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Choosing a Major

It's the first day of class in introductory psychology. The professor asks the class the following question: "What is psychology?" Here are some typical student responses:

"Psychology is the study of the mind."

"Psychology helps people solve problems."

"Psychology looks at the things inside us that make us do what we do."

Then the professor asks: "What does someone trained in psychology do?"

"Studies the mind and thought processes of an individual to find causes of a problem that cannot be explained by physiology."

"Works as a doctor who does not use medication or drugs to look at issues that cause a person to experience disharmony in life, whether difficulty in personal relations, sleep disruption, or behavioral problems."

"Gets training in scientific and social analysis to help patients suffering from mental disorders and/or problems by listening."

Are these student responses accurate? Yes and no. Psychology is the study of mind and behavior and it permits us to help people who are experiencing problems. However, the discipline of psychology encompasses much more than therapy, as we will discuss throughout this book. Each of the roles described above are held by psychologists, professionals with doctoral training in psychology.

The final question the professor asks her class is: "What does someone with a bachelor's degree in psychology do?" This question is often met with silence. A student might cautiously respond, "Be a therapist?" Another student might call out, "Get an MBA" or "Go to graduate school!" and the class might laugh nervously. Sure, these are humorous responses, but are they accurate depictions of the average bachelor's degree recipient in psychology? Nope.

A graduate degree is required to become a therapist, yet most students who major in psychology do *not* go on to graduate school. Nearly all psychology students are asked repeatedly, "What can you do with a psychology degree?" Yet they are often unaware of their career options and unable to answer career-related questions with confidence. The authors of this book faced that very question a seemingly endless number of times (and still do!). We found our answer to that question, and this book is intended to help you find yours. In this chapter we discuss the diverse field of psychology and how to figure out if psychology is the major for you.

What Is Psychology?

Many people first become acquainted with the field of psychology informally through their everyday experience. Turn on the television to see a psychologist

on a daytime talk show explaining how parents can help their troubled teens. Change the channel and you might come across a fictional drama depicting a psychologist conducting therapy across from a patient sitting in a comfortable chair or perhaps laying back on a sofa. Open a magazine and you may find an article written by a psychologist about mindfulness and the benefits of becoming more aware of your daily existence. Psychology has ingrained itself into American pop culture. But how much do you really know about psychology and the work of those trained in psychology? You may be surprised to learn that the field of psychology extends beyond therapy, self-help books, and parenting advice.

What is psychology, then? Psychology is the scientific study of behavior—anything an animal or a person does, feels, or thinks. Psychologists are scientists who apply precise methods of observation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation to learn about what makes people and animals behave like they do. Psychologists generate hypotheses, or educated guesses, about what might cause a particular behavior or phenomenon, and they conduct careful scientific research to test those hypotheses. The field of psychology examines interactions among the brain, the environment, psychological functioning, and behavior. Topics of psychological study include social relationships, the brain and the chemicals that influence it, vision, human development, the causes of normative and atypical behavior, and much more.

Psychology is a rich field with many opportunities. A wide range of topics fall under the umbrella of psychology and each topic is its own specialized field of study. Table 1.1 presents an overview of the most common specialties within psychology that we will discuss in this book.

The many subdisciplines within psychology present varied career opportunities. Each chapter within this book examines one or more subdisciplines within psychology to provide a taste of the many fields in which people with interests in psychology (perhaps, like you) may work.

Careers in Psychology With Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees

The most important theme of this book is that there are many career opportunities for psychology students at all levels of education. Here we examine degree options and present a brief overview of the types of careers available with each. We examine these options in more depth throughout this book.

Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

The bachelor's degree, a BA (bachelor of arts) or BS (bachelor of science) degree, typically is the culmination of 4 years of undergraduate study. Whether a student earns a BA or BS often depends on the university he or she attends, rather than the program's rigor. Psychology students are awarded BA degrees in

TABLE 1.1 ● Subfields in Psychology

Subfield	Emphasis
Behavioral Neuroscience	Interrelation of brain and behavior
Clinical Psychology	Study and treatment of emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems or disorders
Cognitive Psychology	How we think; specifically, how we take in information, store it, learn, and use it to make decisions
Community Psychology	Interactions between individuals and their communities; how communities influence individuals as well as how individuals influence their communities
Counseling Psychology	Study and promotion of normative function and healthy adaptation
Developmental Psychology	Human development; the ways in which people grow, change, and stay the same, across the lifespan
Experimental Psychology	Scientific methodology and research
Forensic Psychology	Applying psychology to inform and study legal issues
Health Psychology	Study of psychological, biological, and social influences on health and wellness
Human Factors Psychology	People's interactions with machines, environments, and products
Industrial-Organizational Psychology	Application of psychological principles and scientific research findings to the workplace
Quantitative Psychology and Psychometrics	Devising techniques for acquiring, measuring, and analyzing information and human characteristics
School Psychology	Fostering the intellectual, emotional, educational, and social development of children in school settings
Social Psychology	People's interactions with each other and the social environment

some universities and BS degrees in others, yet their education usually is identical. Most students who earn bachelor's degrees enter the work world after graduation, working in business and human service settings. Some enter graduate school to earn a master's degree or doctorate. A critical theme of this book is that a bachelor's degree prepares students for a wide range of careers. Graduate study entails more specialized training but is not needed to have a successful career.

Master's Degree in Psychology

The master's degree is a graduate degree that typically requires 2 years of study beyond the bachelor's degree. There are many different types of master's degrees, most commonly the MA (master of arts) and MS (master of science). Requirements for service-oriented fields such as clinical, counseling, and school psychology usually include practical experience in an applied setting, which may span longer than the 2 years of coursework.

