

2

Choosing a Major

Is Psychology for You?

Chapter Outline	
College Majors and Careers How to Choose a Major Become Informed of Your Options Seek Information From Students, Graduates, and Professionals Current Students Recent Graduates Career Professionals Professors	<i>Exercise 2.1: Learning About Majors: Questions to Consider</i> <i>Exercise 2.2: Learning About Majors: What to Ask Recent Graduates</i> <i>Exercise 2.3: Learning About Majors: What to Ask Professors</i> <i>Exercise 2.4: Learning about Majors: Summing Up What You've Learned</i>
How to Learn About Yourself Learn About Yourself Through Reflective Writing Uses of Reflective Writing Tips for Beginning a Reflection Log Learn About Yourself Through Self-Assessment Assess Your Traits Identify Your Occupational Interests Assess Your Skills Use Career Assessment Tools Examine Your Values Draw Conclusions	<i>Exercise 2.5: Assess Your Personal Traits</i> <i>Exercise 2.6: Identify Your Holland Personality Type</i> <i>Exercise 2.7: Assess Your Skills</i> <i>Exercise 2.8: Examine Your Values</i> <i>Exercise 2.9: Review Your Personal History</i>

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Chapter Outline	
Choosing Psychology Skills and Knowledge You'll Develop as a Psychology Major Knowledge of Human Behavior Information Acquisition and Synthesis Skills Research Methods and Statistical Skills Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills Reading, Writing, and Speaking Skills Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills Adaptability Psychological Literacy What to Expect as a Psychology Major Introductory Psychology/ General Psychology Methodology and Statistics Breadth Courses Elective Courses Capstone Course	

“What’s your major?” As a new college student, this is likely one of the most common questions you’ll encounter from your friends and relatives. If you haven’t yet chosen a major, this may also be a particularly frustrating question. Don’t fret. You’re not alone in your frustration. Choosing a major is one of the most difficult decisions you’ll face in college. After all, how do you decide what to do with your life? Fortunately, you don’t need to have your life plan laid out in order to choose a college major that fits you. A common misconception about college is that one’s choice of major determines one’s career. It’s no wonder that students who buy into this myth find selecting a major daunting. Luckily, this common belief is not true. In this chapter we’ll examine the process of choosing a major and what skills you can expect to develop as a psychology major.

College Majors and Careers

Choosing a major is not the same as choosing a lifelong career. For example, many people assume that students who major in humanities, sciences, and

social science fields, including English, history, biology, sociology, and psychology, are qualified only for careers in those specific areas. This isn't true. A history major does not have to become a historian, a biology major does not have to become a biologist, and a psychology major does not have to become a psychologist in order to be gainfully employed. This is especially fortuitous because each of these professions requires years of graduate study beyond the baccalaureate degree. Students who earn undergraduate degrees with these majors find jobs in business, research, human services, education, and a variety of other fields (see Chapter 3 for more information about careers with a bachelor's degree in psychology). Although the question of what major to pursue may feel pressing, your choice of majors does not limit your opportunities.

Within 10 years after graduation, most people work in careers that are not directly connected to their undergraduate majors—and that's not a bad thing. As people acquire experiences their interests often change. A solid skill set will help you adapt to your changing interests and circumstances and will help you build a flexible career. In addition, new types of jobs are emerging each year, and most of us have no way of knowing what those jobs will be or what type of education will be needed in order to qualify for them. For example, 15 years ago, most people had never heard of a patient advocate or a web developer, and social media managers and app developers didn't exist! Without a doubt, other careers will evolve over the coming years. Consequently, career counselors recommend that college students focus on developing general transferable skills that employers want, such as competence in writing, speaking, problem solving, technology use, and team building. These are skills that you can develop with any major. Therefore, choose a major that reflects *your* interests and abilities and provides you with opportunities to develop these generalizable skills as well as those that are unique to your chosen field. The exercises in this chapter will help you learn more about yourself; assess your interests, skills, and abilities; and determine which major is right for you.

How to Choose a Major

As you begin the process of selecting a major, remember that there is no bad choice. Every college major offers opportunities to develop competence in communication, information management, and critical thinking skills. However, majors differ in the specific set of competencies emphasized. For example, the emphasis on scientific reasoning and problem solving, coupled with a focus on understanding how people think and behave, is what makes psychology unique among majors. Carefully consider your options, your skill set, and your interests when selecting a college major. At the end of this process, you may find that psychology is the major for you or you may make another choice. Listen to yourself and make the decision that is right for you, but also recognize that many students change their major sometime during their college years. It is not set in stone. Follow these steps to ensure that you're true to yourself in choosing the college major that is right for you and one that you'll stick with throughout your college years.

Become Informed of Your Options

The first step in making any decision is to become informed of your options. What majors does your college offer? Some majors, such as psychology, English, and economics, are available at all colleges and universities. Other majors, such as engineering, can be found only at some institutions. What options does your college offer? How do you find out what majors are offered? Every college has a student handbook. Check the “students” area of your school’s homepage or use the search function. The handbook will likely list the available majors at your school.

Another way to learn about your options is to examine each academic department online (my preferred option—it’s thorough!). Your school’s homepage likely has a link to a webpage listing academic departments, or you can use the search function to find this page. Scroll through and click on each department, one by one. You’ll probably want to do this in more than one sitting because you’ll scan a lot of webpages. Take a moment to review each department’s program, even if at first glance you think it isn’t interesting or right for you.

You might spend just a few minutes studying most programs, but some will likely strike your interest and cause you to probe further. It is important to review a wide range of programs, even those that you think you might not like. Sometimes we have preconceived biases and incorrect information about a discipline or major. For each major, ask yourself the following questions and quickly note your responses so that you can easily revisit your work and compare majors later.

- What are some of the required classes?
- Are any clubs or activities listed?
- Who are the faculty? What are their research interests? Does it look like students are involved in their research?
- Is any information available about graduates’ employment?

After you’ve scanned each academic department and major, list all of the majors that sound interesting to you, without making judgments. Then, for each potential major, gather additional information to complete the checklist of questions in Exercise 2.1. If you are unable to answer a question, it’s time to move beyond Internet research and seek advice from others.

Seek Information From Students, Graduates, and Professionals

Internet research can get you only so far. In order to learn about majors and career options, it’s essential to gather information from knowledgeable people. Current students, graduates, career counselors, and professors can offer invaluable information and perspectives.

Current Students

Ask other students how they chose their major and why they think it’s a good choice. What do they think about their courses, the topic, professors, and

EXERCISE 2.1

LEARNING ABOUT MAJORS: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is this field? What does it study?
- How interested am I in this topic? Is it a new interest or a long-standing one? Do I enjoy the subject?
- Do I have any experience in this area?
- Have I taken a class in this subject? If so, what did it cover? What was the class like?
- How motivated am I to study this subject? Is it inherently interesting or fun? Do I dread classes or homework in this area?
- What classes can I expect to take as a major?
- What other experiences do majors typically obtain (for example, internships and/or research experiences)?
- What jobs have recent graduates obtained?

