

Overview

Your career is like undertaking a long journey, with challenges and successes. Sometimes you might encounter roadblocks, detours, or decide you want to shift direction. To help you on your journey, it's helpful to have a compass to tell you if you're going in the right direction. Your VISTA is your compass. What is VISTA? It stands for **Values, Interests, Strengths, Traits, and Attitude**. It is a tool to get to know yourself and what you may be looking for in a career. The first four elements of VISTA are key to establishing your compass and are unique to you, while the last one is added to this because having the right attitude helps you to navigate and adapt to changes in your journey and to be open to different opportunities.

How to Use this Workbook

While this workbook has been designed for all students, how you use it will differ depending upon what your needs are. Some possible uses are:

- Answering a specific question, such as “what are my strengths?” In this case, you will want to complete the relevant section.
- Gaining greater clarity about what you are seeking in a career; it will be helpful for you to work through all sections of VISTA to create a compass that will assist you with making career choices that align with who you are and what is important to you in a career.
- Generating career options that might appeal to you. You will benefit from completing the “Generating Options” handout.

Some of you may also be interested in completing one or more of our in-depth formal assessment tools to complement your self assessment. We offer a range of popular, reputable assessments that can be completed online. These tools are offered for a fee and the specific details of the tools that we offer can be found on CareerLink (<https://careerlink.ucalgary.ca/home.htm>)

Completing Your VISTA

Each section of the workbook is comprised of an overview, activities, and a reflection, along with a “Going Deeper” segment. The individual dimensions of your VISTA can be viewed as diamonds of great worth that are buried in your backyard. Your goal is to uncover and use them in your career journey. When completing the activities, take your time so that your answers accurately reflect who you are. After each section, summarize your results in the following table or “compass”.

My VISTA, My Compass

V alues	
I nterests	
S trengths	
T raits	
A ttitudes	

Destination Map

While most people typically want to quickly narrow down their options, the more options we have initially, the better our career decision will ultimately be. Think about a journey. It is much more likely that your destination will be more tailored to you if you have several destinations to choose from rather than only a few. What career options are you considering? What career options generated through your VISTA would you like to learn more about? To help you generate more options go to “Generating Options” activity located at the end of this handout.

Values

Values can be thought of as being like major landmarks that we use to navigate the various challenges we encounter and the decisions we make. Career values refer to what is important to people in their work, such as salary, autonomy, predictability, challenge, etc. The degree to which your career fits your values can impact your level of satisfaction, as well as your sense of meaningfulness. Understanding your values can help you identify careers that you might find fulfilling, as well as career that you might want to avoid.

Values can be difficult to identify. We typically are much more aware of the feelings and thoughts that we experience when are values are not met in a situation, than we of are what our values actually are. The following questions are designed to help you better understand what your values are. As you answer the following questions, be sure to answer based on what is true for you rather than answer according to what you feel you should value.

What is important to you in your life; what are major priorities for you (for example, family, learning, relationships, health, travel, etc.)?

If you could design the ideal or perfect job, what attributes would it have?

Think about past or current experience you found particularly satisfying (jobs, volunteering, hobbies, projects, etc.). What was it about this experience that you valued?

What else do you value in an organization, work, educational setting and in your life?

What do significant others (family and/or partners) in your life value in a career?

Keeping in mind your responses to the previous questions, review and circle the values that are important to you in the list below.

Achievement	Flexible work schedule	Physical work environment
Advancement	Harmonious work environment	Respect (by others)
Adventure/ Risk	Helping others	Recognition
Autonomy/Independence	Interpersonal relationships	Routine
Challenge (intellectual)	Learning opportunities	Security
Compensation/Income	Life work balance	Status/Prestige
Competition	Leadership	Travel
Creativity/Self Expression	Location	Variety
High Ethics/Morals	Making a difference	Working with others

Review your answers. Choose the eight values that are the most important to you. If you find this challenging to do, rank each value identified from the exercises on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1= not important and 5 = very important. Review your list and select the values with the highest ranking. Write them below. For each of these, write a brief description of what the value means to you. This last step is important as two people can have the same value but what it means to each person can be quite different.

