
Finding a Career That Fits Me

Building a realistic future around my strengths and needs

Choosing a career can feel overwhelming when confidence is low and previous experiences have made you doubt your ability. You may believe that everyone else has a clear direction while you are still trying to work out what you are good at. If ADHD, dyscalculia, anxiety, exhaustion or difficult school experiences are also present, career decisions can feel less like an opportunity and more like a test you are already expecting to fail.

You do not need to discover one perfect career

A useful career direction is not a single hidden answer. It is a working hypothesis based on what matters to you, what you do well, the conditions in which you function and the opportunities available now. You can test a direction, learn from it and adjust. A decision does not have to guarantee the rest of your life; it needs to create a sensible next step.

Career advice often begins with job titles, but job titles can hide the parts of work that determine whether it is sustainable. Two roles with the same title may have very different managers, routines, noise levels, deadlines, social demands and amounts of administration. A role may sound exciting but require constant interruption. Another may appear ordinary yet provide predictable structure, practical activity and a supportive team. Fit is found in the detail.

It is also important to distinguish a genuine limitation from a conclusion formed through shame. Not having GCSE Maths, needing instructions in writing or finding interviews difficult may affect the route into some work, but it does not make every career unavailable. The question is not “What is wrong with me?” It is “What conditions help me contribute reliably, and what route gives me the best chance of reaching them?”

Start with evidence, not self-criticism

Low confidence tends to produce a distorted career history. You may remember every mistake and overlook years of turning up, solving problems, helping people, learning systems, managing pressure or taking responsibility. Begin with evidence from actual life. Consider paid work, volunteering, caring, hobbies, home responsibilities and situations in which other people rely on you. Transferable skills often developed outside formal education still count.

Write down tasks rather than flattering labels. “Good with people” might mean listening carefully, calming conflict, explaining information or noticing when someone needs support. “Practical” might mean repairing, organising materials, following a safe process or seeing what needs doing. “Creative” might mean generating ideas, presenting information clearly or finding an alternative when a standard method fails. Specific examples make strengths believable.

The evidence question

For each strength, ask: When have I used it? What did I actually do? What was the result? What part came naturally, and what support was present? This moves the discussion away from vague confidence and towards information that can guide applications, interviews and training choices.

Interests matter, but energy matters too

Enjoying a subject does not automatically mean you will enjoy every job connected with it. Notice which activities absorb you, but also what happens afterwards. Some work is satisfying yet leaves

you depleted because it requires intense social performance, sensory tolerance, rapid switching or prolonged concentration. Sustainable work usually contains enough interest to hold attention without demanding a level of recovery that makes the rest of life impossible.

Understanding the conditions in which you work best

Career fit includes environment, pace and structure. You may function best with a clear routine, visible priorities and one task at a time, or you may need variety, movement and regular new problems. You may prefer working independently, alongside a small familiar team or in a role with frequent public contact. Think about noise, lighting, travel, physical activity, remote working, shift patterns, supervision, deadlines and how much unplanned change you can manage.

ADHD can create strong performance when work is interesting, urgent or varied, but difficulty with repetitive administration, time awareness and switching priorities. That does not mean avoiding responsibility. It means identifying the systems and role design that support consistency. External reminders, written procedures, protected planning time, software, check-ins and clearer priorities can reduce the effort spent holding the whole job in your head.

Dyscalculia may make rapid mental arithmetic, cash handling, timesheets, measurements or numerical codes particularly demanding. Look beyond whether a role “uses numbers” and ask how. Are figures entered into a standard system? Are calculators and spreadsheets normal? Is checking built into the process? How serious would an error be? A supported numerical task can be manageable, while an apparently simple task performed under observation and time pressure may not be.

Your non-negotiables and preferences

Non-negotiables protect health, safety and dependable functioning, such as a manageable commute or written instructions. Preferences improve satisfaction but may be flexible, such as a particular start time. Separate the two. If everything becomes essential, options disappear; if nothing is treated as essential, you may repeat a working situation that is unsustainable.

Values and the kind of contribution you want to make

Values describe what you want your working life to stand for. You may value stability, fairness, creativity, security, service, mastery, independence, teamwork or visible results. Values are not the same as job titles. The value of helping others can be expressed in health, customer service, education, maintenance, logistics or community work. Identifying the value gives you more routes than attaching your future to one idealised role.

Moving from ideas to realistic options

Generate a small group of career ideas before judging them. Use job profiles, conversations and local vacancies to learn what the work actually involves. Compare entry requirements, pay, working pattern, travel, availability, progression and daily duties. An attractive headline is not enough. Read several adverts for similar roles because one employer’s expectations may differ from another’s.