Prompt

After considering the above questions, respond to the following in a short essay: What do you know about the field? What are your experiences? What can you expect as a major during college and after graduation?

PRACTICAL TIP

DON'T LET PROFS (NEGATIVELY) COLOR YOUR PERSPECTIVE

As you go about the process of considering majors and your experiences in various fields, remember that sometimes an experience with a professor can color your view of a discipline. For example, an introductory course taught by a professor who you find unappealing may make a subject that you'd otherwise find interesting seem boring. When you evaluate a field negatively, take a moment to consider what experiences have led to this evaluation. If it's the result of a single classroom experience, consider giving the discipline another shot before you rule it out.

opportunities after graduation? What are the required courses like? Every major has its most challenging set of courses: What are those courses? Why are they considered challenging? What about the professors? Do students have out-of-class interactions with faculty? What kind? What out-of-class experiences are available? Is there a student club?

Recent Graduates

Ask recent graduates about their experiences. Ask them some or all of the questions you asked current students. Also ask about their experiences after graduating (Exercise 2.2). If you don't know any recent graduates, visit the department and/or your college's career center. Most college career centers maintain records of recent graduates and may be able to put you in contact with a few graduates to help you learn more about their work and career experiences.

Career Professionals

Visit your college's career center to seek advice. Tell the career counselor what you've learned about yourself in completing the exercises in this chapter (consider sharing your responses). Career counseling professionals can help you narrow your choice of majors and provide additional opportunities to learn about yourself by completing additional personality and interest assessments. Take advantage of this important (and free!) resource.

Professors

Don't forget to talk with professors to learn more about majors. Visit the office hours of a professor who teaches a class in which you are enrolled,

EXERCISE 2.2

LEARNING ABOUT MAJORS: WHAT TO ASK RECENT GRADUATES

- What did they like most about their major? Least?
- What was the job search like?
- What kinds of jobs did they seek?
- How were they received by potential employers?
- Where were they hired?
- How well does their job match their expectations?
- What are the positive and negative features of their work?
- What role, if any, did their major play in their job search and career?
- Do they feel that their major prepared them for their jobs?
- If they could do it again, what major would they choose? Why?

Prompt

Address the following topics in a short essay: What jobs do recent graduates hold? What was their job search like? How do recent graduates view their college major as preparation for their current job?

seems approachable, or works in a field of interest to you. Ask questions about the undergraduate major and what kinds of jobs recent graduates hold (Exercise 2.3). Do some homework beforehand to ensure that your questions are informed. For example, read the department website to learn a little bit about the major, basic course requirements, and, if possible, what courses the professor teaches. Visit the professor's website to learn about his or her courses and research. It will be easier to know what to ask if you know a little bit about the program and professor. You might begin by explaining that you're thinking about becoming a major and would like to know more about the field. Students sometimes feel uncomfortable approaching a professor, but remember that office hours are times specifically allocated to interacting with students. Take advantage of this time to ask the questions that will help you determine if a given major is for you.

EXERCISE 2.3

LEARNING ABOUT MAJORS: WHAT TO ASK PROFESSORS

- What are some of the major requirements in the major? Specifically, what is the recommended timetable for completing specific courses or experiences?
- Are there formal opportunities to work closely with faculty, such as courses with small enrollments, research classes, or independent study courses?
- Do many students interact with faculty outside of the classroom (for example, assisting with research)?
- Do students tend to participate in clubs and outside activities, such as group trips to conferences?
- What do graduates do?
- Are there opportunities to participate in off-campus applied activities, such as internships?
- How did the professor choose his or her major?
- Does the professor have any advice on choosing a major?
- What are important attributes for a successful student?
- What advice would the professor give for a new student in the major?

Prompt

Address the following topics in a short essay: What are some of the opportunities and recommended experiences for majors? What jobs do recent graduates hold? What advice or experiences did the professor share about choosing a major?

As you can see, there are multiple sources of information about any given major. Approach the task of choosing a major as if you were solving a puzzle. Each source provides a unique bit of information and perspective. Sources may disagree about particular qualities or characteristics of a major. Compile all of the information and weigh it based on the person's perspective (as a student, graduate, or faculty member, for example), perceived accuracy (Does the information seem accurate? What is the source's perspective?), and perceived similarity (How similar are your and the source's views?) (Exercise 2.4). Once you have gathered information and decided on several majors that may be a good fit for you, it's time to shift your attention inward and learn about yourself.

EXERCISE 2.4

LEARNING ABOUT MAJORS: SUMMING UP WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

After evaluating one or more majors and speaking with degree-seekers, degree-holders, and professionals, what have you learned?

1. What majors did you evaluate?
2. What are some of the opportunities for students and graduates in this major, according to students?
3. What are some of the opportunities for students and graduates in this major, according to professors and other professionals?
4. Do students and professors share the same views on the challenges of this major? If not, where do they diverge? Why do you think they disagree?
5. What are the most important commonly mentioned positive and negative features of this major?
6. How well do you think you could overcome the challenges?
7. What do you think is the most positive aspect of this major?

How to Learn About Yourself

An essential part of choosing a major that will provide the preparation that you desire is knowing your own interests and aspirations. Specifying them, however, is challenging. How do you know what you want? How can you anticipate your interests over the next few years? How do you tackle such an amorphous

topic as choosing an area of study? I won't lie: Learning about yourself and uncovering your interests and aspirations isn't easy and can even feel uncomfortable. This is especially true if you view it as one burning task that has a strict deadline. Don't force it. You have time to explore and find what's right for you.

Learn About Yourself Through Reflective Writing

After completing the exercises earlier in this chapter and book, you may have noticed that writing is a useful way of organizing your ideas and recording what you learn about various majors. Writing is also useful for learning and organizing what you know about yourself. Always good advice, understanding yourself is critical to choosing a major that will satisfy your intellectual curiosity and fulfill your career goals. Consider keeping a log of your thoughts and experiences, a record of reflective writing. Some might call this record a log, journal, or diary. Whatever you call it, reflective writing—capturing your thoughts and perspective in writing—can help you learn about yourself. Your log is a collection of your creative activity and can be saved in a simple notebook, computer file, or even your phone. It is a private learning space where you can reflect on yourself and your experiences, goals, dreams, and anxieties and learn more about who you are. Recording your thoughts can serve many purposes and aid you throughout college and your career. As you proceed through college, you may find it useful to use your log to record ideas for papers and, if your program requires it, thesis topics. There is a benefit to being mindful, and your log can help you become more aware of yourself and the world around you. If you are still wondering what writing and maintaining a log of your thoughts can do, let's consider some of the uses of reflective writing.