What can you do with a master's degree? Depending on the program and curriculum, a master's degree enables graduates to: (a) teach psychology in high school (other certification may be needed); (b) become more competitive for jobs in government and industry; (c) practice industrial/organizational psychology in business settings; (d) obtain certification to practice school psychology (depending on the state); and (e) obtain certification as a counselor or marriage and family therapist and practice counseling. Students who are interested in graduate study for the sole purpose of becoming a therapist should carefully consider a master's degree, as it is a quicker, cheaper alternative to a doctoral degree that can fulfill certification requirements to practice. Can master's trained individuals provide effective therapy? Studies have suggested no convincing differences in therapeutic outcomes as a function of the practitioner's level of training (Montgomery, Kunik, Wilson, Stanley, & Weiss, 2010). A far greater number of students pursue master's degrees than doctoral degrees in psychology.

Doctoral Degree in Psychology

A doctoral degree provides a greater range of flexibility and autonomy than the master's degree, but it requires a greater commitment of time and money. A doctoral degree usually requires 5 to 7 years of graduate work to complete (and for some individuals as many as 8 or 9 years). In clinical, counseling, and school psychology, the requirement for the doctoral degree generally includes a year or more of internship or supervised experience.

Why do students seek doctoral degrees? Generally, students pursue doctoral degrees for any of the following reasons: (a) to teach college; (b) to conduct research in a university or private organization in industry or business; (c) to practice clinical psychology without supervision; or (d) to engage in a variety of consulting roles allowing autonomy. There are two types of doctoral degrees in psychology; each provides training that prepares students for specific professional activities. The PhD refers to the doctor of philosophy. Like the master's degree, the PhD is awarded in many fields. It is a research degree that culminates in a dissertation based on original research. PhD graduates may work as researchers and as practitioners in a variety of settings. The PsyD refers to the doctor of psychology. It is offered only in clinical, counseling, and school psychology and is considered a professional degree, much like a JD (doctor of jurisprudence, a lawyer's degree). The PsyD emphasizes practice; students

become expert practitioners but do not become researchers. The EdD (doctor of education), a third doctoral option for psychology students, is not as popular as the PhD and PsyD. The EdD is offered in departments of education, rather than psychology. Typically, EdD graduates work in the field of education and educational psychology as researchers, administrators, and professors. We discuss graduate degrees in more depth in Chapter 15.

Why Major in Psychology?

Psychology is consistently among the top five most popular bachelor's degrees awarded each year. In the 2015–2016 academic year, nearly 117,000 students earned bachelor's degrees in psychology (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). Why are so many students attracted to psychology? Psychology courses cover a range of fascinating topics, such as how we think, learn, use our memory, feel emotions, cope with adversity, and change throughout our lives. Much of what we study in psychology is directly relevant to our everyday life. We all seek to understand human behavior and the environment around us. Moreover, psychology students develop a host of transferrable skills that are useful across many settings.

Obtain Transferable Skills

The psychology major prepares graduates for "lifelong learning, thinking, and action" (McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991, p. 600). Like other liberal arts majors, psychology students learn valuable thinking and communication skills. Psychology education, however, is unique because it emphasizes learning and applying principles of psychology to understand human behavior. Psychology majors develop a host of transferrable skills that prepare them for a variety of careers.

Knowledge of Human Behavior

The content of psychology, knowledge about human behavior, is intrinsically useful. Undergraduate education in psychology is intended to expose students to the major facts, theories, and issues in the discipline. Understanding human behavior entails learning about physiology, perception, cognition, emotion, development, and more. Consequently, psychology majors construct a broad knowledge base that serves as the conceptual framework for lifelong learning about human behavior as well as the capacity to apply their understanding in everyday situations.

Information Acquisition and Synthesis Skills

The knowledge base of psychology is constantly expanding. Successful psychology students learn how to gather and synthesize information. They learn

how to use a range of sources, including the library, computerized databases, and the Internet, to gather information about an area of interest. More important, psychology students learn how to weigh and integrate information into a coherent and persuasive argument. In addition, successful psychology students apply their advanced understanding of cognition and memory to enhance their own processing and recall of information.

Research Methods and Statistical Skills

Psychology students learn how to apply the scientific method to address questions about human behavior. They learn how to identify a problem, devise a hypothesis, choose and carry out scientific methods to gather information about the problem, conduct statistical analyses to evaluate a hypothesis, and interpret data summaries to devise a conclusion. In other words, psychology students become able to pose and answer questions about human behavior and experience.

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Exposure to the diverse perspectives within psychology trains students to think flexibly and to accept some ambiguity. Introductory psychology students often ask for the "right" answer; they soon learn that answers often aren't black or white, but many shades of gray. Psychology students acquire skills in thinking critically about complex problems. They learn to weigh multiple sources of information, determine the degree of support for each position, and make a reasoned decision about which position has more merit and how a problem is best solved.

Reading, Writing, and Speaking Skills

Psychology students develop reading, writing, and presentation skills for effective oral and written communication. They learn how to think critically about what they read, as well as comprehend and present arguments from a psychological standpoint. Moreover, their understanding of human behavior aids students in constructing arguments that are easily comprehended by others. Information derived from psychology regarding cognition, memory, listening, persuasion, and communication enhances psychology majors' ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

Psychology students develop the ability to communicate their ideas and use their knowledge of human behavior to devise persuasive arguments. Successful students can lead, collaborate with others, and work effectively in groups. Psychology students are primed to be effective communicators because they are trained to be sensitive to issues of culture, race, class, and ethnicity. Students of

psychology also develop intrapersonal awareness, or self-knowledge. They are able to monitor and manage their own behavior, which is critical in succeeding in academic and interpersonal tasks.

Adaptability

Psychology students quickly learn that the perfect experiment is an unattainable goal toward which all researchers strive. Students learn how to design the best research studies possible, given limited resources. The capacity to evaluate and adapt to changing circumstances is highly valued in a volatile economy and workplace.

