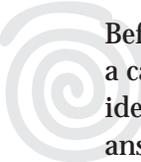




Section I: Clarifying Your Direction



Before you can make an informed decision to pursue a career in the arts, you need to evaluate yourself and identify your options. This section will help you answer the following questions:

- What are the career options in my area of interest?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes?
- How do I decide what career path is right for me?



Chapter 1. Knowing What's Right for You

This chapter provides resources and guidance to help identify your options and determine which direction is right for you. In reading this chapter, remember that everyone is unique. What is right for someone else may not be right for you. You may decide that you are perfectly suited to be a freelance musician playing for operas, orchestras, theaters, recording studios, or special events, such as weddings. On the other hand, you may decide that the lifestyle, lack of structure, and potential stress of being a freelance musician is not for you and you want a job with more security—a salaried job as a music teacher, for instance. Both options are good, but different people may prefer one or the other.

This chapter will help you address two important challenges you face in choosing a career path in the arts. The first challenge is to know yourself well. In this book are resources that will help you explore and assess your likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Take time to do the exercises, and get more assistance and guidance if you need it. Once you select a career that interests you, you must face your second challenge: to understand exactly what a successful person in that career does every day, every week, and every month. You may be surprised. For instance,

some jobs that sound exciting at first actually involve a lot of tedious paperwork.

Fully understanding the realities of a career choice requires research. This chapter offers some ideas and suggestions to assist you. Remember, only when you have taken a thorough and honest look at yourself and then investigated what different jobs entail can you decide which career is right for you.

Although you may change careers several times throughout your life, it is important to choose careers carefully. A well-chosen career will allow you to exploit your strengths and minimize your weaknesses while providing you with ongoing pleasure, satisfaction, and enjoyment.

A. Taking a Look at a Career in the Arts

Having a profession in the arts can be exciting and rewarding. It can also be very challenging. If you are reading this book, you have probably decided that you want a career in the literary, performing, or visual arts. This book provides valuable information to help you succeed in your career in the arts as a person with a disability.

Careers in the literary, performing, and visual arts are similar in many ways. The biographies throughout this book offer a glimpse into the rewards and difficulties you might face if you pursue the arts as a profession. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How much time, energy, and money am I willing to devote to prepare myself for this career?
- Will I be able to take the disappointments and rejections that are bound to be part of pursuing a career in the literary, performing, and visual arts?
- Do I have a true passion for this field above all other options? Only enthusiasm motivates you to rise early in the morning, work late at night, cope with disagreeable colleagues, and overcome problems instead of letting them overcome you.
- Am I willing to accept the fact that there might not be large monetary compensation?
- Will this career be satisfying to me even if I do not become a big star in Hollywood or a world-renowned painter, novelist, architect, or poet?
- Do I want a nine-to-five job, or am I willing to work longer hours?
- Am I willing to work in whatever physical surroundings are necessary?
- Am I persistent, even in the face of failure?

- How well do I work under pressure? How do I handle stress?
- Am I willing to travel as part of my work or move to find work?
- Can I adapt to the pressure of not having long-term job security?
- Am I a patient and resilient person?

The resources provided in this book offer valuable information on the working conditions and lifestyles of people making their living in the arts. This knowledge can help you make the best possible choices.

B. Knowing Yourself: The Self-Assessment Process

Making a good career decision begins by knowing yourself. You must be totally honest with yourself about your skills, interests, values, and personality. This section provides simple tools to help in this evaluation, as well as a list of resources.

Here is an exercise to help you in this process: Take out four sheets of paper. Write “Skills” at the top of the first, “Interests” at the top of the second, “Values” at the top of the third, and “Personality” at the top of the fourth sheet. On those four sheets, answer the questions listed below.

Knowing Your Skills

- What can I do best?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What skills do I want to use on the job?
- What skills might I still need to acquire?

Knowing Your Interests

- What am I interested in doing?
- What tasks, jobs, academic courses, and other activities have I enjoyed the most?
- What kinds of people would I like to work with?
- What kinds of job settings would I enjoy?

Now look for some themes or trends based on your list of interests. Your list might have one or more of the following themes:

- helping others solve problems
- creating something new
- working with your mind
- working with your hands
- leading or organizing others
- working by yourself
- working in teams
- doing structured activities

- solving difficult problems
- working with numbers
- managing events

Knowing Your Values

- What satisfaction do you seek from a career?
- In what ways must you be challenged and rewarded on the job?
- In what types of work environments would you be happiest?
- What do you value most? From the list in the box, select the five things that matter most to you. Write them on a separate sheet of paper and rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being most important. Feel free to add values to your list that may not be listed here.

Knowing Your Personality

- What personal qualities (e.g., patience, compassion, competitiveness) do you possess that will help on the job?
- What personal qualities (e.g., shyness, impatience, disorganization) do you possess that might cause problems on the job?