Uses of Reflective Writing

Sometimes we're not aware of our thoughts and feelings until we capture them with the written word. Expressing your ideas in words forces you to focus your thoughts, identify your opinions and values, and clarify your sense of identity. Here are four ways that you can use regular self-reflective writing.

Record your experience. A reflective log provides a record of your life and your thoughts. Days, weeks, and months pass all too quickly. Memory is fallible. Most people look back on their college years fondly and view those years as critical in shaping their identity. Return to your writing to help you to remember events, experiences, feelings, and intentions. Your log is a place to record accomplishments, hopes, and dreams as well as to retain details that you would probably otherwise forget.

Reduce stress and gain insight into yourself. Do you find yourself fuming after an argument or conflict? Do you repeatedly think about what you should have said in a conversation or in class hours or days later? Writing can help you process your experiences and move past ruminating over what has already happened and what you cannot change. Write your inner dialogue rather than

rehearse it in your head. Review what you have written. Is it complete? There's no need to keep recycling negative thoughts; you've recorded them, so there is no need to keep them in mind. Letting go gives you space to move on. Therefore, after a long day or a difficult experience, reflective writing can give you a private opportunity to consider your feelings and release stress. From a therapeutic perspective, looking back over your writing weeks, months, or years later permits the opportunity to reflect on patterns of experience, interaction, and emotion, providing insight into yourself and your perspective on life. How have you changed and grown?

Use reflective writing as an organizational tool. Your writing does not have to be particularly deep. Some people use their reflection logs for creating lists and plans, sometimes referring to their log as a "bullet journal." Perhaps the easiest way to begin keeping a log is to use it as a place to record lists of immediate tasks to be accomplished. With regular use, writing becomes a habit and can grow beyond making lists to include reflection, planning, and goal setting. You can write about your goals and document the steps needed to achieve them, as well as note your progress. In this way, your log can help to organize your daily life and plan for the future.

Try reflective writing as a problem-solving tool. Writing is an effective tool for problem solving because writing is thinking. The next time you find yourself confronted with a problem or a big decision, try writing about it. Explain the problem. What do you know about it? Discuss your feelings about the problem and analyze it. Writing may lead you to brainstorm potential solutions. Then your writing might shift toward analyzing each solution. Expressing ideas in written form requires a different thought process than thinking. We think in new ways when we write. This allows us to conceptualize problems differently and come to solutions more quickly.

Tips for Beginning a Reflection Log

Your log can take many forms. It might be a plain notebook, text or word processing file on your computer or synced in a cloud service, or an app on your phone. The form your log takes doesn't matter, as long as it is readily and easily accessible to you. The cardinal rule of reflective writing is to remember that your log is for your eyes only. Don't let spelling, handwriting, and grammar be major concerns. Get your feelings and experiences down in writing, any way that you can. No one else will review or grade it. To get started, consider the following tips.

Don't overthink it: Just write. There are no rules. You can write about anything that comes to mind, like ideas for papers and projects, everyday items such as lists of accomplishments and tasks to be completed, and even creative writing ideas such as story or poetry ideas, if that's your thing. Write about your problems or everyday frustrations. Observe your life. If you're having difficulty writing, you might even write about the trouble that you're experiencing. You

can write your thoughts as they come, even if you're writing that you don't know what to write.

Try a third-person perspective. If you are having trouble getting started, try writing about events that are happening to you or around you from a third-person perspective, using pronouns such as *he* and *she*, as if you are observing someone else. For example, begin writing with the phrase, "It was a time when . . .," and then describe the situation in detail, using as many of your senses as possible. What are the sounds, smells, sights, and feelings present? This exercise can help you to put things into perspective; it is especially effective when writing about life changes (like the transition to college), relationships (like that argument with your boyfriend or girlfriend), and events that you found upsetting (like finding out that you didn't do so well on that test).

Write for brief periods, often. The goal of keeping a reflective log is to catch your thoughts. The more often you write, the more you'll learn about yourself. Keep your log close at hand. If you have 15 minutes between classes, write. You might write about what you've learned in your prior class and how it relates to your experience, which will make it more likely that you learn and retain the material. Or you might simply write about what you're thinking or feeling, such as whether you are hungry, tired, or antsy. Get into the habit of writing each day, even for just a few minutes. Try writing at bedtime or right after you wake up. It doesn't take much time. You'll be surprised at how much you can capture in just a few minutes if you don't censor yourself. Also try to write some longer entries, because they will give you the opportunity to flesh out your thoughts and make insights about yourself.

Avoid expectations. Your log is whatever you choose to create. It does not have to be filled with descriptions of monumental experiences. Entries don't have to be well written or scholarly. Don't let these beliefs rob you of the chance to benefit from reflective writing. Also note that reading is not required. Some people reread their logs as chronicles of their lives. Others rarely read their logs but instead use writing to process their thoughts. Remember that the information is always there should you choose to read it, but you don't have to read it.

Try reflective writing. It can help you explore who you are and discover who you hope to become. Through writing and reflecting, the mundane can become profound. Throughout this book, you'll find plenty of topics and ideas to write about, which will help you learn about yourself and make plans for your future. Take a chance and explore yourself through writing.

Learn About Yourself Through Self-Assessment

By now you likely realize that understanding yourself is critical to choosing a major that keeps your interest over the college years. Reflective writing is an important tool, but choosing a major requires a thorough self-assessment. It sounds technical, but *self-assessment* is simply the process of examining your

skills, abilities, motivations, interests, values, experience, and accomplishments. In other words, it's how you learn about yourself, which will help you make decisions about your major. The following exercises will help you to better understand yourself, but remember that a useful self-assessment is not generated instantaneously. It takes time, hard work, and honesty.

Assess Your Traits

Who are you? What characteristics best describe you? Understanding your unique personality traits will help you to choose a major that is right for you and, later, a job that complements your characteristics and is rewarding. Exercise 2.5 will help you to get a better understanding of your personality, which is essential to choosing a major that you'll be happy with.

EXERCISE 2.5

ASSESS YOUR PERSONAL TRAITS

Check off those traits that describe you. Brainstorm additional traits if needed. Take your time to evaluate each and be honest with yourself.