All of these skills emphasized by undergraduate education in psychology will help you grow into a well-rounded and educated person who is marketable in a variety of fields. The psychology major satisfies the objectives of a liberal arts education, which include critical and analytical thinking, independent thinking, leadership skills, communication skills, understanding how to learn, being able to see all sides of an issue, and understanding human diversity (Roche, 2010). However, it is the training in research design and statistical analysis, as well as human behavior, that makes the psychology major unique among liberal arts degrees.

Develop Psychological Literacy

The transferrable skills developed with education in psychology enable graduates to view the world more complexly. Sure, they understand facts and theories about human behavior, but their competence goes well beyond memorized facts. Students become able to discriminate relevant from trivial information. They learn how to find and pull together—what professors often refer to as *synthesize*—information from a variety of sources. Psychology majors develop psychological literacy, the ability to apply psychological knowledge in everyday life to improve lives, their own and others' (American Psychological Association, 2013; Cranney, Botwood, & Morris, 2012; McGovern et al., 2010). Individuals who are psychologically literate:

- Have basic knowledge and vocabulary of psychology
- Value and apply critical thinking and creative problem solving
- Apply psychological principles to address issues at home, work, and in the community
- Act ethically
- Can gather and effectively evaluate information
- Can use technology effectively
- Can communicate effectively with different audiences

- Demonstrate sensitivity, understand, and foster respect of diversity
- Are self-reflective

Psychological literacy develops as individuals move from learning facts about psychology to applying bodies of knowledge and modes of thinking. The undergraduate psychology curriculum is designed to provide students with opportunities to develop psychological literacy.

Careers for Psychology Majors

The majority of students who graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology do not go to graduate school. It is estimated that about one-quarter of psychology undergraduate degree recipients attend graduate school immediately after graduation (Goldstein, 2010). Instead, psychology baccalaureates head into the job market and find success. A recent study of bachelor's degree recipients found that about 2.9% of psychology bachelor's degree recipients age 25 to 29 were unemployed in 2016, compared with the national average of 3.1% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Moreover, between 2010 and 2016, the unemployment rate of psychology majors dropped 3% (from 5.9% in 2010).

Skills and Career Settings

The skills that employers seek can be categorized into two sets of competencies: *research skills* and *interpersonal skills* (human service skills, commonly referred to as "people skills"). Employers seek research skills such as the ability to identify problems and locate, analyze, and apply information to solve problems, carry out research, conduct statistical analyses, and write reports. Interpersonal skills include the relational, communication, and self-management skills we have discussed, such as understanding of psychological principles, group dynamics, and persuasion. The psychology curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop and integrate both sets of skills, setting psychology majors apart from other graduates. All jobs entail both types of skills but in differing degrees. Your career options are varied if you think creatively and focus on these skills.

Psychology degree recipients work in a variety of settings. Surveys of working adults age 24 to 54 with bachelor's degrees suggest that about one-third work in human service settings (Julian, 2012). Nearly 40% work in business, management, and human resource positions (including advertising, marketing, finance, and public relations). About 20% work in sales and the remaining 10% to 15% work in education. Table 1.2 lists common job titles psychology majors have obtained after graduation, by setting. It is not a complete list; many other opportunities are out there waiting for you. Although the jobs are grouped by the degree to which they emphasize research and interpersonal skills, remember that both sets of skills, in differing ratios, are needed for all jobs.

TABLE 1.2 ● Positions Obtained by Psychology Majors

Business and Academic Settings	Social and Human Service Settings
Administrative assistant	Activities coordinator
Admissions evaluator	Administration
Advertising sales representative	Animal trainer
Advertising trainee	Army mental health specialist
Affirmative action officer	Behavioral specialist
Alumni director	Career counselor
Benefits manager	Case worker
Claims specialist	Childcare provider/worker/supervisor
Community relations officer	Child protection worker
Computer programmer	Clinical coordinator
Customer relations	Coach
Data management	Community outreach worker
Department manager	Conservation officer
Disability case manager	Correctional treatment specialist
Disability policy worker	Corrections officer
Employee counselor	Counselor assistant
Employee recruitment	Crisis intervention counselor
Employee relations specialist	Data management
Financial aid counselor	Dietician
Fundraiser	Employee health maintenance program specialist
Health care facility administrator	Employment counselor
Host/hostess	Group home attendant
Human resources coordinator/ manager/specialist	Mental health assistant
Information specialist	Mental retardation aide
Job analyst	Occupational therapist
Lab coordinator	Parent/family education
Labor relations manager/specialist	Patient resources and reimbursement agent
Laboratory assistant	Police officer
Loan officer	Preschool teacher
Management analyst	

(Continued)

TABLE 1.2 ● (Continued)

Business and Academic Settings	Social and Human Service Settings
Management trainee	Probation officer
Marketing	Program manager
News writer	Psychiatric aide/attendant
Occupational analyst	Psychiatric technician
Personal recruiter	Recreation leader
Personnel manager/officer	Recreation supervisor
Polygraph examiner	Recreational therapist
Product and services research	Rehabilitation counselor
Programs/events coordination	Residence counselor
Public opinion surveyor	Social service assistant
Public relations	Social worker
Purchasing agent	Social worker assistant
Real estate agent	Substance abuse counselor
Research assistant	Veterans contact representative
Retail sales management	Veterans counselor
Sales representative	Victims' advocate
Special features writing/reporting	Vocational training teacher
Staff training and development	Volunteer coordinator
Systems analyst	Youth counselor
Teaching assistant	
Technical writer	
Trainer/training officer	
Writer	

Source: American Psychological Association (2013) and Appleby (2016).

Occupational Outlook Handbook

The U.S. federal government recognizes nearly 1,000 different occupations. How many can you name? How do you learn about these opportunities? Your first stop is the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor and available online as a searchable database (http://www.bls.gov/ooh/). The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides information about hundreds of careers. Details include training, job outlook, wages, related careers, as well

as websites to help you explore further. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* can help you identify job titles that you can Google to learn more about.