Beauty	Freedom	Personal growth
Being loved	Friendship	Power
Civic duty	Happiness	Recreation
Commitment	Health	Status
Creativity	Helping others	Success
Excellence	Integrity	Wealth
Fame	Learning	Wisdom/ Intelligence
Family	Love	Work
Other values: _____		

- How might your personal style influence your career choice?
- How might your personality affect how you get along with your supervisor and coworkers?

C. Getting Additional Guidance on Self-Assessments

You may decide you want to get additional assistance with the self-assessment process. The following places can provide counseling and advice, as well as administer vocational tests, to help you further clarify your career options:

- a high school counselor's office
- a college or university career counseling department
- a local vocational rehabilitation office (see Appendix G)
- the U.S. Department of Labor "One Stop Shops," <http://www.ttrc.doleta.gov/onestop/>
- a professional career or vocational rehabilitation counselor's office

A number of tests and inventories are available to aid you in the self-assessment process, including the following types:

- aptitude/intelligence tests, e.g., Multi-dimensional Aptitude Battery (MAB), Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)

- interest inventories, e.g., Career Directions Inventory (CDI), Career Assessment Inventory (CAI), Strong Interest Inventory (SII), Jackson Vocational Interest Inventory (JVIS)
- personality inventories, e.g., Life Styles Inventory (LSI), Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

The following two books are especially helpful with self-assessment and career exploration:

What Color Is Your Parachute? 2000

By Richard Nelson Bolles

Ten Speed Press, 1999

The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success

By Nicholas Lore

Fireside, 1998

D. Identifying Your Options

When you have completed your self-assessment, it is time to begin identifying some options. Based on what you have discovered about your skills, interests, and personality, what careers should you consider? Use the information provided in Chapter 2, as well as other career guides you have researched, as a starting point for exploring your career options.

E. Researching Your Options

After you have made a list of careers that you plan to research in more depth, you can begin your exploration. Your research can involve several steps. This section discusses some of them.

1. Read books by professionals in your chosen field to learn what it will take to succeed in those careers. Also, read biographies (some short ones appear in this career guide) about people in those careers.
2. Seek out several people with careers that interest you and ask to meet with them for informational interviews. Remember that your family members, neighbors, and friends can be a great resource and may know people in these careers. Prepare for an informational interview exactly as you would for a job interview. Informational interviews can often lead to jobs, but that is not the purpose of an informational interview and you should never ask for a job during an informational interview. The goal of an informational interview is to gather as much information as possible. Here are some appropriate questions to ask during an informational interview:
 - What do you do on a daily basis?
 - What do you like most about what you do? Least?
 - What did you do before entering this field?

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- What skills are most important for your job?
 - Why did you choose this occupation?
 - What is the best way to break into this field?
 - What are the advancement opportunities in this field?
 - What publications or periodicals should I be reading in order to stay informed about trends in this field?
 - What advice would you give me on being successful in this career?
 - Who else would you suggest I meet with so that I can learn more about this career?
3. Explore local community programs. Some youth organizations, parks and recreation departments, and community colleges offer classes to expose participants to a variety of careers and hobbies. For instance, Explorer posts are career orientation groups formed by the Boy Scouts of America and open to young men and women in grades 9 through 12. The students gather to discuss their career interests and meet people already working in various fields. Meetings take place at the work sites, so group members have the opportunity to see the work environment and observe employees at work.
 4. Consider cooperative education and work-study programs. High school students, for instance, may be allowed to attend school in the morning and go to a job in the afternoon.
 5. Investigate both paid and unpaid internships. For the most part, internships are offered to college students; however, some organizations do offer internships to high school students. To find out more, see Appendix E or check with professional organizations in your field of interest (see Appendix B). Make sure you read the internships section in Chapter 3 of this book. You can even go through your yellow pages for local companies and arts-related organizations that might be willing to hire you on a temporary or volunteer basis. Do not be afraid to take the initiative to offer your services or suggest a role for yourself.
 6. Think about a part-time job. Students often view a part-time job as a way to earn money, but it can also help you determine whether a career is right for you. Try contacting businesses and organizations in your area of interest. Many employers hire part-time help and welcome enthusiastic and competent workers.
 7. Try job shadowing. Job shadowing gives you the chance to observe someone on the job for a day
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or two. You will be able to watch, listen, ask questions, and learn. Job shadowing opportunities are organized through youth groups, high schools, or community colleges, or you can initiate the opportunity yourself. Mentors will sometimes provide the opportunity to shadow them for a day. See Chapter 3 for more about finding a mentor.

8. If you are in high school or college, consider special summer camps. You can learn about careers in music, dance, literary arts, theater, and many other fields by attending special summer camps. Check with your state or local arts council (see Appendix A) or with your school counselor about possible opportunities.
9. Volunteer your time with relevant organizations. Volunteering allows you to gain work experience and better understand your career interests. Document your time and contributions, and get to know your supervisors. If you choose this field as a career, your experience can be invaluable in helping you find paid work. Don't forget to ask for a letter of recommendation before you leave your volunteer position.
10. Explore the Internet. Using one of the well-known search engines, you can find a vast amount of information about all sorts of careers. You can learn more about using the Internet later in this chapter.