<input type="checkbox"/> Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Extroverted	<input type="checkbox"/> Practical
<input type="checkbox"/> Accurate	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair-minded	<input type="checkbox"/> Private
<input type="checkbox"/> Active	<input type="checkbox"/> Farsighted	<input type="checkbox"/> Productive
<input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable	<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling	<input type="checkbox"/> Progressive
<input type="checkbox"/> Adept	<input type="checkbox"/> Firm	<input type="checkbox"/> Protective
<input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible	<input type="checkbox"/> Prudent
<input type="checkbox"/> Affectionate	<input type="checkbox"/> Forceful	<input type="checkbox"/> Punctual
<input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive	<input type="checkbox"/> Formal	<input type="checkbox"/> Quick
<input type="checkbox"/> Alert	<input type="checkbox"/> Frank	<input type="checkbox"/> Quiet
<input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious	<input type="checkbox"/> Frugal	<input type="checkbox"/> Rational
<input type="checkbox"/> Analytical	<input type="checkbox"/> Future-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Realistic
<input type="checkbox"/> Appreciative	<input type="checkbox"/> Generous	<input type="checkbox"/> Receptive
<input type="checkbox"/> Articulate	<input type="checkbox"/> Gentle	<input type="checkbox"/> Reflective
<input type="checkbox"/> Artistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Good natured	<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed
<input type="checkbox"/> Assertive	<input type="checkbox"/> Gregarious	<input type="checkbox"/> Reliable
<input type="checkbox"/> Astute	<input type="checkbox"/> Hardy	<input type="checkbox"/> Reserved

<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic	<input type="checkbox"/> Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful
<input type="checkbox"/> Attentive	<input type="checkbox"/> Honest	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsible
<input type="checkbox"/> Balanced	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/> Reverent
<input type="checkbox"/> Brave	<input type="checkbox"/> Humorous	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Broad-minded	<input type="checkbox"/> Idealistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Sedentary
<input type="checkbox"/> Businesslike	<input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident
<input type="checkbox"/> Calm	<input type="checkbox"/> Impersonal	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-controlled
<input type="checkbox"/> Candid	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-disciplined
<input type="checkbox"/> Capable	<input type="checkbox"/> Individualistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-starter
<input type="checkbox"/> Caring	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrious	<input type="checkbox"/> Sensible
<input type="checkbox"/> Cautious	<input type="checkbox"/> Informal	<input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive
<input type="checkbox"/> Charitable	<input type="checkbox"/> Initiator	<input type="checkbox"/> Serious
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/> Innovative	<input type="checkbox"/> Sincere
<input type="checkbox"/> Clean	<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Sociable
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear	<input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent	<input type="checkbox"/> Sophisticated
<input type="checkbox"/> Competent	<input type="checkbox"/> Introverted	<input type="checkbox"/> Stable
<input type="checkbox"/> Competitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Intuitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong
<input type="checkbox"/> Congenial	<input type="checkbox"/> Inventive	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong-minded
<input type="checkbox"/> Conscientious	<input type="checkbox"/> Jovial	<input type="checkbox"/> Structured
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservative	<input type="checkbox"/> Judicious	<input type="checkbox"/> Subjective
<input type="checkbox"/> Considerate	<input type="checkbox"/> Just	<input type="checkbox"/> Successful
<input type="checkbox"/> Consistent	<input type="checkbox"/> Kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Tactful
<input type="checkbox"/> Conventional	<input type="checkbox"/> Liberal	<input type="checkbox"/> Talented
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative	<input type="checkbox"/> Likable	<input type="checkbox"/> Tenacious
<input type="checkbox"/> Courageous	<input type="checkbox"/> Literary	<input type="checkbox"/> Thorough
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Logical	<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful
<input type="checkbox"/> Critical	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyal	<input type="checkbox"/> Tolerant
<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	<input type="checkbox"/> Mature	<input type="checkbox"/> Trusting
<input type="checkbox"/> Daring	<input type="checkbox"/> Methodical	<input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy
<input type="checkbox"/> Decisive	<input type="checkbox"/> Meticulous	<input type="checkbox"/> Truthful
<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate	<input type="checkbox"/> Mistrustful	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding

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<input type="checkbox"/> Delicate	<input type="checkbox"/> Modest	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexcitable
<input type="checkbox"/> Democratic	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivated	<input type="checkbox"/> Uninhibited
<input type="checkbox"/> Dependable	<input type="checkbox"/> Nurturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal
<input type="checkbox"/> Detail-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Objective	<input type="checkbox"/> Versatile
<input type="checkbox"/> Diligent	<input type="checkbox"/> Observant	<input type="checkbox"/> Vigorous
<input type="checkbox"/> Discreet	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm
<input type="checkbox"/> Distinctive	<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Wholesome
<input type="checkbox"/> Dominant	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Wise
<input type="checkbox"/> Dynamic	<input type="checkbox"/> Orderly	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eager	<input type="checkbox"/> Organized	
<input type="checkbox"/> Easygoing	<input type="checkbox"/> Original	
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective	<input type="checkbox"/> Outgoing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Efficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Patient	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eloquent	<input type="checkbox"/> Peaceable	
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/> Perceptive	
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic	<input type="checkbox"/> Persistent	

Prompt

Examine the list of personality descriptors that you have selected. Carefully consider each. How well does each adjective describe you? Choose three to five adjectives that you find most relevant.

1. Why did you choose those descriptors? Provide examples from your experience that illustrate how each word describes you.
2. Think back to your childhood dreams. Do you remember being asked by friends and family "What do you want to be when you grow up?" How did you typically respond? What careers did you select as a child? Why?
3. Consider your childhood career goal. What traits are needed to succeed in that career?
4. Do you still have the same career-related dreams? How have your interests changed?
5. Consider your characteristics listed in question 1. How do these traits compare with those needed for the career of your childhood dreams? How do they fit with your revised adult view?

Identify Your Occupational Interests

Another way to use what you know about yourself to choose a major is to identify your occupational interests. Pay attention to your interests to determine the work environment that you'll find most appealing. Holland (1959, 1997) proposed that people's interests and the matching work environments can be loosely categorized into six themes or codes: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Although they were created half a century ago, the Holland Occupational Codes remain the most commonly used assessment of career interests (Ruff, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2007). Complete Exercise 2.6 for a brief insight into your career interests. Another option is the O*NET Interest Profiler, a self-assessment inventory that applies Holland codes to help individuals identify their work-related interests (Lewis & Rivkin, 1999). The O*NET Interest Profiler is a free computer program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration and the American Job Center Network (<http://www.onetcenter.org/CIP.html>). A short version of the O*NET Interest Profiler is also available (<http://www.onetcenter.org/IPSF.html>). These tools are a good start, but an accurate Holland career assessment is conducted by a career professional using specialized tools. The career development center at your college can help you determine and interpret your Holland Code.