The U.S. Department of Labor also sponsors a search tool for career exploration and job analysis: O*NET OnLine (http://www.onetonline.org/). O*NET includes much of the information from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* as well as information on key attributes of workers. Most notably, job seekers can search for jobs by skills, interests, knowledge, work contexts, and other factors. As you read through the chapters of this book, take a moment to review O*NET entries for careers that you find interesting. It's an excellent source of information that can help you decide if a particular career is for you and can assist you in devising a plan to achieve your goals.

Finally, the U.S. Department of Labor's CareerOneStop (http://www.careeronestop.org) and California CareerZone (http://www.cacareerzone.org) are two other sources for free online tools, information, and resources on a broad variety of employment paths. Each site provides self-assessments, career videos, salary, and education requirements to help users determine their fit to specific jobs based on their skills, interests, and values. These are useful places to begin exploring careers, especially for students who are just beginning the career search process and prefer access to a very broad selection of options (Golding, Lippert, & Malik, 2018).

As we will discuss throughout this book, a bachelor's degree in psychology offers a range of opportunities. Is the psychology major right for you? The first step in choosing a major—any major—is to understand yourself.

Understand Yourself and Choose a Major via Self-Assessment

Who are you? Your ability to answer this question will shape your life, although your answer to this question will likely shift over your lifetime. Choosing a college major that's right for you requires that you understand yourself and identify your career goals. Self-assessment is the process of examining your skills, abilities, interests, values, and experiences. Understand yourself and you'll be more likely to choose a major that fits you. It's easier to succeed in college when you like what you're studying.

How do you determine your interests and skills? The following written exercise can help you think about what you like, what you do well, and what's important to you. Writing out your answers will permit you to put them aside to review later, even years later, to consider how your views have changed (or not).

Identify Your Skills

What do you know about your abilities? What are you good at? One way to gain insight into your abilities is to write an experiential essay or journal entry. Write about any times you can think of when you encountered a problem and took action to solve it. Write freely, letting all of your achievements flow onto

the page. Don't edit. This assignment is for your eyes only. The problems that you list don't have to be huge or life-changing. Even learning to play a song on your guitar or managing your annoying roommate are accomplishments. In other words, the successes that you list can be small, and they don't have to be acknowledged by anyone else. This is your list composed of what is important to *you*. Write as much as you can, and don't stop when it becomes challenging. Instead, probe further. Even writing about the difficulty of thinking about additional accomplishments might jog your memory.

Once you have completed your list of accomplishments, take a close look at it and analyze the skills needed for each accomplishment. For example, sorting out problems with your roommate taps interpersonal skills. Also identify specific skills that you've learned, like the ability to use computer programming languages or speak a non-native language. List your skills on a separate page. After you have considered all of your accomplishments and noted the related skills and abilities, review the skills listed in Table 1.3. Check off additional skills as needed.

Review your list and the skills you have checked. Can you identify examples of how each skill has developed or how you've used it to achieve a goal? Based on your consideration, what are your top three to five skills? Why? These skills are your strengths. Next, consider the other skills you checked. Do any of these skills need further development? Which of these skills do you prefer using? Why? Do you dislike engaging in any of your skills? Why? Are there any skills that you don't currently have but would like to develop?

Identify Your Values

Review your list of accomplishments and skills. Which are most personally relevant to you? Why? Which are most satisfying? Identifying the skills and achievements you cherish will help you understand your interests and values, which can help you in choosing a major.

Next, consider your values in more depth. Values are the things that are important to you, that you see as desirable in life (Table 1.4). Spend time thinking through your priorities. How do you define success? What do you believe is important in life? What experiences do you hope to have? What do you hope *never* to experience? How should your work mesh with your personal life? Is personal time and flexibility important to you? Is financial success important? Job security? Would you rather live in a city or in a rural area? Would you like a family (and if so, large or small)? While choosing a major does not tie you to a particular career, it is useful to consider your career aspirations and life goals in order to seek the educational experiences that will prepare you for them. What do you want out of life?

As you evaluate careers and life choices, return to these notes to remind yourself of your perspective on yourself—your values and skills. It's easy to lose focus on our own values when an opportunity arises. You will encounter many opportunities throughout life. Not all promising opportunities will be right for you. You are more likely to identify and choose opportunities that will make you happy if you keep your own perspective in mind.

TABLE 1.3 ● Assess Your Skills

- ❑ Acting or performing
- ❑ Administering
- ❑ Advising
- ❑ Analyzing data
- ❑ Applying
- ❑ Arranging social functions
- ❑ Budgeting
- ❑ Calculating
- ❑ Checking for accuracy
- ❑ Coaching
- ❑ Collecting money
- ❑ Communicating
- ❑ Compiling statistics
- ❑ Conceptualizing
- ❑ Controlling
- ❑ Coordinating events
- ❑ Counseling
- ❑ Creating new ideas
- ❑ Decision-making
- ❑ Designing
- ❑ Dispensing information
- ❑ Dramatizing ideas or problems
- ❑ Editing
- ❑ Entertaining people
- ❑ Evaluating
- ❑ Expressing feelings
- ❑ Finding information
- ❑ Fundraising
- ❑ Generalizing
- ❑ Goal setting
- ❑ Handling complaints
- ❑ Identifying problems
- ❑ Illustrating
- ❑ Implementing
- ❑ Improving
- ❑ Initiating with strangers
- ❑ Innovating
- ❑ Interpreting
- ❑ Interviewing
- ❑ Investigating problems
- ❑ Judging
- ❑ Leading
- ❑ Listening to others
- ❑ Managing
- ❑ Measuring
- ❑ Mediating
- ❑ Motivating
- ❑ Navigating
- ❑ Negotiating
- ❑ Observing
- ❑ Organizing
- ❑ Painting
- ❑ Persuading
- ❑ Photographing
- ❑ Planning
- ❑ Problem solving
- ❑ Programming
- ❑ Promoting
- ❑ Proofreading
- ❑ Questioning
- ❑ Reading
- ❑ Reasoning
- ❑ Recording
- ❑ Record keeping

