K12 ACADEMICS — CAREER EXPLORATION SERIES

# What Can I Do With This Major?

A guide for students & families — how college majors really connect to careers, why your major isn't your destiny, and how to turn a degree into a path you love.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

# The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

### YOUR MAJOR OPENS DOORS — NOT JUST ONE

One of the biggest myths in college is that your **major locks in your career**. For most fields, it doesn't — employers hire for skills, and graduates end up in a huge range of jobs. This guide walks **ten steps** to connect a major to real careers (and covers the important exceptions).

**General guidance.** Career outcomes and requirements vary and change. This guide teaches how to think about majors and careers; for current data and specific licensed-field requirements, check live sources like BLS and each field's licensing board.

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STEP 01 OF 10

# Your Major Isn't Your Destiny

WHAT TO KNOW

For most fields, your major **opens many doors, not one**. History majors work in law, business, and tech; biology majors work in health, research, sales, and policy. A major is a starting point, not a life sentence.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Many doors | Skills over titles | A starting point |
| --- | --- | --- |
| not one path | what you can do | not a sentence |

HOW TO HELP

Relax the pressure: choose a major you'll **engage with and do well in**, knowing it opens a wide range of careers, not a single predetermined one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Studies consistently show most people work in fields **unrelated to their major** — and do just fine.

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STEP 02 OF 10

# Employers Hire Skills, Not Just Majors

## WHAT TO KNOW

Outside a few technical fields, employers care most about **skills and potential**: communication, problem-solving, teamwork, writing, and the ability to learn. Your major builds these — which is why it travels so far.

## BY THE NUMBERS

| Skills first | Potential | Major = evidence |
| --- | --- | --- |
| communication, problem-solving | can you learn & grow? | of skills, not a lock |

## HOW TO HELP

Focus on the **transferable skills** your major builds, and learn to *name* them — that's what turns "I majored in X" into a job.

## GOOD TO KNOW

"What can you do?" matters more to employers than "what did you major in?" — for most roles.

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STEP 03 OF 10

# Identify Your Transferable Skills

WHAT TO KNOW

Every major builds portable skills. A humanities major builds **writing, research, and analysis**; a science major builds **data and problem-solving**; any major builds **time management and communication**. These transfer everywhere.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Every major | Name them | They transfer |
| --- | --- | --- |
| builds real skills | research, analysis, data | across careers |

HOW TO HELP

Make a list of the **skills your major develops**, and gather evidence (projects, papers, presentations) — this is the raw material of every résumé and interview.

GOOD TO KNOW

The skill of "learning hard things" — which any real major builds — is one employers value most.

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STEP 04 OF 10

# Explore the Career Paths

WHAT TO KNOW

For any major, there are **direct paths** (a chemistry major becoming a chemist) and many **adjacent paths** (that same major in sales, teaching, patent law, or policy). The adjacent ones are often where most graduates land.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Direct paths | Adjacent paths | Explore both |
| --- | --- | --- |
| the obvious ones | often the majority | far more options |

HOW TO HELP

Look up **"what can I do with a major in ___"** pages (most universities publish them) and O*NET — you'll find dozens of directions per major.

GOOD TO KNOW

The obvious career for a major is usually the **least** common destination — explore the adjacent paths.

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STEP 05 OF 10

# Know the Real Exceptions

WHAT TO KNOW

Some careers **do** require a specific major or program: **nursing, engineering, accounting (CPA), teaching, architecture, physical therapy, and pre-professional tracks** for medicine and law. If you want these, the major matters.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Licensed fields | Examples | Plan ahead |
| --- | --- | --- |
| need the right major | nursing, engineering, CPA | requirements are strict |

HOW TO HELP

If you're aiming at a **licensed or technical field**, research its exact degree and licensing requirements early — these are the real exceptions to "major doesn't matter."

WATCH OUT

Wanting to be a nurse, engineer, or accountant? The major genuinely matters — confirm the accredited path before you enroll.