EXERCISE 2.6

IDENTIFY YOUR HOLLAND PERSONALITY TYPE

Realistic

- I am mechanically inclined
- I am athletically inclined
- I like working outside with tools, plants, or animals
- I like creating things with my hands
- I am practical
- I like to see direct results of my work
- I am a nature lover
- I am systematic
- I am persistent
- I am calm and reserved
- I am independent
- I dislike vagueness and ambiguity

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(Continued)

Investigative

- I like learning, observing, problem solving, and working with information
- I like solving abstract, vague problems
- I am curious
- I am logical
- I am reserved
- I am introspective
- I am independent
- I am observant
- I am interested in understanding the physical world
- I like working alone or in small groups
- I like to be original and creative in solving problems
- I enjoy intellectual challenges

Artistic

- I am imaginative and creative
- I like to express myself by designing and producing
- I prefer unstructured activities
- I am spontaneous
- I am idealistic
- I am unique
- I am independent
- I am expressive
- I am unconventional
- I am compassionate
- I am bold
- I prefer to work alone

Social

- I am compassionate
- I like helping and training others
- I am patient

- I am dependable
- I am supportive
- I am understanding
- I am perceptive
- I am generous
- I am idealistic
- I am cheerful, well liked
- I am people-oriented and friendly
- I am concerned with the welfare of others
- I am good at expressing myself and getting along well with others

Enterprising

- I like to work with people
- I like persuading people
- I like managing situations
- I like achieving organizational or economic goals
- I am a leader
- I am talkative
- I am extroverted
- I am optimistic
- I am spontaneous and daring
- I am assertive
- I am energetic
- I am good at communicating
- I am good at selling and persuading
- I prefer tasks that require quick action

Conventional

- I am good with numbers
- I like to work with data and carry out tasks in detail
- I am persistent
- I am practical
- I am conforming
- I am precise

(Continued)

(Continued)

- I am conscientious
- I am meticulous
- I am adept
- I am practical
- I am frugal
- I am stable and dependable
- I am well controlled
- I prefer tasks that are structured
- I prefer to know what's expected
- I prefer a well-defined chain of command

Prompt

Count your checkmarks to determine which sets of descriptors best match your characteristics.

Most students find that two or more sets of qualities fit them. Which set(s) of descriptors best described you? Provide an example of an experience or ability that illustrates this set of descriptors.

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966, 1997).

Understanding your career interests may make it easier to choose a major because some majors are better suited to particular constellations of interests than are others. Table 2.1 lists college majors, organized by Holland Code. Remember that this is simply a guide. Not all possible careers are listed, and the categories are much more fluid than they appear. Notice that many college majors fit more than one Holland Code. College majors tap multiple interests and abilities—and foster similar skills in students, such as critical thinking and communication skills.

Assess Your Skills

In addition to understanding your interests, your choice of major should reflect your skills and abilities. What are your skills? What activities do you do best? If you're unsure, use your log to write an experiential diary to get a better grip on your skills. An experiential diary lists all the jobs, leadership positions, and extracurricular activities that you've engaged in, and then all the tasks comprising each of these activities and jobs. Once you've created a master list, write down the skills required to perform the tasks on your list. For example, if the task was answering the phone, it probably entailed the

TABLE 2.1 • Careers by Holland Personality Type

Realistic	Investigative	Artistic
Agriculture/Forestry	Animal Science	Advertising
Architecture	Anthropology	Architecture
Criminal Justice	Astronomy	Art Education
Engineering	Biochemistry	Art History
Environmental Studies	Biological Sciences	Communications
Exercise Science	Chemistry	English
Geology	Computer Science	Foreign Language
Health and Physical Education	Engineering	Graphic Design
Medical Technology	Geography	History
Plant and Soil Sciences	Geology	Interior Design
Recreation and Tourism Management	Mathematics	Journalism
Sport Management	Medical Technology	Music
	Medicine	Music Education
	Nursing	Speech/Drama
	Nutrition	
	Pharmacy	
	Philosophy	
	Physical Therapy	
	Physics	
	Psychology	
	Sociology	
	Statistics	
Social	Enterprising	Conventional
Audiology	Advertising	Accounting
Counseling	Broadcasting	Business
Criminal Justice	Communications	Computer Science
Elementary Education	Economics	Economics
History	Finance	Finance
Human Development	Industrial Relations	Mathematics
Library Sciences	Journalism	Statistics
Nursing	Management	

(Continued)

TABLE 2.1 ● (Continued)

Social	Enterprising	Conventional
Nutrition	Marketing	
Occupational therapy	Law	
Philosophy	Political Science	
Physical Education	Public Administration	
Political Science	Speech	
Psychology		
Religious Studies		
Social Work		
Sociology		
Special Education		
Urban Planning		

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966, 1997).

following skills: communication (the effective use of language), problem solving, and the ability to direct inquiries. Also identify specific skills that you've learned, like the ability to use computer programming languages or speak a non-native language. Even with an experiential diary, it is sometimes difficult to list and remember all of your skills and abilities. Exercise 2.7 will help you to better understand your skills.

EXERCISE 2.7

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Check off all of the skills that apply to you, then complete the activity below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acting or performing | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administering | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing data | <input type="checkbox"/> Measuring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applying | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arranging social functions | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigating |

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calculating | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Checking for accuracy | <input type="checkbox"/> Observing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collecting money | <input type="checkbox"/> Painting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compiling statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conceptualizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinating events | <input type="checkbox"/> Programming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating new ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> Proofreading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decision-making | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Designing | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dispensing information | <input type="checkbox"/> Reasoning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatizing ideas or problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Record keeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editing | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertaining people | <input type="checkbox"/> Recruiting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating | <input type="checkbox"/> Researching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expressing feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finding information | <input type="checkbox"/> Selling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fund raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Generalizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Sketching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handling complaints | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identifying problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching or training |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Implementing | <input type="checkbox"/> Team building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Improving | <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking logically |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Initiating with strangers | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerating ambiguity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Innovating | <input type="checkbox"/> Translating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting | <input type="checkbox"/> Troubleshooting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interviewing | <input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Investigating problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Judging | |

(Continued)

(Continued)

Prompt

1. What skills did you check?
2. Can you think of examples of how each skill has developed or how you've used it to achieve a goal?
3. Based on your consideration, choose your top three to five skills and explain your choices. These skills are your strengths.
4. Now look at all of the skills that you checked:
 - a. Do any of these skills need further development?
 - b. Which of these skills do you prefer using? Why?
 - c. Which are you interested in using in the future? Why?
 - d. Do you dislike engaging in any of your skills? Why?
5. Are there any skills that you don't currently have but would like to develop? Explain.

By now it should be apparent that you already have an array of skills. Are you interested in using and pursuing them? We tend to like and be interested in things that we are good at. Is that true for you? You may not be skilled in a particular area, but if you find it interesting, you can seek the education and training to become skilled. Don't let your current competence levels dictate your choices. If you are willing to work, you can make great strides and learn many skills that can help you meet your career goals.

