job/ industry that you are interested in. The goal of these conversations is to explore your career options, to expand your network, to build confidence, to access information and to identify your own strengths and areas of development. For example, you read an article about a new programme for addiction treatment and you feel curious about how the researchers went about evaluating the programme. You could contact one of the authors of the article to ask if they would be willing to share how they went about gaining access to the information they needed for their evaluation. Before you interview someone, do research about what you would want to discuss with them – you could ask this person to “fill in the gaps” for you. Start with people you already know: friends, family, neighbours, colleagues, lecturers, tutors and fellow students. Use online social networks such as LinkedIn to further identify potential people. For more information on how to go about this and suggestions for questions that you might want to ask, visit <http://bit.ly/2riGpOq>. Also, watch this video to learn more: The Dos and Don'ts of Informational Interviews: <http://youtu.be/ixbhtm8l0sl>.

Keep track of:

- information you have gathered,
- how you make sense of the information,
- questions you still have, and
- ways you think you will be able to get answers to these questions.

# 5 Talk to others (informational interviews)



Note the names 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.

People who work in my preferred career	People who can give me information about potential career choices

You may have identified a lot more people than you thought! Imagine how much information you can gather about the career you are interested in just by talking to these people. Each person will give you fresh insights opinions and valuable information about the careers you are considering, whether they are currently working in that field or are only remotely related to or associated with it.

A close-up photograph of several wooden blocks arranged to spell out the word 'SEARCH'. The blocks are light-colored wood with black letters and numbers. The 'S' has a '1', 'E' has a '1', 'A' has a '1', 'R' has a '1', 'C' has a '3', and 'H' has a '4'. The blocks are scattered on a yellow surface.

# 6 Attend a careers fair

Attending a careers fair event gives you the opportunity to speak to people from different industries. You may be studying a qualification that does not seem to have a direct link to the exhibitors or the presenters, but they have one thing in common: they employ people, who work in organisations, who do business with all kinds of suppliers and services. Somewhere in this value chain your qualification will find a place to fit – either as a customer or as an employer or employee.

## Preparation

- Think about what you will wear.
- Practice your handshake and introduction - how will you introduce yourself to recruiters?
- Update your CV and prepare to answer questions about yourself, your career and your studies.
- Do research about the participating organisations (start with the organisation's website).
- Prepare questions that you would want to ask recruiters - use your research about an organisation to inform your questions (for example: What kind of person are you seeking for this position? What particular skills do you value most?).

## During

- Make an effort to speak to all the exhibitors and presenters and keep a note of who they are and what their companies do – remember to introduce yourself.
- Speak clearly and confidently – it may be noisy, so remember to speak up if necessary.
- Be ready to take notes: Carry a notebook and pen with you, or do it on your cellphone/ tablet.
- Network with other students at the Careers Fair (but not at the expense of talking to employers!)
- Don't ask about: Information you could have easily learned on the employer's website or salary and benefits.



# 6 Attend a careers fair

## After

- Make notes about the various people you spoke to.
- Connect with company representatives that you met on-line (for example, through LinkedIn)
- Reflect on your experience: How did you use this opportunity? Could you link your skills and qualification to what was offered at the Fair?
- Update your career portfolio with what you learnt at the Careers Fair.

# 7 Learning experiences

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

- Coursera.org (<http://www.coursera.org/>)
- Udemy (<http://www.udemy.com/>)
- Saylor Academy (<http://www.saylor.org/books/>)
- Open Textbook Library (<http://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/>)
- College Open Textbooks (<http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org/textbook-listings/textbooks-by-subject/computerscience>)
- Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>)
- MITOpenCourseware (<https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/electrical-engineering-and-computer-science/>)
- Open Culture ([http://www.openculture.com/computer\\_science\\_free\\_courses](http://www.openculture.com/computer_science_free_courses))
- iTunes university (<http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>)
- FreeVideoLectures (<http://freevideolectures.com/Subject/Computer-Science>)

A decorative header image featuring wooden blocks with letters spelling out 'SEARCH'. The blocks are arranged in a slightly overlapping, 3D perspective. The letters are S, E, A, R, C, H, with subscripts 1, 1, 1, 1, 3, 4 respectively. The background is a light, textured surface.

# 8 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 allows 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.saqg.org.za/>.

## 8 Volunteer

Your volunteer work links to your career vision and planning: before you volunteer, think about where you would want to invest your effort. Volunteering will help you to: figure out whether a specific field of work is for you or not; find out information about a specific field; and network with others in your field of interest. Some questions to think about: Which organisations or community would benefit from my skills and knowledge? How would this organisation or community contribute to my career development? What conduct is expected of a professional in this organisation and in my future career? What are you hoping to gain from your volunteer activities? It is important to consider that as you are volunteering, you are building your reputation (your “brand”): you would not want to build a reputation as an exploiter or unreliable worker.

Identify volunteer opportunities in your area through conversations with members of your community. The GreaterGoodSA website at <http://www.myggsa.co.za/> will further help you to identify volunteer opportunities in your community that are related to your interests.



# My career learning plan

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

## WHAT AM I STILL CURIOUS ABOUT?

### MAKE SMART GOALS

- S** Specific (clear and simple)
- M** Measurable (what? how many?)
- A** Actionable (can I achieve this?)
- R** Realistic (do I have what I need to do this?)
- T** Time-based (by when?)

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

# Counselling and Career Development

We provide career, academic and personal guidance and counselling to prospective and registered students by e-mail, in person or by telephone.

Have a question about your career, improving your learning or managing challenges that impact on your studies? Send an e-mail to [counselling@unisa.ac.za](mailto:counselling@unisa.ac.za).

## Our website

The counselling and career development website contain a number of e-resources to support your career decision-making, how you learn and dealing with personal challenges. Some examples of what is available on our website:

Career resources	Solving career problems, making career decisions, changing career direction, research career options, develop employability and graduateness skills and learn how to use LinkedIn.
Learning resources	Getting started with studies, planning studies and time, learn more effectively, get support, deal with study challenges and exam preparation
Personal challenges resources	Improve wellness, finding a counsellor and what counselling is about.

You can listen to a number of podcasts to support your career, learning and personal development. Podcast titles include: Myths about counselling, Volunteering and your career, Choosing a career, Time management, Making notes, Exam preparation, Getting support and Thinking differently about challenges.

**Visit our website:**

<http://www.unisa.ac.za/counselling>