



Overcoming Barriers to Decision Making

Take time right now to think about recent decisions you have made. Even small decisions like when to get up, whether or not to exercise, what television programs to watch, what to eat, who to choose as friends and how to spend your free time count.

Write down at least five decisions you made *this week*:

1. Waking up at 6:30
2. Not taking a break at work
3. Watching a news show
4. Not eating lunches
5. Not going to the gym

Essentially, your attitude shapes your behavior and your ability to make wise decisions. Attitudes are gut-level feelings and thoughts that guide our decision making. If you are aware of your attitudes and habits, you can enhance your daily effectiveness. If you believe you can, you can! And conversely, if you have a negative attitude, it will have an effect on your outcomes. Many people make decisions with limited knowledge or little sense of personal responsibility. They function on automatic pilot without considering the consequences. This stance may seem to simplify or accelerate the decision-making process but the results are often less than optimal. As you read the following sections, think about the process you followed in making the decisions you listed above.



Decision-Making Styles

The box below titled “Decision Making Styles” describes some of the ways people go about making decisions. Read it now, and then read “Meet Art” in the “Real Stories” feature on page 160. Try to determine what decision-making styles Art used.

Decision-Making Styles

Planning: “Weighing the facts.” Considering values, objectives, necessary information, alternatives, and consequences; a rational approach with a balance between thinking and feeling.

Impulsive: “Don’t look before you leap.” Little thought or examination; taking the first available alternative.

Intuitive: “It feels right.” Automatic, preconscious choice based on inner harmony.

Compliant: “Anything you say.” Nonassertive; letting someone else decide; following someone else’s plans.

Delaying: “Cross that bridge later.” Procrastination, avoidance, hoping someone or something will happen to avoid making a decision, postponing thought and action.

Fatalistic: “It’s all in the cards.” What will be will be; letting the environment decide; leaving it up to fate.

Agonizing: “What if?” Worrying that a decision will be the wrong one; getting lost in all the data; overwhelmed by analyzing alternatives.

Paralytic: “Can’t face up to it.” One step further than “what if”—complete indecision and fear; accepting responsibility but being unable to act on it.

Defaulting: “Playing it safe.” Choosing the alternative with the lowest level of risk.

We often use a combination of styles that can further complicate the decision-making process.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

1. Which of these approaches to decision making do you use most and least often?
2. Which would you like to use more often? Which would you like to avoid? Why?
3. Consider a current decision in progress (e.g., one you wrote at the beginning of this chapter). Think it through using several of these approaches. Which prove to be most useful?

Strategies for maintaining a positive attitude and managing stress are essential. Some of these techniques are listed in this "Success Strategies" feature.



SUCCESS strategies

Stress Management Techniques

- **Take time for yourself.** Treat yourself well and pay attention to your personal needs and enjoyment.
- **Maintain or start a realistic exercise schedule.** Participate in activities you enjoy that will also get you moving. Exercise is one of the best remedies for stress.
- **Socialize with friends and family.** Your support network can help you keep your stressors in perspective.
- **Remind yourself about personal strengths.** Some people find it reassuring to have a list of things they do well to give themselves a motivational boost when life becomes overwhelming.
- **Encourage a sense of humor.** A good healthy laugh is a great way to keep perspective on all the changes in your life.
- **Keep your eye on the goal!** Remember why you are working so hard and how good it will feel when you finally reach your goals.




Deciding on a Major

Some students seem to have no trouble choosing a major. They select a major that is compatible with their skills or interests. Many students, however, remain undecided until they are forced to choose. Often it is because they are unclear about their talents and preferences. If you are one of the undecided, you probably feel pressure and anxiety from peers, parents, and your college. Rather than choosing a specific major, start by choosing an area of general interest and just begin to lean slightly in that direction to imagine what that would be like. Think about your personal career profile—your values, personality, interests, and skills—to narrow down the choices of possible majors.



▲ If you require help making decisions about school or work, take advantage of campus resources such as counselors and advisers.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

Some of the best decisions are made effortlessly through the process of elimination. Once you have eliminated all the possible majors that do not fit, you will be left with a smaller number of potentially good choices.

Whenever you meet people who have interesting jobs, do your own research by asking them if they have a degree and in what major. Because many people have majored in subjects seemingly unrelated to their jobs, you will eventually have to decide whether you will choose a major closely related to an area of work that may be of interest (e.g., biology to become a biomedical technician) or if you should select a major that seems interesting to you at this time in your life (e.g., communications or psychology) without any specific job in mind. Research indicates that either strategy can lead you to a successful, satisfying career.

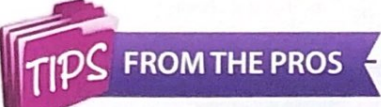
If all of your personal assessment does not help you identify a specific major, you might consider sampling some courses to see if they spark an interest. For example, you could take an introductory course in an area such as interior design, management, engineering, or film. It is better to sample courses in several areas during your initial semesters in college and research what those majors involve, than to choose one prematurely only to find out after several semesters and a great investment of time and money that you don't really like that field.

Remember, many occupations do not have a strong relationship to a specific college major. Employers are looking primarily for candidates who are well-rounded individuals and who have done well in college, no matter what their major. If you decide to choose a major not specifically related to your future career, identify a major that interests you and in which you can excel and enjoy the learning experience. Employers in the business world often focus more on knowledge and communication skills gained from extracurricular activities, internships, and work experience than on a student's specific major.



Choosing a Major

If you are still exploring possible majors, we will suggest an effective way to narrow your choices. First of all, historically, majors are simply a convenient way for colleges and universities to organize their courses of study. They were never primarily intended to help students make career choices. But most students assume that when they choose a major, they are also selecting a career. In some cases, a major such as engineering leads to a job as an engineer. In contrast, English or Sociology is an area of study that does not necessarily lead to a job as an English or Sociology teacher unless you are willing to continue on for a graduate degree. Here is one website that lists jobs related to a wide variety of college majors: <http://www.uncwil.edu/stuaff/career/majors/index.htm>.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

A report from the University of California–Irvine stated that “over 75% of students pursuing MBA degrees at top ranked schools completed undergraduate degrees in areas other than business.”