Use Career Assessment Tools

While you can learn a lot about yourself through reflection and surveying your own interests, a visit to the career center at your college can provide you with an objective and detailed profile of your interests. A career counselor can administer several inventories to help determine what career path is right for you. The two most commonly administered inventories are the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong, Donnay, Morris, Schaubhut, & Thompson, 2004) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

The Strong Interest Inventory is administered at your college's career center, and it contains 291 items that survey your occupational interests and values. It takes about 40 minutes to complete and yields a detailed report that includes your Holland Code, a list of your top interests and what you find most motivating and rewarding, and comparisons of your interests with those of people working in 122 occupations. The Strong Interest Inventory also lists

occupations in which people whose interests most closely match yours work. Finally, your values (that is, preferences regarding work style, learning environment, leadership style, risk taking, and team orientation) are listed. A summary provides a graphic representation of your results. The career counselor will discuss your results with you. Remember that although a number of compatible careers are listed, you are free to pursue whatever career appeals to you. The Strong Interest Inventory provides a more detailed look at the aspects of career assessment than we have discussed in this chapter. It's especially useful if you have tried the activities in this book and still find yourself puzzled about what really interests you.

Another assessment option available in your college's career center is the MBTI. With over 100 items, the MBTI assesses individuals' perceptions, preferences, and judgments in interacting with the world (Myers et al., 1998). Created by mother and daughter, Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, the MBTI is based in Carl Jung's theory that there are 16 personality types in which people may be categorized based on their preferences along four dimensions or subscales. The MBTI contains several subscales. The extraversion/introversion subscale refers to the degree to which you turn outward or inward—that is, the degree to which you are oriented toward people and actions or the internal world of thoughts and ideas. The sensation/intuition subscale examines how you prefer to understand information: do you focus on the facts or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? Do you focus on logic and reasoning when making decisions or do you first look at circumstances and people (thinking/feeling)? Your preference for structure is assessed by the judging/perceiving scale, which examines whether you prefer to make decisions or remain open to new ideas and options. Finally, the measure categorizes takers into a "personality type," suggesting their own set of preferences. If you choose to take the MBTI, remember that it is simply a tool to help you learn about yourself. In fact, some psychologists argue that despite its popularity, there is insufficient research to conclude that the MBTI is an effective measure of personality (Pittenger, 2005). Ultimately, it's up to you to determine if the results make sense to you.

Examine Your Values

While choosing a major does not tie you to a particular career, it is useful to consider your career aspirations and life goals in order to seek the educational experiences that will prepare you for them. What do you want out of life? How do you define success? Would you rather live in a city or in a rural area? Is personal time and flexibility important to you? Would you like a family (and if so, large or small)? Is financial success important? Values are the things that are important to you, that you see as desirable in life. Spend time thinking through your priorities. Reflective writing can help you to understand and clarify your values. Consider the following collection of values, categorized by theme (Exercise 2.8). Check off the ones that appeal to you.

EXERCISE 2.8

EXAMINE YOUR VALUES

<p>Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Active in community <input type="checkbox"/> Help others <input type="checkbox"/> Help society and the world <input type="checkbox"/> Work with and help people in meaningful way 	<p>Adventure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement <input type="checkbox"/> Risk taking <input type="checkbox"/> Travel <input type="checkbox"/> Drama <input type="checkbox"/> Exciting tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Good health <input type="checkbox"/> Travel 	<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Influence people and opinions <input type="checkbox"/> Supervise others <input type="checkbox"/> Power authority and control <input type="checkbox"/> Make decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Direct work of others <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate people data and stuff <input type="checkbox"/> Hiring and firing responsibility
<p>Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetic appreciation <input type="checkbox"/> Artistic creativity <input type="checkbox"/> Creative expression <input type="checkbox"/> Develop and express new ideas <input type="checkbox"/> No routine <input type="checkbox"/> Work on own or as creative team <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible working conditions 	<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> Work friendships <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Work with others/ teamwork <input type="checkbox"/> Public contract <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly work atmosphere <input type="checkbox"/> Work with people you like 	<p>Financial Reward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> High earnings <input type="checkbox"/> Commission-based work <input type="checkbox"/> Material possessions <input type="checkbox"/> Very high salary <input type="checkbox"/> Extra pay for extra work <input type="checkbox"/> Long hours
<p>Prestige</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition <input type="checkbox"/> Status <input type="checkbox"/> Respect stature <input type="checkbox"/> Professional position 	<p>Meaning and Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality <input type="checkbox"/> Personal fulfillment <input type="checkbox"/> Work related to ideals <input type="checkbox"/> Make a difference 	<p>Variety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Changing work responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity of tasks <input type="checkbox"/> New projects <input type="checkbox"/> Varied tasks

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility and pay are related to education and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Express inner self in work <input type="checkbox"/> Integrate belief system into work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meet new people <input type="checkbox"/> Range of settings and situations
<p>Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stability <input type="checkbox"/> Predictably <input type="checkbox"/> Low pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Job assurance <input type="checkbox"/> Guaranteed annual salary in secure stable company <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Live in familiar location 	<p>Independence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Time freedom <input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy <input type="checkbox"/> Work alone <input type="checkbox"/> Set own pace and working conditions, flexible hours <input type="checkbox"/> Choose team or work alone 	<p>Physical Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor work <input type="checkbox"/> Physical challenge <input type="checkbox"/> Physical fitness <input type="checkbox"/> Desk job
<p>Intellectual Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address challenging problems <input type="checkbox"/> Pursue/obtain knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Constant updating of information and ability to deal with new ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Work with creative and intellectually stimulating people <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledged expert <input type="checkbox"/> Research and development 	<p>Productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Competent and proficient <input type="checkbox"/> Fast-paced work <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient work habits <input type="checkbox"/> Hard work is rewarded <input type="checkbox"/> Quality and productivity rewarded by rapid advancement 	<p>Advancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Promotions <input type="checkbox"/> Work under pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Competition <input type="checkbox"/> Limited only by energy and initiative

(Continued)

(Continued)

Prompt

1. What values did you check? Do your selected values cluster into a few areas?
2. How have these values influenced your choices and behaviors? Consider your extracurricular activities and interests.
3. How might these values inform your career choices?

An effective way of assessing your interests and values is to write about your personal history. Exercise 2.9 helps you to identify your strengths and is a fantastic self-esteem builder because it focuses on your accomplishments—the things that make you special. By understanding which achievements you cherish, you'll have a better idea of your interests and values, which is essential to choosing a major or career that's right for you.

