



CAREER VISION

Five Fun Ways to Test-Drive a Career

Buying a car? With so many options to choose from, your to-do list is probably a mile long. You've got to figure out what type of vehicle is best for you and investigate which makes and models offer the options you want. No doubt you'll take your favorites out for a spin before making your big purchase. After all, buying a car is an important decision; you don't want to make a wrong turn.

The same is true for other big decisions, like choosing a career. So, how do you test-drive an occupation before moving full speed ahead? Follow these directions.

Check under the Hood

Don't shift into drive until you know where you're going. Start by looking inside yourself. Explore your interests, values, personality, and, most of all, your aptitudes (natural talents). Look for career options that could be a good match for you, based on what you've learned about yourself.

Kick the Tires

Gather information about the careers you're considering. Read about occupations on career information websites sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, such as [My Next Move](#), [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), [O*NET](#), and [CareerOneStop](#).

Learn about the job tasks, skills, job outlook, salary range, career path, and training / educational requirements. Talk with people who work in the occupations and industries you're considering.

Take it for a Spin

Based on what you've learned from your research, decide which occupation(s) you want to "test drive". There are many great ways you can explore careers through experiential activities, five of which are described below.

Which of these are best for you? That depends on where you're starting from. For instance, if you're a high school student, get a summer job, enroll in a career-themed summer camp, or shadow someone who works in an occupational field that sparks your



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interests. If you're in college, job shadowing, volunteerism and internships can give you a better perspective as you navigate your path from college to career.

- **Job shadow.** Observe “a day in the life” of the employee in the workplace. Ask yourself, “Can I see myself doing these tasks, working with these types of people, in this kind of work environment?”

It's best to do several job shadows to really understand the position as well as the differences between companies and workplaces. For instance, if you're considering a career in architecture shadow an architect who owns a small practice designing luxury homes and another who works for a large firm building retirement communities. Both are architects, yet their work environments (and some work responsibilities) are very different. Which is the better fit for you?

- **Secure an internship or co-op position** working in your desired career and industry. Typically, an internship is a single, multi-week work experience, most often for college students. Co-ops for students tend to be longer-term, spanning several semesters, with related classwork interspersed throughout the schedule.

College students hold most of the available internships. But more opportunities are becoming available for high school students.

- **Volunteer with a non-profit organization** for a project or activity where you can learn about the world of work and job tasks. Not sure where to look, visit idealist.org and click the "Volunteer Opportunities" tab. Also check out VolunteerMatch.org.
- **Get a summer or part-time job** in a work environment that aligns with your career interests. Say, for example, you're thinking about becoming a veterinarian. Look for an after-school job as a kennel worker in a vet's office or an animal shelter.
- **Take part in an academic summer camp program** that provides teens with hands-on exposure to occupational fields and the college majors that support them. The following websites provide information on a wide assortment of academic and career-themed camps: The Camp Channel, Allen's Guide, My Summer Camps, and The Sloan Career Cornerstone Center. And contact with your local community college about their teen summer camp offerings.

Note: Career Vision cannot endorse any programs in particular and encourages parents to check references.



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Green Light

What did your test-drive tell you? Is this career a possible fit for you? Using the information you've gathered along the way and through ongoing exploration about yourself and the world of work, you'll be ready to choose your course with confidence.