	Values	Brief Description
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Reflection

What surprises were there, if any?

Are there one or two values that stand apart from the others? These can be considered cornerstone values.

What possible careers could be suggested from your top values?

Going Deeper

In choosing your top career values, were you influenced by what significant others in your life value in a career? If so, how were you influenced? Are you comfortable with this?

Many people struggle with deciding whether they should have a career where they make money or make a difference. According to [Stanford Professors, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans](#)¹, a better question is: how much money do you want to make and how much of difference would you like to make? Fulfillment comes when your mix of these aligns with your career and includes what you do outside of your work.

Have you ever struggled with deciding whether you should have a career where you have a high income or make a difference? If yes, explain.

Complete the [Work Values Test](#)² by 123 Test. How do the values assessed by this inventory compare with the values you identified? Based on your results, do you wish to revise your list of eight career values? If so, how?

¹ Designing Your Work Life: How to Thrive and Change and Find Happiness at Work, by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, 2016

² <https://www.123test.com/work-values-test/>

Interests

Imagine you are sailing on a lake on a windy day. Suddenly the wind stops, and you lose all momentum. In order to return to shore, you now have to expend your own energy rowing the sailboat. Interests and passions are very similar to the wind in our example. They propel your career and it is far easier to accomplish challenging tasks when we are interested in what we are doing. Being Interested also creates opportunities for us to experience “flow,” states where we are focused and fully absorbed in what we are doing, and when we typically at our best. That’s why interests are an important part of your VISTA. Begin to think about the kinds of things that you enjoy in general.

What have been your favorite courses/ workshops to date?

What have been your favorite pastimes and hobbies? What do you believe your favorite pastime would be if you had time to learn and practice it?

What subjects of conversation grab your attention? What do you enjoy reading about?

Think about past or current experiences you have had (jobs, volunteering, hobbies, projects, etc.). Name the activities you enjoyed doing most from these experiences.

What do you love to do? What energizes you? What activities absorb your attention so much that you lose track of time (flow)?

What other interests do you have?

Review your answers. Choose the interests that excite you the most. Write them below.

Reflection

What surprises, if any, were there?

If you have a clearly defined career path, which of your career interests are being expressed?
If you do not have a clearly defined career path, which interests do you want to express in your career?

If you knew you could not fail, or there were no limitations in your way, what would you do?

What career options, apart from ones already identified, do your interests suggest?

Going Deeper

It is okay **not to know** your passion. In fact, the advice “find your passion” is not necessarily the best advice as research indicates that passion is not found but rather, it is developed. According to grit researcher, Dr. Duckworth, developing a passion takes time, can be “messy,” and involves trying different [activities](#)³. Nor does being passionate about something mean that you won’t experience difficulty or moments of boredom. Developing a passion requires sticking with an interest even when things become difficult.

What do you think of the advice “develop your passion”?

Developing a passion or interest requires trying various activities. What are some activities that you would like to try?

³ Want to Build Grit? Find Your Passion, by [Seth J. Gillihan Ph.D.](#), Sep 07, 2018
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Strengths

We all have strengths and understanding your strengths is a key component to career success. While there are many definitions of what a strength is, a simple but useful definition is that strengths are what we excel at. Strengths can include skills, such as programming, natural talents, such as problem solving, and activities, such as public speaking. While it is important for you to know what skills employers want, it is just as important to clearly understand what your unique strengths are so that you can find a career that allows you to best utilize them. This will result in increased career success and fulfillment. Keep in mind that just because you are good at something does not necessarily mean you want to use it in a career.

Some of you may struggle with identifying your strengths. One possible reason is that you have been taught to be modest and therefore, may feel uncomfortable acknowledging your strengths. In this case, it is important to give yourself permission to do so as you answer the following questions.

What would you say are your strengths?

What things come naturally to you?

What do you know a lot about?

Reflect on the different types of extracurricular activities you have participated in. What strengths do they suggest you have?

Think about a time when you were at your best. What did you do well? What personal strengths did you use in this situation?

Complete the [Motivated Skills Inventory](#)⁴ and answer the following questions:

What are your motivated skills?