EXERCISE 2.9

REVIEW YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY

1. List and write about all of the times that you can think of when you have encountered a problem (regardless of its size) and have taken action to solve that problem. List as many as you can. Don't stop when it becomes difficult, but probe further.
2. Next, write about your achievements. They may be related to your list from item 1. If you're stumped, try free writing about your achievements, writing whatever comes to mind, without censoring or editing it. Keep the ideas flowing. Looking over the exercises in this chapter can help. The accomplishments that you list need not be monumental. Accomplishments can be small, and they don't have to be recognized by other people. Write about the achievements that are personally relevant to you and of which you are most proud.
3. Next examine the problems you have solved and your accomplishments. Which have brought you the most satisfaction? Which do you value most highly? Why?

Draw Conclusions

Now that you're aware of your traits, interests, skills, and values, compile this information to get a comprehensive view of yourself. Review the lists and

descriptions of majors in your college handbook. Do any seem to fit your set of traits, skills, and interests? Some majors and careers will match many of the personal traits and skills that you possess, and others will not match your self-description. Review what you have learned about various majors and about yourself. If you are still puzzling over what major to choose, list the two or three front-runners. Use your college handbook and department websites to find additional information. Once you have narrowed down your choice of majors, consider the pros and cons of each major. Consider the questions listed in Table 2.2.

The happiest and most successful students choose majors that they find engaging and that match their traits, skills, interests, and values. Some students decide on a major before they understand themselves. They take courses for a semester or two and then realize that they've chosen a major in which they have minimal interest or ability. Engaging in self-assessment early in your college career can save you from changing majors and wasting time.

Choosing Psychology

After completing the exercises in this chapter, speaking with others, seeking outside information, and doing some careful thinking, you may have narrowed down your choices of majors. If that's true for you, fantastic! If not, keep working and thinking; you will find what is right for you. All majors offer important educational opportunities. In that sense, you can't choose a "wrong" major.

TABLE 2.2 • Comparing Majors

Choose a potential major (or two or three, if you're still searching) and determine the following:

1. How interested am I in this topic? Is it a new interest or a long-standing one? Do I enjoy the subject?
2. What is the curriculum for this major? What kinds of classes do I have to take?
3. How well does the major match my personal traits, skills, and abilities? Can I perform well in this subject? Is it too easy or too challenging?
4. Which professors teach this subject? Do I know any? Have I taken courses with any?
5. How motivated am I to study this subject? Is it inherently interesting or fun? Do I dread classes or homework in this area?
6. Do I tend to seek out other students and faculty in this department for discussions and other informal interactions?
7. What kinds of jobs do graduates hold? Will the major prepare me for the kind of career I desire?

That said, there are some majors that will better fit your interests and aspirations than others. Let's take a closer look at psychology: What skills and knowledge are acquired with the psychology major?

Skills and Knowledge You'll Develop as a Psychology Major

The psychology major prepares graduates for "lifelong learning, thinking, and action" (McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991, p. 600). Like other liberal arts majors, psychology students learn valuable thinking and communication skills. Psychology education, however, is unique because it emphasizes learning and applying principles of psychology to understand human behavior. As a psychology major you will have the opportunity to develop the following competencies.

Knowledge of Human Behavior

Undergraduate education in psychology is intended to expose students to the major facts, theories, and issues in the discipline. Understanding human behavior entails learning about physiology, perception, cognition, emotion, development, and more. Consequently, psychology majors construct a broad knowledge base that serves as the conceptual framework for lifelong learning about human behavior as well as the capacity to apply their understanding in everyday situations.

Information Acquisition and Synthesis Skills

The knowledge base of psychology is constantly expanding. Successful psychology students learn how to gather and pull together, what professors often refer to as *synthesize*, information. They learn how to use a range of sources, including the library, computerized databases, and the Internet, to gather information about an area of interest. More important, psychology students learn how to weigh and integrate information into a coherent and persuasive argument. In addition, successful psychology students apply their advanced understanding of cognition and memory to enhance their own processing and recall of information.

Research Methods and Statistical Skills

Psychology students learn how to apply the scientific method to address questions about human behavior. They learn how to identify a problem, devise a hypothesis, choose and carry out scientific methods to gather information about the problem, conduct statistical analyses to evaluate a hypothesis, and interpret data summaries to devise a conclusion. In other words, psychology students become able to pose and answer questions about human behavior and experience.

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Exposure to the diverse perspectives within psychology trains students to think flexibly and to accept some ambiguity. Introductory psychology students often ask for the “right” answer; they soon learn that answers often aren’t black or white, but many shades of gray. Psychology students acquire skills in thinking critically about complex problems. They learn to weigh multiple sources of information, determine the degree of support for each position, and make a reasoned decision about which position has more merit and how a problem is best solved.

Reading, Writing, and Speaking Skills

Psychology students develop reading, writing, and presentation skills for effective oral and written communication. They learn how to think critically about what they read, as well as comprehend and present arguments from a psychological standpoint. Moreover, their understanding of human behavior aids students in constructing arguments that are easily comprehended by others. Information derived from psychology regarding cognition, memory, listening, persuasion, and communication enhances psychology majors’ ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

Psychology students develop the ability to communicate their ideas and use their knowledge of human behavior to devise persuasive arguments. Successful students can lead, collaborate with others, and work effectively in groups. Psychology students are primed to be effective communicators because they are trained to be sensitive to issues of culture, race, class, and ethnicity. Students of psychology also develop intrapersonal awareness, or self-knowledge. They are able to monitor and manage their own behavior, which is critical in succeeding in academic and interpersonal tasks.

Adaptability

Psychology students quickly learn that the perfect experiment is an unattainable goal toward which all researchers strive. Students learn how to design the best research studies possible, given limited resources. The capacity to evaluate and adapt to changing circumstances is highly valued in a volatile economy and workplace.

An undergraduate education in psychology will provide you with the opportunity to develop these skills, which, incidentally, is not an exhaustive list. The psychology major satisfies the objectives of a liberal arts education, which include critical and analytical thinking, independent thinking, leadership skills, communication skills, understanding how to learn, being able to see all sides of an issue, and understanding human diversity (Roche, 2010). However,

it is the training in research design and statistical analysis, as well as human behavior, that makes the psychology major unique among liberal arts degrees.

Psychological Literacy

By now you likely realize that if you choose to major in psychology, you will expand your knowledge of human behavior. You'll also get better at discriminating relevant from trivial information. You'll learn how to find, evaluate, and synthesize information from a variety of sources. You'll learn about psychological theories, concepts, and terms that will help you to understand and influence the world around you. In other words, you will demonstrate *psychological literacy*, which is the ability to apply psychological knowledge in everyday life to improve lives—your own and others' (Cranney, Botwood, & Morris, 2012; McGovern et al., 2010). Individuals who are psychologically literate:

- Have basic knowledge and vocabulary of psychology
- Value and apply critical thinking and creative problem solving
- Apply psychological principles to address issues at home, work, and in the community
- Act ethically
- Can gather and effectively evaluate information
- Can use technology effectively
- Can communicate effectively with different audiences
- Demonstrate sensitivity to, understand, and foster respect of diversity
- Are self-reflective

Psychological literacy develops as individuals move from learning facts about psychology to applying bodies of knowledge and modes of thinking. The undergraduate psychology curriculum is designed to provide students with opportunities to develop psychological literacy. The American Psychological Association (2013) has outlined five broad goals for psychology education. The Psychology Department at your college likely models the psychology curriculum on the APA goals.