(Continued)

TABLE 1.3 ● (Continued)

- ❑ Recruiting
- ❑ Researching
- ❑ Scheduling
- ❑ Selling
- ❑ Singing
- ❑ Sketching
- ❑ Speaking
- ❑ Supervising
- ❑ Synthesizing information
- ❑ Teaching or training
- ❑ Team building
- ❑ Thinking logically
- ❑ Tolerating ambiguity
- ❑ Translating
- ❑ Troubleshooting
- ❑ Visualizing
- ❑ Writing

TABLE 1.4 ● Values

Service	**Adventure**	**Leadership**
❑ Active in community	❑ Excitement	❑ Influence people and opinions
❑ Help others	❑ Risk taking	❑ Supervise others
❑ Help society and the world	❑ Travel	❑ Power, authority, and control
❑ Work with and help people in a meaningful way	❑ Drama	❑ Make decisions
	❑ Exciting tasks	❑ Direct work of others
	❑ Good health	❑ Leadership
	❑ Travel	❑ Coordinate people, data, and stuff
		❑ Hiring and firing responsibility
Creativity	**Relationships**	**Financial Reward**
❑ Aesthetic appreciation	❑ Organization affiliation	❑ High earnings
❑ Artistic creativity	❑ Work friendships	❑ Commission-based work
❑ Creative expression	❑ Family	❑ Material possessions
❑ Develop and express new ideas	❑ Work with others, teamwork	❑ Very high salary
❑ No routine	❑ Public contract	❑ Extra pay for extra work
❑ Work on own or as creative team	❑ Friendly work atmosphere	❑ Long hours
❑ Flexible working conditions	❑ Work with people you like	

Prestige ❑ Recognition ❑ Status ❑ Respect stature ❑ Professional position ❑ Responsibility ❑ Responsibility and pay are related to education and experience	**Meaning and Purpose** ❑ Spirituality ❑ Personal fulfillment ❑ Work related to ideals ❑ Make a difference ❑ Express inner-self in work ❑ Integrate belief system into work	**Variety** ❑ Changing work responsibilities ❑ Diversity of tasks ❑ New projects ❑ Varied tasks ❑ Meet new people ❑ Range of settings and situations
Security ❑ Stability ❑ Predictably ❑ Low pressure ❑ Job assurance ❑ Guaranteed annual salary in secure, stable company ❑ Retirement benefits ❑ Live in familiar location	**Independence** ❑ Time freedom ❑ Autonomy ❑ Work alone ❑ Set own pace and working conditions, flexible hours ❑ Choose team or work alone	**Physical Activity** ❑ Outdoor work ❑ Physical challenge ❑ Physical fitness ❑ No desk job
Intellectual Challenge ❑ Address challenging problems ❑ Pursue/obtain knowledge ❑ Constant updating of information and ability to deal with new ideas ❑ Work with creative and intellectually stimulating people ❑ Acknowledged expert ❑ Research and development	**Productivity** ❑ Competence and proficiency ❑ Fast-paced work ❑ Efficient work habits ❑ Hard work is rewarded ❑ Quality and productivity rewarded by rapid advancement	**Advancement** ❑ Promotions ❑ Work under pressure ❑ Competition ❑ Limited only by energy and initiative

Identify Your Occupational Interests

Another way to use what you know about yourself to choose a major and career is to identify your occupational interests. Holland (1959, 1997) proposed that people's interests and the matching work environments can be loosely categorized into six themes or codes: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. The six categories are presented in Table 1.5. Most people find that they are a combination of several personality types.

TABLE 1.5 ● Identify Your Holland Personality Type

Realistic ❑ I am mechanically inclined. ❑ I am athletically inclined. ❑ I like working outside with tools, plants, or animals. ❑ I like creating things with my hands. ❑ I am practical. ❑ I like to see direct results of my work. ❑ I am a nature lover. ❑ I am systematic. ❑ I am persistent. ❑ I am calm and reserved. ❑ I am independent. ❑ I dislike vagueness and ambiguity.	Someone with a realistic personality type is athletically or mechanically inclined. He or she would probably prefer to work outdoors with tools, plants, or animals. Some of the traits that describe the realistic personality type include practical, candid, a nature lover, calm, reserved, restrained, independent, systematic, and persistent.
Investigative ❑ I like learning, observing, problem solving, and working with information. ❑ I like solving abstract, vague problems. ❑ I am curious. ❑ I am logical. ❑ I am reserved. ❑ I am introspective. ❑ I am independent. ❑ I am observant. ❑ I am interested in understanding the physical world. ❑ I like working alone or in small groups. ❑ I like to be original and creative in solving problems. ❑ I enjoy intellectual challenges.	The investigative type enjoys learning, observing, problem solving, and analyzing information. Traits that describe the investigative type include curious, logical, observant, precise, intellectual, cautious, introspective, reserved, unbiased, and independent.

Artistic ❑ I am imaginative and creative. ❑ I like to express myself by designing and producing. ❑ I prefer unstructured activities. ❑ I am spontaneous. ❑ I am idealistic. ❑ I am unique. ❑ I am independent. ❑ I am expressive. ❑ I am unconventional. ❑ I am compassionate. ❑ I am bold. ❑ I prefer to work alone.	Imaginative and creative, the artistic personality type likes to work in unstructured situations that allow for creativity and innovation. Personality characteristics of the artistic type include intuitive, unconventional, moody, nonconforming, expressive, unique, pensive, spontaneous, compassionate, bold, direct, and idealistic.
Social ❑ I am compassionate. ❑ I like helping and training others. ❑ I am patient. ❑ I am dependable. ❑ I am supportive. ❑ I am understanding. ❑ I am perceptive. ❑ I am generous. ❑ I am idealistic. ❑ I am cheerful, well liked. ❑ I am people-oriented and friendly. ❑ I am concerned with the welfare of others. ❑ I am good at expressing myself and getting along well with others.	The social personality type enjoys helping and training others. Characteristics that describe the social type include friendly, cooperative, idealistic, perceptive, outgoing, understanding, supportive, generous, dependable, forgiving, patient, compassionate, and eloquent.
Enterprising ❑ I like to work with people. ❑ I like persuading people. ❑ I like managing situations.	The enterprising personality type likes to work with people in persuasive, performance, or managerial situations to achieve goals that are

(Continued)

TABLE 1.5 ● (Continued)

❑ I like achieving organizational or economic goals. ❑ I am a leader. ❑ I am talkative. ❑ I am extroverted. ❑ I am optimistic. ❑ I am spontaneous and daring. ❑ I am assertive. ❑ I am energetic. ❑ I am good at communicating. ❑ I am good at selling and persuading. ❑ I prefer tasks that require quick action.	organizational or economic in nature. Characteristics that describe the enterprising type include confident, assertive, determined, talkative, extroverted, energetic, animated, social, persuasive, fashionable, spontaneous, daring, accommodating, and optimistic.
Conventional ❑ I am good with numbers. ❑ I like to work with data and carry out tasks in detail. ❑ I am persistent. ❑ I am practical. ❑ I am conforming. ❑ I am precise. ❑ I am conscientious. ❑ I am meticulous. ❑ I am adept. ❑ I am practical. ❑ I am frugal. ❑ I am stable and dependable. ❑ I am well controlled. ❑ I prefer tasks that are structured. ❑ I prefer to know what's expected. ❑ I prefer a well-defined chain of command.	The conventional personality type is well organized, has clerical or numerical ability, and likes to work with data and carry out tasks in detail. Characteristics that describe the conventional type include meticulous, numerically inclined, conscientious, precise, adept, conforming, orderly, practical, frugal, structured, courteous, acquiescent, and persistent.

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966, 1997).

Although they were created half a century ago, the Holland Occupational Codes remain the most commonly used assessment of career interests (Ruff, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2007). Another option is the O*NET Interest Profiler, a self-assessment inventory that applies Holland Codes to help individuals identify their work-related interests (Lewis & Rivkin, 1999). The O*NET Interest Profiler is a free computer program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration and the American Job Center Network (available at http://www.onetcenter.org/CIP.html). A short version of the O*NET Interest Profiler is also available (http://www.onetcenter.org/IPSF.html). These tools are a good start, but an accurate Holland career assessment is conducted by a career professional using specialized tools. The career development center at your college can help you determine and interpret your Holland Code.

Understanding your career interests may make it easier to choose a major because some majors are better suited to particular constellations of interests than others. Table 1.6 lists college majors, organized by Holland Code. Remember that this is simply a guide. Not all possible careers are listed, and the categories are much more fluid than they appear. Notice that many college majors fit more than one Holland Code. College majors tap multiple interests and abilities—and foster similar skills in students, such as critical thinking and communication skills.

Use Career Assessment Tools

While you can learn a lot about yourself through reflection and surveying your own interests, a visit to the career center at your college can provide you with an objective and detailed profile of your interests. A career counselor can administer several inventories to help determine what career path is right for you. The two most commonly administered inventories are the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong, Donnay, Morris, Schaubhut, & Thompson, 2004) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998).

Administered at your college's career center, the Strong Interest Inventory contains 291 items that survey your occupational interests and values. It takes about 40 minutes to complete and yields a detailed report that includes your Holland Code, a list of your top interests and what you find most motivating and rewarding, and comparisons of your interests with those of people working in 122 occupations. The Strong Interest Inventory also lists occupations in which people whose interests most closely match yours work. Finally, your values (that is, preferences regarding work style, learning environment, leadership style, risk taking, and team orientation) are listed. A summary provides a graphic representation of your results. The career counselor will discuss your results with you. Remember that although a number of compatible careers are listed, you are free to pursue whatever career appeals to you. The Strong Interest Inventory provides a more detailed look at the aspects of career assessment that we have discussed in this chapter. It's especially useful

TABLE 1.6 ● Careers by Holland Personality Type

Realistic	**Investigative**	**Artistic**
Agriculture/Forestry	Animal Science	Advertising
Architecture	Anthropology	Architecture
Criminal Justice	Astronomy	Art Education
Engineering	Biochemistry	Art History
Environmental Studies	Biological Sciences	Communications
Exercise Science	Chemistry	English
Geology	Computer Science	Foreign Language
Health and Physical Education	Engineering	Graphic Design
Medical Technology	Geography	History
Plant and Soil Sciences	Geology	Interior Design
Recreation and Tourism Management	Mathematics	Journalism
Sport Management	Medical Technology	Music
	Medicine	Music Education
	Nursing	Speech/Drama
	Nutrition	
	Pharmacy	
	Philosophy	
	Physical Therapy	
	Physics	
	Psychology	
	Sociology	
	Statistics	
Social	**Enterprising**	**Conventional**
Audiology	Advertising	Accounting
Counseling	Broadcasting	Business
Criminal Justice	Communications	Computer Science
Elementary Education	Economics	Economics
History	Finance	Finance
Human Development	Industrial Relations	Mathematics
Library Sciences	Journalism	Statistics
Nursing	Law	
Nutrition	Management	

TABLE 1.6 ● (Continued)

Occupational Therapy	Marketing	
Philosophy	Political Science	
Physical Education	Public Administration	
Political Science	Speech	
Psychology		
Religious Studies		
Social Work		
Sociology		
Special Education		
Urban Planning		

Source: Adapted from Holland (1966).

if you have tried the activities in this book and still find yourself puzzled about what really interests you.

Another assessment option available in your college's career center is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). With over 100 items, the MBTI assesses individuals' perceptions, preferences, and judgments in interacting with the world (Myers et al., 1998). Created by mother and daughter, Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, the MBTI is based on Carl Jung's theory that there are 16 personality types in which people may be categorized based on their preferences along four dimensions or subscales. The MBTI contains several subscales. The extraversion/introversion subscale refers to the degree to which you turn outward or inward—that is, the degree to which you are oriented toward people and actions or the internal world of thoughts and ideas. The sensation/intuition subscale examines how you prefer to understand information: Do you focus on the facts or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? Do you focus on logic and reasoning when making decisions or do you first look at circumstances and people (thinking/feeling)? Your preference for structure is assessed by the judging/perceiving scale, which examines whether you prefer to make decisions or remain open to new ideas and options. Finally, the measure categorizes takers into a "personality type," suggesting their own set of preferences. If you choose to take the MBTI, remember that it is simply a tool to help you learn about yourself. In fact, some psychologists argue that despite its popularity, there is insufficient research to conclude that the MBTI is an effective measure of personality (Pittenger, 2005). Ultimately, it's up to you to determine if the results make sense to you.

The happiest and most successful students choose majors that they find engaging and that match their skills, values, and interests. Self-assessment is a process. Allow yourself opportunities to explore. Exploration is a critical part of

career development because it allows you to become aware of and test options for career paths that you might take. Some students decide on a major before they understand themselves. They take courses for a semester or two and then realize that they've chosen a major in which they have little interest or ability. Engaging in self-assessment early in your college career can save you from changing majors and potentially extending your time in college.

How to Choose a Major

Now that you've learned some principles of self-assessment, apply what you have learned to narrow your choices of college majors. Lots of students find career planning stressful and confusing. Sometimes it seems like everyone else knows what they want to do with their lives but you. Finding the right major and determining your career goals doesn't require magic, innate abilities, or luck. What does it take? Choosing a major that is right for you requires the willingness to do the hard work of looking deep within and disentangling what you think you should do, what others want you to do, what you truly want to do, and what you realistically have the ability to do.

Follow Basic Rules for Choosing a Major and Career

Several general principles should guide you through the process of choosing a major, as follows.

Be an Active Participant in Choosing a Major

Choosing a major that is right for you entails more than filing papers with the university registrar's office. Being an active participant means that you recognize that the process of considering and narrowing down possible majors must be your own. Frequently students feel subtle pressure to select particular majors from family members or friends. Maybe your parent majored in finance and everyone's always told you that you're just like him or her. Or maybe several of your friends have decided to major in communications or theater arts and take classes together. We all face subtle expectations from others. Regardless, the process of choosing and your choice of major must be your own. You must actively participate, perhaps even struggle, in the decision. No one cares as much about what major you choose as you do, because the only person truly affected by your choice is you.

Your College Major Will Not Determine Your Career

Choosing a major is not the same as choosing a lifelong career. For example, many people assume that students who major in humanities, sciences, and social science fields, including English, history, biology, sociology, and psychology, are qualified only for careers in those specific areas. This isn't true. A

history major does not have to become a historian, a biology major does not have to become a biologist, and a psychology major does not have to become a psychologist in order to be gainfully employed. This is especially fortuitous because each of these professions requires years of graduate study beyond the baccalaureate degree. Your college major is simply a starting point. It will not limit you to one career choice because every major provides training in many skills. Choosing your college major is an important decision, but it is *not* a high-pressure decision that will irrevocably shape the course of your life.

Career Planning Is a Process

Career planning is not a one-time event. It is not begun and finished quickly in a single session or over a short period, say in your first semester or first year in college. Instead, career planning is a lengthy process that may begin in college but persists throughout life. You likely will not decide what you want to do for the rest of your life suddenly and definitively—and your decision will likely change throughout your life. Most people have many careers over their lifetimes. To determine your life path, you must be willing to engage in the process and do the work of looking within and evaluating your aspirations, expectations, and opportunities.

Every Major Has Value

As you begin the process of selecting a major, remember that there is no bad choice. Every college major offers opportunities to develop competence in communication, information management, and critical thinking skills. However, majors differ in the specific set of competencies emphasized. For example, the emphasis on scientific reasoning and problem solving, coupled with a focus on understanding how people think and behave, is what makes psychology unique among majors.

Learn About Your Options

The first step in making any decision is to become informed of your options. What majors does your college offer? Some majors, such as psychology, English, and economics, are available at all colleges and universities. Other majors, such as engineering, can be found only at some institutions. What options does your college offer? How do you find out what majors are offered? Every college has a student handbook. Check the "students" area of your school's homepage or use the search function. The handbook will likely list the available majors at your school.

Another way to learn about your options is to examine each academic department (our preferred option—it's thorough!). Your school's homepage likely has a link to a webpage listing academic departments or you can use the search function to find this page. Scroll through and click on each department, one by one. You'll probably want to do this in more than one sitting because

you'll scan a lot of pages. Take a moment to review each department's program, even if at first glance you think it isn't interesting or right for you.

You might spend just a few minutes studying most programs, but some will likely strike your interest and cause you to probe further. It is important to review a wide range of programs—even those that you think you might not like. Sometimes we have preconceived biases and incorrect information about a discipline or major. For each major, ask yourself the following questions and quickly note your responses so that you can easily revisit your work and compare majors later.

- What are some of the required classes?
- Are any clubs or activities listed?
- Who are the faculty? What are their research interests? Does it look like students are involved in their research?
- What other experiences do majors typically obtain (for example, internships and/or research experiences)?
- What jobs have recent graduates obtained?

After you've scanned each academic department and major, list all of the majors that sound interesting to you, without making judgments.

Seek Information From Students, Graduates, and Professors

Internet research can get you only so far. In order to learn about majors and career options, it's essential to gather information from knowledgeable people. Students, graduates, career counselors, and professors can offer invaluable information and perspectives.

Current Students

Ask other students how they chose their major and why they think it's a good choice. What do they think about their courses, the topic, professors, and opportunities after graduation? What are the required courses like? Every major has its most challenging set of courses: What are those courses? Why are they considered challenging? What about the professors? Do students have out-of-class interactions with faculty? What kind? What out-of-class experiences are available? Is there a student club?

