



How to Choose a Major

Choosing a major can seem like a daunting task. Many students think that they are making a decision that locks them into one job forever, even though this is rarely the reality. Keep in mind:

- Most students will experience multiple career changes over their lifetime.
- Many jobs and graduate programs are open to students with any major, so many students choose a major because it is enjoyable and they do well academically in it. (Most employers will be looking for skills and work-related experiences like internships more than for specific majors.)
- Some students pick a major to prepare for a specific industry, or to give them options in a variety of careers.
- Many students select a minor or pursue a double major to combine multiple interests.
- Choosing a major solely to prepare for a “hot” industry is rarely the best strategy. There are many other factors to consider besides hiring projections. Plus, the job market and hiring trends are constantly changing.
- Illinois State offers a variety of resources to assist in the process of choosing a major.

Take a look inward

There are many ways to determine what majors exist and which one is the best fit. It’s important to be proactive. Students should take a look inward and learn about the options in order to make the best possible choice.

Strategies for self-reflection:

- Reflect on your skills, abilities, strengths, interests and values that are most important to you. Your career advisor in Career Services can assist you.
- Take time to consider questions like these:
 - Which classes do I like best?
 - How do I spend my free time?
 - What do family and friends tell me are my strengths?
 - What’s my dream job and is it attainable?
 - How important are salary and lifestyle considerations in my future career?
- Use FOCUS – a self-guided series of online assessments that assists students in exploring personal interest, values, and abilities as well as possible occupations and careers, available on the Career Services website.
- Complete an individualized assessment to discover personal preferences (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or Strong Interest Inventory) and discuss results with a career advisor.
- Take the Career Choice Class (IDS 106), a one-credit, semester-long career exploration course.
- Find additional activities and worksheets* to assist in the self-reflection process and in choosing a major.

Strategies for researching majors:

- Get information on majors, career options with each of Illinois State’s majors and policies that pertain to the major selection process*.
- Try an elimination activity. Research majors at Illinois State* and cross out those that are not of interest. Then take a closer look at the remaining majors by doing research on possible careers and course requirements within each. Once narrowed down to 3-5 possible majors, meet with a career advisor to discuss these options.
- Take a variety of classes. Try courses in unfamiliar areas to gain exposure to possible new interests.
- Talk to faculty and students in programs of interest to gather information.

Strategies for researching careers:

- Research career fields and jobs that sound interesting or that might be a good match. The Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/oco) is a reliable source of career information.
- Consider questions like these in your research:
 - Which degrees and majors are preferred and what skills are required?
 - What are the usual entry-level jobs and typical career tracks?
 - What is the hiring outlook?
 - What are the typical demands and rewards of this kind of work?
- Attend Illinois State career fairs and talk with recruiters representing career fields of interest. Visit the Career Services website for more information on fairs and events

Learn about your options

Using Illinois State resources can be extremely valuable. Your career advisor in Career Services can assist you with identifying career options and majors. Your academic advisor can provide information on course requirements and program policies in majors of interest.

After taking the time to learn about yourself and researching majors and career areas of interest, you can narrow your focus to those options that are the best fit for you. Choosing a major is a process that takes time, and being proactive and flexible is the best strategy for making a wise choice.

*Visit [IllinoisState.edu/Majors](https://illinoisstate.edu/Majors) for more information