Goal 1: Knowledge Base in Psychology

- 1.1 Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology
- 1.2 Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains
- 1.3 Describe applications of psychology

Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry and Critical Thinking

- 2.1 Use scientific reasoning to interpret psychological phenomena
- 2.2 Demonstrate psychology information literacy
- 2.3 Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving
- 2.4 Interpret, design, and conduct basic psychological research
- 2.5 Incorporate sociocultural factors in scientific inquiry

Goal 3: Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World

- 3.1 Apply ethical standards to evaluate psychological science and practice
- 3.2 Build and enhance interpersonal relationships
- 3.3 Adopt values that build community at local, national, and global levels

Goal 4: Communication

- 4.1 Demonstrate effective writing for different purposes
- 4.2 Exhibit effective presentation skills for different purposes
- 4.3 Interact effectively with others

Goal 5: Professional Development

- 5.1 Apply psychological content and skills to career goals
- 5.2 Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation
- 5.3 Refine project-management skills
- 5.4 Enhance teamwork capacity
- 5.5 Develop meaningful professional direction for life after graduation

Do you notice a correspondence among the APA goals, characteristics of psychological literacy, and the competencies developed with a psychology major? Most psychology departments model their programs after the APA goals with the intention of promoting psychological literacy. Psychology students develop lifelong skills that are relevant to their personal and professional lives.

What to Expect as a Psychology Major

What, specifically, can you expect as a psychology major? Like all college students, you can expect to complete a range of courses required by the university, often referred to as General Education requirements because they're intended to provide you with a broad education covering many subjects that are essential to becoming a well-rounded and capable thinker. Whereas the General Education curriculum provides breadth of knowledge, your major is intended to provide depth of knowledge in a specific area. As a psychology

major you can expect to learn about human behavior and the methods that psychologists use to study human behavior. Specific requirements may vary by university; however, you can expect to complete courses in the following areas.

Introductory Psychology/General Psychology

Your first course in psychology will provide a whirlwind and fast-paced tour of the field, including all of the subdisciplines discussed in Chapter 1.

Methodology and Statistics

It is the methodology courses that will teach you how psychologists learn about human behavior. Students learn the research methods that psychologists use to ask and answer questions about behavior. They also learn statistics and the methods psychologists use to compile and draw conclusions from the information that they collect. Finally, students gain experience in designing and carrying out research studies that give them practice in asking and answering questions about human behavior.

Breadth Courses

Just as the General Education curriculum is designed to provide students with a broad knowledge base for a well-rounded education, the psychology breadth requirement imparts psychology majors with a well-rounded education in human behavior. The particular sets of requirements vary across psychology departments, but all will include courses in the clinical, developmental, cognitive, biological, and social/personality subfields. Common courses offered by psychology departments are listed in Table 2.3.

Elective Courses

You can expect to take several elective courses in your major; these are courses that are not required but are your choice. These courses are opportunities to explore your interests or gain knowledge and skills that you think will be helpful in the future.

Capstone Course

The capstone course is intended as the crowning achievement for majors, a course that requires them to synthesize all that they have learned to demonstrate that they have mastered the material. It is an advanced course that is intended to require you to integrate your knowledge about how to study psychological phenomena: how to ask research questions, devise methods of addressing questions, and draw conclusions. You might conduct an independent research study or write a lengthy review paper or senior thesis. Ask your professors to learn more about the capstone requirement and get advice so that you can plan ahead and take the courses that you believe will best prepare you for this experience.

TABLE 2.3 • Psychology Courses

Applied Psychology	History, Methods, and Statistics
Family Psychology	Research Methods
Health Psychology	Experimental Psychology
Industrial Psychology	Psychological Statistics
Organizational Psychology	History of Psychology
Psychology and Law	Learning and Cognitive
Sport Psychology	Psychology of Learning
Consumer Psychology	Psychology of Creativity
Biological and Neuropsychology	Educational Psychology
Physiological Psychology	Behavior Modification
Sensation and Perception	Cognitive Psychology
Psychopharmacology	Cognitive Neuroscience
Clinical Psychology	Personality, Social Processes, and Measurement
Clinical Psychology	Group Dynamics
Abnormal Psychology	Social Psychology
School Psychology	Psychology of Motivation
Developmental	Psychology of Personality
Adolescent Psychology	Psychological and Educational Testing
Adulthood and Aging	Psychology of Adjustment
Life-Span Development	Psychology of Gender
Developmental Psychopathology	Psychology of Women
Child Psychology	Cross-Cultural Psychology

The above courses may be grouped in several ways, depending on department. Some psychology courses are required for majors at nearly all schools, while others are electives found at a handful of schools.

PRACTICAL TIP

PLAN AHEAD FOR YOUR CAPSTONE COURSE

Most departments offer a handful of capstone courses in different subfields of psychology. For example, one department may offer capstone seminars

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(Continued)

in developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and experimental psychology. Usually these capstones have different prerequisites. The developmental psychology capstone may require students to have completed specific courses in developmental psychology and likewise for the other capstone courses. Be aware of these requirements early to ensure that you have the time and opportunity to take the prerequisite courses to gain admittance into the capstone course you desire.

What major is right for you? Is it psychology? Only you can answer that question. Psychology offers many opportunities, but other majors offer different sets of opportunities. You are the only expert in choosing your major. No one else can do it for you, and no test provides all of the answers. While parents, friends, professors, and counselors might offer assistance and advice, ultimately this is your decision. Your major will not lock you into one career path; there are many roads, and a psychology major can be the first step toward a variety of careers.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Why Psychology?

What are some reasons to choose a psychology major? What are the aspects or benefits that most appeal to you? What do you find less appealing? Why? Do you plan to major in psychology? Why or why not? Do other majors appeal to you? Why? In what ways are they similar to or different from psychology?

Self-Review

Once you've amassed several weeks or months' worth of entries, you might use your log to reflect on how you're changing. Read over earlier log entries. How have you changed? Do you have different ideas or views about what you wrote? Do you have new interpretations of events? Do you disagree with an earlier entry? Try to track how you think, and how your thinking is changing. Can you draw conclusions about yourself from what you've written?

Why College?

Why did you decide to attend college? What did you hope to gain? What have you learned since beginning college? Do you still have the same reasons for attending?