

Career exploration and planning lesson for grades 9-12

Overview

If you're here, it means you're looking for ways to teach your high school students professional skills. This 60-minute lesson plan has everything you need to teach your students how to approach career planning, and successfully navigate the ever-changing world of work.

It includes materials, learning objectives and standards, activities and instructions, and student handouts. We also recommend tech tools that you can use to make the learning experience fun and interactive for your students.

Resources

- Career exploration lesson plan (you are here)
- [Career exploration and planning powerpoint](#)
- [Tap into your WIFI activity + handouts](#)
- [Real people, real pathways activity + handouts](#)
- [LinkedIn for students activity + handouts](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)
- Tech tool recommendations
- Stopwatch/timer

Grade Levels: 9-12

Time: 60 minutes or 1-2 class periods for a full-length lesson, including one of the three activities.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will reflect on their unique strengths, skills, and career aspirations.
- Students will explore examples of career paths by reading or viewing profiles of various professionals.
- Students will learn how to conduct an informational interview.
- Students will become familiar with career exploration tools online.
- Students will draft a profile on LinkedIn that they can continue to refine and tailor.
- Students will gain confidence and feel more comfortable about navigating career options, and making career decisions.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3

Lesson plan

Do Now (5 minutes)

When students enter the classroom or sign into class online, project the slide that displays the following quotes, and question. You can also use a collaborative tool like [Padlet](#) and post the question there.

“Plans are worthless, but planning is essential.”

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Just because you made a good plan, doesn’t mean that’s what’s gonna happen.”

— Taylor Swift

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Do any of these quotes resonate with you? Which one(s) and why? What do you think they have to do with your future career? Take five minutes to write down what you would say.

Debrief Do Now (5-10 minutes)

Invite students to share out. If you use Padlet, give students the opportunity to read each other’s responses before they share. If you’re teaching in person, you can cold call or ask for volunteers. Online, you can ask students to type in the chat box. As students are sharing, note patterns that come up in their responses.

Once several students share, emphasize the importance of making decisions for fundamental, not instrumental, reasons.

Doing something for instrumental reasons means you think your action is a means to an end, that it’s going to take you somewhere specific. But what if it doesn’t work out?

Doing something for fundamental reasons means you think your action is inherently valuable, regardless of what it may or may not lead to. Fundamental reasoning is more sustainable. It encourages you to align your actions with your values, and allows you to have flexibility when it comes to setting career goals.

“You must live with a certain amount of ambiguity about not knowing what’s going to happen next, but it keeps you alert to unexpected opportunities and serendipity.”

Framing: Why do we need to learn this? (5-10 minutes)

In an ever-changing and increasingly complex world of work, building a career is about continually discovering how you can apply your strengths, passions, and hard work in the world, to do something that matters.

Supporting video clips:

- [Daniel Gutiérrez on following your passion \(1:51\)](#)
- [Finding the right job for you \(2:45\)](#)

Activity: Tap into your WIFI (30-45 minutes)

Resources

- [Tap into your WIFI worksheet from Amba Brown](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

In this activity, students will complete Amba Brown’s WIFI worksheet. This worksheet is designed to help students identify professional areas they may want to explore, rooted in their interests, dreams, and ambitions. The acronym “WIFI” stands for the following:

W Watch Your Interests

First, students reflect on their primary interests, activities they enjoy, and traits that may inform their career direction.

I Investigate Your Options

Here, students consider the next major step in their life plan, whether traveling the world, pursuing further education, or jumping into a new career straightaway.

F Follow Your Dreams

Next, the student imagines the next five years and considers setting ambitious goals.

I “I’m interested in _____ & I’ll see where it leads me.”

Rather than committing to a single career path, students are asked to explore their interests and remain open-minded about future pathways by setting a broad direction based on their interests.

1. Ask students to consider the questions on the worksheet and jot down their initial thoughts. Students don’t need to answer every question fully right now, but encourage them to write down the ideas that immediately come to mind—no matter how wild or far-fetched they might seem:
 - What interests you? List 5 ways you enjoy spending your time.
 - What are your skills? List 5 things you're good at.
 - How would your friends describe you? List 5 ways they'd explain what you're like.
 - If there was no chance you’d fail, what would you do? Anything at all!
2. Bring the class back together, and invite students to share their thoughts, with the aim of establishing a supportive network. Understanding their classmates’ aspirations will allow students to help each other as they continue exploring career options.

For example, one student might find a resource that isn’t useful to them, but if they recognize that it would be particularly helpful to another student, they can pass it along.

Optional extensions:

- Direct students to [Amba Brown’s longer Finding Your Path worksheet](#), which dives deeper into “investigating your options”.

- Encourage students to take more time to expand on and refine their initial ideas, and set some SMART goals.

Activity: Real people, real pathways (30-45 minutes)

Resources

- [Activity handout for students](#)
- [I am a scientist profiles \(22 profiles\)](#)
- Video: [A day in the life of Elian, Bicycle Plumber](#)
- Video: [A day in the life of Shirley, Platform Driver](#)
- Video: [A day in the life of Sophie, Entrepreneur](#)
- Video: [A day in the life of Angie, school teacher of technology](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

In this activity, students will explore professional profiles and reflect on the profiled individuals' traits and accomplishments, and how those traits map to each person's current career. This activity is designed to help students unpack their preconceived notions about what a career path should look like, and start thinking about their own career journey.