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STEP 06 OF 10

# Combine Major + Experience

## WHAT TO KNOW

What you do **alongside** your major often matters more than the major itself. **Internships, part-time work, projects, a minor, and campus involvement** are what turn a degree into a job offer.

## BY THE NUMBERS

| Internships | Projects & work | A minor |
| --- | --- | --- |
| the biggest lever | real evidence | adds a dimension |

## HOW TO HELP

Pair your major with **internships, real projects, and experience** in the direction you're curious about — employers hire the whole package, not the transcript.

## GOOD TO KNOW

A history major with two great internships beats a "practical" major with none — experience is the multiplier.

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STEP 07 OF 10

# Research Real Outcomes

WHAT TO KNOW

Don't guess — **look at where graduates actually go**. Many colleges publish outcome data by major, and O*NET and BLS show real career and pay information. Use current data, not old assumptions.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Outcome data | O*NET / BLS | Current only |
| --- | --- | --- |
| by major, from colleges | real career info | it changes yearly |

HOW TO HELP

Check your college's **outcomes by major** and BLS/O*NET data — and talk to alumni and the career center about where a major really leads.

WATCH OUT

Ignore viral "useless majors" lists — look at real, current outcome data for the specific program you're considering.

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STEP 08 OF 10

# Don’t Pick a Major for Money Alone

WHAT TO KNOW

Salary matters, but choosing a major **you’ll disengage from** to chase a paycheck often backfires — you do better in fields you’re drawn to. Balance interest, aptitude, and market reality.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Interest | Aptitude | Market |
| --- | --- | --- |
| you’ll do better | play to strengths | factor it in, don’t obsess |

HOW TO HELP

Weigh **interest, strengths, and job market together** — a field you’ll thrive in usually beats a “safe” one you’ll dread.

GOOD TO KNOW

The “highest-paying major” is worthless if you switch out or burn out — fit and follow-through pay off.

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STEP 09 OF 10

# It’s OK to Be Undecided

WHAT TO KNOW

Starting **undecided or changing your major** is normal — most students do one or both. Early general courses, advising, and exploration help you choose well, not late.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Undecided is fine | Changing is normal | Explore early |
| --- | --- | --- |
| most explore | very common | use gen-ed courses |

HOW TO HELP

If you’re unsure, **use your early courses and the career center to explore** — an intentional, informed choice beats a rushed one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Switching majors once is common and usually costs little if you do it early — it’s part of figuring it out.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

# Make a Plan to Explore

WHAT TO KNOW

Turn this into action: use the tools around you. **The career center, advisors, alumni, informational interviews, and internships** exist to help you connect major to future — most students underuse them.

BY THE NUMBERS

| Career center | Advisors & alumni | Take a step |
| --- | --- | --- |
| free & underused | real guidance | this month |

HOW TO HELP

Book a **career-center appointment, talk to someone in a field you're curious about, and line up one experience** — exploration beats worry.

GOOD TO KNOW

The career center is **free and expert** — and most students barely use it. Go early and often.

QUICK REFERENCE

# Majors Don’t Map 1-to-1 to Careers

A few examples of how one major opens many directions — illustrating that a degree is a foundation, not a single job.

### English / History / Philosophy

Law, publishing, marketing, teaching, HR, tech (UX/content), nonprofits, business, and government — strong writing and analysis travel widely.

### Biology / Chemistry

Healthcare, research, lab and industry roles, science sales and communication, policy, patent law, teaching, and environmental fields.

### Psychology

HR, counseling (with grad school), marketing/UX research, social services, business, and healthcare — people-and-data skills apply broadly.

### Business / Economics

Finance, marketing, management, consulting, entrepreneurship, analytics, and government — plus adjacent paths across nearly every industry.

### Licensed fields (the exception)

Nursing, engineering, accounting (CPA), teaching, architecture, and pre-med/pre-law tracks **do** require specific majors or programs — plan those early.

A MAJOR IS A FOUNDATION

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