Then identify the gap between where you are and where the role begins. The gap might be a qualification, recent experience, confidence, transport, technology or evidence for an application. Turn each gap into a question. Is the qualification essential? Is an equivalent accepted? Can experience be gained through a short course, volunteering, job shadowing or a project? Is financial help available? Can a disability adviser discuss adjustments before you apply?

A route does not need to begin with leaving your current job. You might first speak to someone in the field, complete a free or low-cost taster, ask for a new responsibility at work or build one piece of

evidence. Small experiments reduce the risk of making a decision from imagination alone. They also create momentum without demanding immediate certainty.

Use experiments, not life sentences

A useful experiment has a question, an action and a review point. Question: Would I enjoy supporting people with practical problems? Action: speak to two workers and volunteer for one short project. Review: What gave me energy? What drained me? Which skills did I use? What conditions would need to change for this to be sustainable?

Qualifications, GCSE Maths and alternative routes

Some careers and courses have fixed entry requirements, particularly regulated roles. Others accept Functional Skills, equivalent qualifications, experience or an apprenticeship pathway. Never assume that a requirement is flexible, but do not assume that it is impossible either. Ask the provider directly what is essential, which equivalents are accepted, whether the qualification can be completed alongside training and what assessment adjustments may be available.

Money, risk and the pressure to progress

Wanting better pay is valid, particularly when income feels stuck. Financial pressure can, however, make every career idea carry the weight of rescuing your whole future. Separate the decision into stages: immediate stability, a development step and a longer-term direction. A training route that reduces income may be unrealistic now even if the destination fits. A sideways move with better conditions, stronger experience or a clearer progression route may be more useful than a dramatic change.

Compare the whole financial picture: current take-home pay, travel, equipment, training costs, benefits, pension, hours and the reliability of future income. Check claims about salary progression rather than relying on the highest advertised figure. If retraining is involved, identify funding and the likely timetable. A realistic plan respects financial anxiety by using accurate information, not by pretending money does not matter.

Making a decision when confidence is low

Confidence is not a prerequisite for choosing. Use criteria instead. Decide what a viable option must provide, what would make it unsuitable and what you still need to learn. Score options only as a way of organising discussion, not as a machine that can decide for you. If two routes remain possible, choose the one that offers the safest useful experiment or the most reversible next step.

The 70 per cent decision

Waiting until an option feels completely certain can keep you permanently stuck. If a direction fits most of your important criteria, the risks are understood and the next step is manageable, you may have enough information to move. Leave room to review. A good decision can be revised when new evidence appears.

My career-fit map

What I need	Evidence from my life	What this suggests
Strengths I use well	_____	_____
Conditions that help	_____	_____
Values and interests	_____	_____

My next career experiment

The direction I want to investigate is:

The question I need this experiment to answer is:

The small action I will take is:

I will review what I learned on:

Getting useful careers guidance

A careers adviser can help you investigate options, but the conversation is most useful when you bring specific information. Explain the tasks you do well, the conditions that affect your performance, the qualifications you hold and the barriers you are worried about. Ask for several possible routes rather than one recommendation. Request links or written notes so you can review the information later, and check important requirements directly with the employer or training provider.

Be cautious when an opportunity promises rapid earnings, guarantees employment or pressures you to pay for training immediately. Ask who recognises the qualification, what previous learners achieved, whether additional costs exist and what happens if the course is unsuitable. A credible route should allow questions and provide clear written information. Taking time to verify a promise is responsible decision-making, not a lack of ambition.

A personal reflection

Your working life may have been shaped by survival, availability and other people's expectations more than genuine choice. That does not make your experience wasted. It gives you information about what you can do, what you no longer want and what support you need. You are not starting from nothing. You are beginning with a history that can be examined more fairly and used to make the next decision more deliberately.

A message from Maggie

You do not have to find a grand calling before you are allowed to move forward. A career can grow from one honest next step: recognising a strength, asking a question, trying a short experience or applying for something that fits you better. Please do not let school results or low confidence speak as though they know your whole future. Your needs matter, your abilities are wider than one qualification and you are allowed to build a direction gradually.

Books and reliable UK information

Designing Your Life by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans - practical experiments for exploring possible working lives.

What Color Is Your Parachute? by Richard N. Bolles - exercises for identifying skills, preferences and job-search routes.

StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath - a strengths-based reflection tool; use it as one source of ideas rather than a final answer.

National Careers Service: job profiles, skills assessment and adviser support - <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>

Skills for Careers: training and skills information - <https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/>

GOV.UK: apprenticeships - <https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

GOV.UK: Access to Work - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

GOV.UK: reasonable adjustments for disabled workers - <https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers>

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