Recent Graduates

Ask recent graduates about their experiences. Ask them some or all of the questions you asked current students. Also ask about their experiences after graduating. If you don't know any recent graduates, visit the department

and/or your college's career center. Most college career centers maintain records of recent graduates and may be able to put you in contact with a few graduates to help you learn more about their work and career experiences.

Professors

Don't forget to talk with professors to learn more about majors. Visit during the office hours of a professor who teaches a class in which you are enrolled, seems approachable, or works in a field of interest to you. Ask questions about the undergraduate major and what kinds of jobs recent graduates hold. Do some homework beforehand to ensure that your questions are informed. For example, read the department website to learn a little bit about the major; basic course requirements; and, if possible, what courses the professor teaches. Visit the professor's website to learn about his or her courses and research. It will be easier to know what to ask if you know a little bit about the program and professor. You might begin by explaining that you're thinking about becoming a major and would like to know more about the field. Students sometimes feel uncomfortable approaching a professor, but remember that office hours are times specifically allocated to interacting with students. Take advantage of this time to ask the questions that will help you determine if a given major is for you.

As you can see, there are multiple sources of information about any given major. Approach the task of choosing a major as if you were solving a puzzle. Each source provides a unique bit of information and perspective. Sources may disagree about particular qualities or characteristics of a major. Compile all of the information and weigh it based on the person's perspective (as a student, graduate, or faculty, for example), perceived accuracy (Does the information seem accurate? What is the source's perspective?), and perceived similarity (How similar are your and the source's views?). What are the most important commonly mentioned positive and negative features of this major? How well do you think you could overcome any challenges?

Is a Psychology Major for You?

The psychology major offers many opportunities, but only you can decide what major is right for you. Carefully consider your skills, values, interests, and options. Each chapter in this book describes a different subdiscipline of psychology and careers that are appropriate for individuals with bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees in psychology. These possibilities are simply a starting point. At the end of this reflective process, you may find that psychology is the major for you or you may make another choice. Listen to yourself and make the decision that is right for you.

As a final piece of advice, be open to new possibilities. Flexibility is an important life skill critical to coping and optimal development throughout adulthood. Employers rate adaptability as highly desired in new employees

(National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). Adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity are important characteristics for psychology students because science, like life, isn't always clear-cut and obvious. As you read through the chapters in this book and explore various career opportunities, practice being open to new possibilities. Actively consider each subdiscipline and career opportunity to determine if it's a good fit for your interests and aspirations, even if you first think it isn't a good fit. Stretching your mind to consider what a particular career might be like is a helpful exercise in flexibility and may help you consider a career differently. You might be surprised at what you learn about yourself. Above all, keep a open mind and explore multiple possibilities. You will be more likely to find a job and career that you will love. Throughout this book, we discuss tips for students who are interested in careers related to specific areas of psychology and provide suggestions on helpful experiences to obtain for various jobs.

CHECKLIST 1.1

IS PSYCHOLOGY FOR YOU?

Do you:

- ❑ Have an interest in how the mind works?
- ❑ Want to learn how to think critically?
- ❑ Have an interest in research?
- ❑ Feel comfortable with computers?
- ❑ Want to learn how the brain works and its effect on behavior?
- ❑ Have an interest in mental illness?
- ❑ Like mathematics?
- ❑ Have an interest in how we grow and change over the lifespan?
- ❑ Have an interest in personality and what makes people unique?
- ❑ Wonder how we perceive stimuli in our environment?
- ❑ Have an interest in learning how research findings can be applied to solve real-world problems?
- ❑ Want to learn how to work well with others?
- ❑ Want a well-rounded education?
- ❑ Have an interest in biology and how physiology influences behavior?
- ❑ Have the ability to be flexible and deal with ambiguity?
- ❑ Want to help people?

Scoring: The more boxes you checked, the more likely it is that you're a good match for the psychology major.

EXERCISE 1.1

USING O*NET AND THE *OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK* TO IDENTIFY CAREERS

This exercise requires that you run several O*NET searches as follows (http://www.onetonline.org/), to identify jobs that match your interests and capacities.

1. Search by interest. Use the advanced tab on O*NET to search by interest. Note that the interests listed are Holland Codes (see your responses in Table 1.5 to view your specific interests). List two occupations that you find interesting (and list the interest terms used in your search).
2. Search by skills. Use the advanced tab to search by skills. List two occupations that you find interesting (and list the skills you selected).
3. Search by one other means. Use another search option under the advanced tab (e.g., abilities, knowledge, work activities, and so on). Discuss the option you chose and list two resulting occupations.
4. Choose two of the six occupations that you have identified in this exercise. Look up the two occupations in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (http://www.bls.gov/ooh/). For each, consider the information in both *O*NET* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and answer the following:
    a. What duties are performed in this occupation?
    b. What education or training is needed?
    c. What is the typical salary?
    d. What is the projected job outlook for this occupation?
5. Evaluate the results of item 4. What do you think of these positions? How well do they fit your skills, interests, and values? Do you want to learn more? Are you interested in pursuing any of these positions?

Suggested Reading

Helms, J. L., & Rogers, D. T. (2012). *Majoring in psychology: Achieving your educational and career goals* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kuther, T. L. (2020). *The psychology major's handbook* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Liptak, J. J. (2011). *College major quizzes: 12 easy tests to discover which programs are best*. Indianapolis, IN: JIST.

Shatkin, L. (2011). *Panicked student's guide to choosing a college major: How to confidently pick your ideal path*. Indianapolis, IN: JIST.

Resources

American Psychological Association: Careers in Psychology

https://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx

Career Key

http://www.careerkey.org

College Board: The Ultimate Guide to Choosing a Major

https://blog.collegeboard.org/the-ultimate-guide-to-choosing-a-major

Occupational Outlook Handbook

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/