F. Evaluating Your Options and Designing a Course of Action

Evaluating Options

Now that you have done some research, you are ready to evaluate each of the options you have identified. Take some time to do the following steps.

- Identify and write down the pros and cons of each alternative.
- Identify and write down your values and needs that are satisfied by each option.
- Identify and write down the risks involved with each alternative.
- Project the likely consequences of selecting each alternative.
- Discuss your findings with a trusted friend, family member, or professional counselor. Discussing your thoughts with someone else can help you better evaluate your decision-making and thought processes. In addition, it can provide you with some valuable feedback. Be aware that this may be a difficult process. You may need to let your defenses down to hear clearly the feedback you are getting. Remember that you have the final say about your life choices.

What Color Is Your Parachute? and *The Pathfinder*, books listed earlier in this chapter, can be very helpful in guiding you through the evaluation process.

Taking Action

Having chosen the career that most interests you, you can now begin developing and implementing a plan of action. This should be a written plan.

- List the actions you need to take to begin working in your chosen career.
- What additional training or education do you need?
- What information or resources do you need at each step of the plan?
- What obstacles (e.g., low grade-point average, lack of money for school) do you face? How can you overcome them?

Writing out a plan rather than just thinking about what you need to do will help you to focus on the steps you need to take to reach your career goals. Do not be afraid to update or change your plan of action as you learn new information and discover more about yourself and your life goals.

G. The Story of Bill

Bill, an 18-year-old high school senior and paraplegic since age 13, was graduating soon, and he wanted to find out what career would be best for him. He knew he had an interest in creative writing and thought he might want to be a novelist, but he was not sure. Bill spoke with his career counselor, and she suggested he begin with a self-assessment. The counselor also connected Bill with the department of vocational rehabilitation, because he was now 18 and eligible for services. Bill took a number of skill, aptitude, interest, and personality tests and inventories through his school and his local vocational rehabilitation office. He found that he liked structure, was very outgoing, loved to work with people, and was a good communicator. He was also interested in business, marketing, and teaching. In addition, he found that he valued creativity, stability, and family most highly. This process helped Bill see that he had the aptitude, skills, and interests to follow several different career paths.

After his self-assessment, Bill was ready to explore whether his dream of becoming a novelist was really right for him. Bill did a lot of research and had three informational interviews, one with a freelance writer, one with a novelist, and one with a successful poet. In addition, during his last three months of high school,

he entered a work-study program and took a part-time job working for a well-known advertising agency in his area. Bill's father, a friend of the advertising agency's vice president, was able to assist Bill in getting an informational interview which led to the part-time job. Bill was able to write copy and try other tasks at the agency.

After reviewing what he learned from his self-assessment results, informational interviews, part-time job, and other research, Bill decided he would probably be more successful in advertising or marketing while keeping creative writing as a hobby. His decision did not mean he gave up his dream of being a novelist, but for the present he selected another career he felt was more compatible with his strengths, values, and personality. Bill still had a lot of research and exploration ahead of him, but he felt confident that he was moving in the right direction.

H. Using the Internet as a Research Tool

Many of the resources mentioned in this guide, as well as other important information about job searches, disability services, and the arts, can be found on the Internet. You will find many helpful Internet resources listed throughout this book and in the appendices.

If you do not have a computer with Internet access at home or at work, you can still use the Internet. Most city libraries are equipped with computers and allow free Internet access to anyone with a library card. Call your local library for information. College and university students may have Internet access through the school's library. And Kinko's copy shops, Internet cafes, and local career or employment centers also offer Internet access, though they may charge a fee.

Tips on Searching the Internet

The Internet is often the quickest and least expensive way to find information—as long as you know how to use the search engines efficiently. It is important to remember that the purpose of using the Internet is finding information not just searching for it.

Internet search engines are like giant libraries that catalog many Web sites. In order to search effectively, you need to become familiar with the search rules for each search engine. Here are a few tips to save you time:

Read the “hints” and “help” for each search engine. These sections will explain exactly how the search tool operates.

Experiment with different search engines. Even though search engines have many similarities, there





are also important differences. A search engine that is quick but returns 40,000 pages may not be as effective as one that is slower but returns 30 pages of really useful information. Find the search engine that is best suited for your needs.

Large, well-known search engines include the following:

- Altavista, www.altavista.com
- Ask Jeeves, www.aj.com
- Excite, www.excite.com
- Go Network, www.go.com
- HotBot, www.hotbot.com
- Infoseek, www.infoseek.com
- Lycos, www.lycos.com
- Mining Co., home.miningco.com
- Snap, home.snap.com
- Webcrawler, www.webcrawler.com
- Yahoo, www.yahoo.com