1. Introduce your students to the profile collection. Feel free to use the resources provided here, or others of your choosing.
2. Take 5 minutes to review one profile as an example for the class. Feel free to use the questions listed below, which model common questions used in an informational interview.

Common informational interview questions:

- Tell us about your person. What's their current work role?
 - What was the path they took to their current role?
 - What do they like most about their job?
 - What is the most challenging aspect of their role?
 - If you were interested in a job like this one, what qualifications and experience would you need?
3. Invite students to choose a profile and spend a few minutes reviewing it independently. Students don't necessarily need to choose a person working in a field they aspire to now. There is interesting information and inspiration to be gained everywhere. Direct them to the common informational interview questions to focus their attention while reviewing their profile.
 4. Once all the students have had time to review their chosen profile, put them into small groups of three or four. In their groups, students can share what they learned with their groupmates, using the questions above to guide them.

5. Following the group sharing, bring the class back together to discuss:

- What did you find most interesting or surprising?
- How has this changed the way you think about career pathways, in general?
- How has this changed the way you think about your future career, in particular?

Optional extensions:

- Introduce the online resource, [CareerVillage](#), and encourage students to post a question.

Supporting video clip (3:05):

[How Students can get started on CareerVillage](#)

- Highlight the value of continuing to explore career paths by doing informational interviews. Students can use the questions above as a guide. Together, the class may build their own profile collection as a group blog, with each student contributing at least one post.

Activity: LinkedIn for students (30 minutes)

Resources

- [Activity handout for students](#)
- [8 things teenagers \(and their parents\) need to know about LinkedIn](#)
- [LinkedIn privacy settings](#)
- Video: [LinkedIn for students: Top five profile to-do's](#)
- [Building a great LinkedIn profile tip sheet](#)
- [LinkedIn profile checklist](#)
- [Self-assessment handout](#)

In this activity, students will learn about the social media and networking platform, LinkedIn: why it's important (even when you're a student just starting to think about your career) and how best to use it.

1. Summarize what LinkedIn is and how it's valuable even for young people just beginning their career journey. You may use this resource as a guide: [8 things teenagers \(and their parents\) need to know about LinkedIn](#)

Framing tip:

Explain to students that LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network on the internet. They can use LinkedIn to find the right job or internship, connect and strengthen professional relationships, and learn the skills you need to succeed in your career. All they need is an internet-connected device.

A complete LinkedIn profile can help them connect with opportunities by showcasing their unique professional story through experience, skills, and education.

You can also explain to students that building a great reputation, maintaining a portfolio, and participating in a community of professionals are important habits for future career success. Whether you're documenting volunteer service or tracking awards and club activities at school, LinkedIn helps you develop a "showcase" mindset. Once you have that mindset, you're able to have a complete repository of all your accomplishments.

2. Review LinkedIn's [privacy settings for teens](#).
3. Highlight some key tips for building an effective LinkedIn profile, like:
 - Pick a professional picture
 - Write a good headline (120 characters or less)
 - Showcase your education
 - List your experience (organizations, achievements, honors, etc)
 - Get recommendations from managers, mentors, teachers, etc.

You can show students this quick supporting video (1:21): [LinkedIn for students: Top five profile to-do's](#)

4. Invite students to start building their own LinkedIn profile independently. If students already have a LinkedIn, you can frame this activity as a profile audit to make sure it's set up in the most effective way possible.

Additional resources:

- [Building a great LinkedIn profile tip sheet](#)
 - [LinkedIn profile checklist](#)
5. As students work, check in with individuals to answer questions, provide clarification, or offer suggestions.
 6. **Optional:** Have students share their profiles with a partner to gather inspiration and ideas for improvement.
 7. Encourage students to seek out feedback on their LinkedIn profile from other trusted adults in their lives and remind them that their profile should evolve as they gain more experience.

Cool down (5 minutes)

No matter what activity you did (or if you do all three), give students the opportunity to reflect and set a goal for their next steps. These self-assessments will also help you figure out what you need to do next to help them meet the learning objectives and make meaningful progress in exploring and planning their career. Here are some suggestions:

- You can use a tool like [Mentimeter](#) or [Poll Everywhere](#) to do a pulse check. Ask students on a scale of 1-5 (1 not confident, 5 ready to explore a future career now), how prepared they feel to start exploring and planning for their future career. This information is also helpful for you, as you can use their responses to think about how much more practice they need and whether or not you want to dig deeper into this skill.
- Create a Google Form that gives students a place to reflect and set a goal. Here are some questions you might include:
 - How prepared do you feel to explore and plan your career future?
 - What's your next best step?
 - What do you need more help with?

You can also share additional reflection questions that students can return to throughout their career journey, such as:

- What are your strengths? How can you tell the difference between a weakness and something that just needs a little more effort?
- Do you know what you're good at? If so, how could you do more of it? If not, how could you find out?
- Have you thought about what industries or organizations are looking for people with your strengths and ambitions? What do you know about them? What could you do to learn more?
- The most valuable people bring out the best in others. Who in your life is lifting you up? Who could you reach out to for support? How can you be a support to others?
- How are you building your professional reputation, both intentionally and unintentionally? What would a potential employer see if they Googled you? Are you making thoughtful use of platforms like LinkedIn to promote yourself and connect with people doing work you're interested in?
- What's next for you?

Amplify with additional resources

If you want to dig deeper into teaching career exploration and planning and give your students more practice, check out [Open P-TECH's self-paced student courses](#).

*Note: You'll need to register for Open P-TECH to access this content.