Reflection

Review your answers. What strengths do you want to use in a career? List below and enter into VISTA summary.

⁴ <http://www.seriousjobseeker.net/exercise/skills.php>
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What careers do your strengths suggest?

Going Deeper

Ask three or more individuals that you respect and who know you well what they believe your strengths, talents and most positive qualities are. Ideally ask them to provide this to you in writing so that you can compare their responses. If possible, include people from different parts of your life, such as friends, peers, family members, mentors, coworkers, etc. After reviewing their responses, answer the following questions:

- o What surprised you?
- o What themes did you notice across the responses?
- o What strengths would you like to use in a career?

Identify a time when you were at your best. Write down what you did in as much detail as you can. Review your. Next break down the skills required to accomplish what you did. Be specific.

Traits

We each have a unique way of connecting and relating to others and the world around us that reflects our personality traits. Our traits can be thought of as relatively stable characteristics that lead us to behave in certain ways in various situations. While there are many conflicting theories and models of personality traits, research suggests that certain personality traits can be more suited to certain roles than other roles. As an example, individuals who would describe themselves as “extroverted” might prefer careers that provide them with lots of opportunities to interact with others.

Here are some general questions to help you identify your personality traits. As you answer these questions, focus on attributes that you perceive as being positive rather than negative. If there is an attribute that describes you, but you feel is negative, reframe it so that that it has more of a positive meaning. For example, someone who would describe themselves as “anxious” could reframe this as “sensitive.”

How would you describe your personality?

How would family and friends (whom you have a positive relationship with) describe you?

Think about a time recently where you were at your best in an educational, work or volunteer setting. How would you describe yourself in this situation?

How would peers and supervisors (whom you have a positive relationship with) describe you?

-

Who do you admire? This can either be a person you know or don't know personally. How would you describe them?

Review the list following of traits and highlight the ones that describe you that have not been highlighted in the previous activities:

Adaptable	Competitive	Efficient	Imaginative	Perceptive
Adventurous	Confident	Empathetic	Innovative	Practical
Agreeable	Conscientious	Energetic	Introverted	Reserved
Altruistic	Cooperative	Entrepreneurial	Intuitive	Resourceful
Ambitious	Creative	Extroverted	Inventive	Reliable
Analytical	Curious	Focused	Logical	Responsible
Assertive	Decisive	Friendly	Open minded	Sensitive
Autonomous	Determined	Helpful	Optimistic	Serious
Calm	Disciplined	Honest	Organized	Sociable
Cautious	Easygoing	Humble	Patient	Tenacious

Reflection

Review your answers. What traits best describe you? Choose eight. Enter these into your VISTA summary.

What types of work environments do your traits suggest would suit you?

What possible career choices do your traits suggest you would thrive in?

Going Deeper

Traditionally, psychologists have viewed personality as something stable and unchanging. Even when some psychologists have thought there was room for change, that change was limited. However, recent [research](#)⁵ suggests that our personality traits change more often than we thought. In fact, [research](#)⁶ suggests that over a 10-year period, our personalities can change a great deal despite people often under-estimating how much they can change. This is good news, as many people report wanting to change elements of their personality.

What are your thoughts about your personality? Do you believe it is fixed or that you can change it? If possible, what is one trait that you would like to develop? How would developing this trait contribute to your career success? Some ideas on how to make small shifts in your personality can be found [here](#).

Author, entrepreneur and psychologist [Dr. Benjamin Hardy](#)⁷, believes that the key to changing your personality is to imagine what your ideal future self would look like. He proposes that this vision will provide you with the motivation to do the hard work required to make the changes you want.

Here are the instructions for performing the ideal future self activity:

Visualize what your ideal self would look like in three years with the personality traits you want to have more of. Imagine that you have worked hard to achieve this. After you have a clear image, take about five to ten minutes to write about the details of the image. Be sure to write about how you are demonstrating the desired traits and with whom. After you have done this, write one simple action you can take to start moving you towards your ideal future self.

⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/personality-change#the-flexibility-of-personality>

⁶ Personality Isn't Permanent—Or Is It? The Answer Is No, by [Benjamin Hardy Ph.D.](#), Jun 12, 2020

⁷ <https://benjaminhardy.com/how-to-become-your-future-self/>, How to Become Your “Future Self”, by Benjamin Hardy

Attitude

When we think of having a positive attitude, most people think of being enthusiastic and optimistic. But a positive career attitude is much more than that. It includes being hopeful that you can develop a satisfying career, believing that you are in control of your career development and being interested in learning about possible career options. Another important element of a positive career attitude is a willingness to seek help from others when needed. This includes openness to suggestions and feedback that others might provide. Having a positive attitude can help you to transition from university to a successful career.

Review the statements below that describe facets of a positive career attitude. **For each statement, rate how well it describes you on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = “Does not describe me at all” and 7 = “Describes me very well”.** After you have rated yourself, explain why you chose your rating

I am excited about my future career.

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

My success in developing my career is determined by my efforts.

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

I am hopeful that I will find a career that is satisfying and fulfilling

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

I am open to seeking help from others.

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

I am hopeful that I will find a career that is satisfying and fulfilling.

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

I am curious to learn about different car career options.

How closely does this describe you on a scale of 1 -7?
Please explain why you chose your rating:

Reflection

Review your answers. Is there an overall pattern to your ratings (high, low or mixed)?

Were there any statements that you rated yourself in the 5 or 7 range? If so, how do you think this could positively impact your career development?

Were there any statements where you rated yourself in the 1 or 3 range? If so, how do you think this might negatively impact your career development?

Think of one or two individuals that you admire; these could be individuals you either know personally or that you have learned about. They can even include a character in a movie or novel that you admire. Take a few minutes and imagine that you are speaking with them and that they are giving you advice for your career. What would they say to you? Write this below and be as detailed as possible. Enter this into your VISTA.

Going Deeper

Review your self assessment and select one of the statements that you rated yourself lowest on and would like to improve. Think about what it would look like if this statement described you better. On the scale of 1 to 7, this might mean your rating would increase by 1 point. Now write your description of what this would look like below:

Next, identify possible actions you could take to improve yourself assessed rating. Examples of actions you could take are:

- Speak with a career development specialist or a mentor
- Read or watch videos about people who have overcome difficulties to develop a successful career
- Talk to people who are excited about their career
- Read books on motivation and optimism (see the additional resources section)
- Take an online course on happiness and motivation (Coursera and Udemy are great resources for this)

Next Steps

After completing the activities in this handout, you may feel clear and ready to start setting goals and making commitments. It is also possible you may instead be feeling confused and/or overwhelmed. Remember, this is only the start of your journey. Take the time you need to explore and reflect and take some pressure off by experimenting and trying new things.

Below is a list of a few things you can do next to help maintain your momentum:

1. Complete the “Generating Options” activity, on the next page
2. Create a short list of 10 - 20 things you want to have in your future career
3. Attend Career Services workshops
4. Meet with a Career Development Specialist to discuss your career questions and if applicable, to review your formal assessment results via [CareerLink⁸](#).

⁸ careerlink.ucalgary.ca

Generating Career Options

Holland Codes are a set of personality-based interest themes that were developed by psychologist John L. Holland in the 1970s. Dr. Holland suggested that people find the most satisfaction in work environments that match their preferences. This is known as the person environment fit model and is one of the most researched interest models to date.

Most people are a combination of two or three of the Holland interest themes. These two or three themes become your "Holland Code" which can be used to generate possible careers that might be a good fit for you using the [O*NET Online](#), a free online occupational database (United States).

The **O*NET Interest Profiler**, developed by the U.S. Labour Department, is a popular, valid assessment of the Holland themes which generates your Holland code, along with possible career options. It can be found at [My Next Move](#).

Using your assessment results, what are your three strongest Holland themes?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What careers generated from informal and formal (if applicable) Holland assessments appeal to you?

Another way to generate possible career options is to review the career paths associated with your major or program. You can review the following website: [Career Services Degree Profiles](#) which includes options for specific majors. Review the **Sample Job Titles** box and list occupations of interest below:
