

Chapter 4: Interests

An **interest** is a subject area or activity an individual is curious about. We are naturally drawn towards environments and others who share similar interests. For many individuals, interests serve as a primary influence over career choices.

For example, when someone reads a job posting, they usually think, "I'd enjoy doing that!" or "wow, that would be so boring." If you can relate, you've thought about your career interests before.

While interests are vital in career decision-making, it's necessary to take a balanced approach and consider other essential factors like your skills, personality, and career values in order to make a genuinely informed career decision.

Some people are very familiar with what interests them, while others have an easier time identifying what doesn't interest them. This difference may result from various life experiences, including exposure to things through school, work, hobbies, or family life.

Some people have a wide range of interests, while others have fewer or more focused interests. Having many or fewer interests is neither good nor bad, so be careful not to compare your interest patterns with those of others. The important thing is to understand the implications of your interest pattern on your career.

It is also common for some individuals to have interests that may appear to be incompatible or opposite. For example, consider Kate, who is equally interested in landscaping and fashion design. While these seem like dissimilar or incompatible interests, both involve a degree of creativity.

This example illustrates that even though it's important to identify specific interest areas, it's also helpful to identify patterns and themes associated with your interests.



NOTE:

While this chapter will focus on helping you clarify your interests, you'll have a chance to explore other important factors in subsequent sections of this workbook!

Also, recall from Chapter 2 that it's increasingly common for people to pursue **multi-tracking**. This can be especially important for those who experience difficulty satisfying all their interests with just one occupation.



DEFINITION:

Multi-tracking is defined as simultaneously holding more than one job, which can be done in either the same or different industries.

Furthermore, individuals can meet specific interests through volunteer experiences or hobbies.

Our career doesn't have to satisfy all of our interests!

As most of us develop interests by being exposed to particular topic areas and activities, keep an open mind when exploring interests.

Staying open to new experiences or revisiting past ones will allow you to discover new interests and enrich existing ones.

As a result, you may also find that your interests change over time. For this reason, it is important to regularly reflect on your interests and their impact on your career.

REFLECTION:

We want to begin to identify your interests – both the topics/subject areas that interest you as well as the activities and types of tasks you enjoy doing. Interests can exist in your personal life, your education, and your work, so please consider all areas when answering the following questions.

What topics or subjects do you enjoy discussing, reading about, or watching on T.V.?

What activities or hobbies do you take part in? If you aren't actively involved in any hobbies at the moment, consider what you might enjoy.

Are there careers or industries you think are interesting? Share why.

Flow

Flow is a state of engagement described as the effortless immersion in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); some also refer to the experience as being "in the zone".

There are three conditions that an individual requires to achieve a state of Flow:

1. The individual must be involved in an activity with a clear set of goals.
2. The individual must have an adequate balance between perceived skill and ability and the perceived challenge at hand. If the individual's skills are inadequate, anxiety or frustration may result. If their skills are superior to what the task requires, boredom may result.
3. The activity must provide the individual with clear and immediate feedback. This allows them to adjust their performance in order to maintain a state of Flow.

When one experiences a state of Flow, most of the following conditions are present:

- High degree of effortless concentration
- Loss of feeling self-conscious
- Feeling of elation
- A distorted sense of time (e.g., "time flies when you are having fun")
- Sense of control over the activity
- Some degree of intrinsic reward, the activity itself is rewarding (e.g., I would do this for free!)
- Lack of awareness of bodily needs (e.g., hunger or thirst)
- Sense of absorption in the activity

It's important to note that not all factors need to be present for Flow to occur. Additionally, the experience occurs typically when an individual is in an active versus passive state, as passive activities don't require skill or concentration.

For example, you are more likely to experience Flow when you are engaged in work, sports, playing music, or participating in a game instead of watching T.V. It's also noteworthy that activities that produce Flow may no longer create this state of being if it's always performed with the same level of skill and challenge. Therefore, it's important to seek additional challenges and increase your skills to meet new challenges.

Additionally, an individual may not achieve Flow the first time they engage in an activity. Usually, a certain degree of skill development is required to obtain satisfaction from flow-producing activities.

For example, musicians often report Flow-like experiences when playing instruments. However, prior skill development and extensive practice are necessary before this experience can occur. As a result of the required investment of time and energy to achieve this state, potential Flow-producing activities are sometimes prematurely abandoned before the individual can experience true Flow.

Below are a few examples of how some have described the Flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990):

"Your concentration is very complete. Your mind isn't wandering, you are not thinking of something else; you are totally involved in what you are doing...Your energy is flowing very smoothly. You feel relaxed, comfortable, and energetic."

"That's the time when I sort of lose touch with the rest of the world, I'm totally absorbed in what I'm doing."

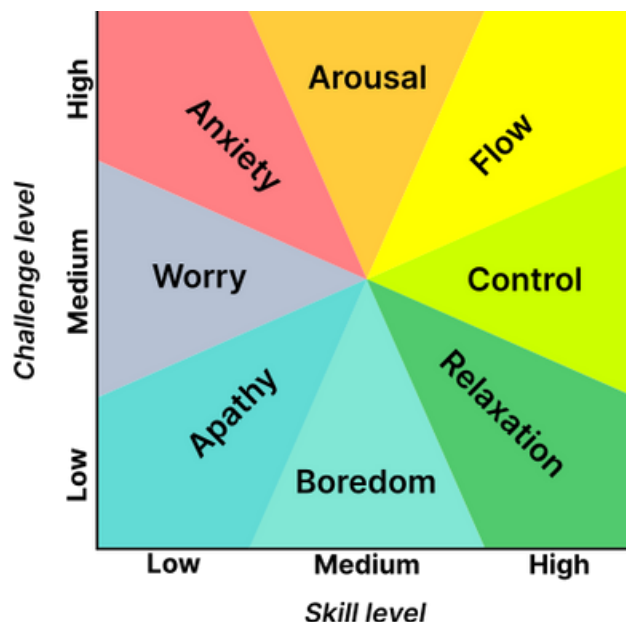
"The concentration is like breathing - you never think of it. The roof could fall in and if it missed you, you would be unaware of it."

Achieving a state of Flow also has a number of benefits, including:

- Heightened performance
- Increased motivation to engage in the activity again
- Increased motivation to obtain and develop additional skills and knowledge related to the area
- Improved sense of competency and self-efficacy

Here is an illustration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) of mental state as a function of challenge and skill level.

Flow appears in the upper right-hand section of the illustration



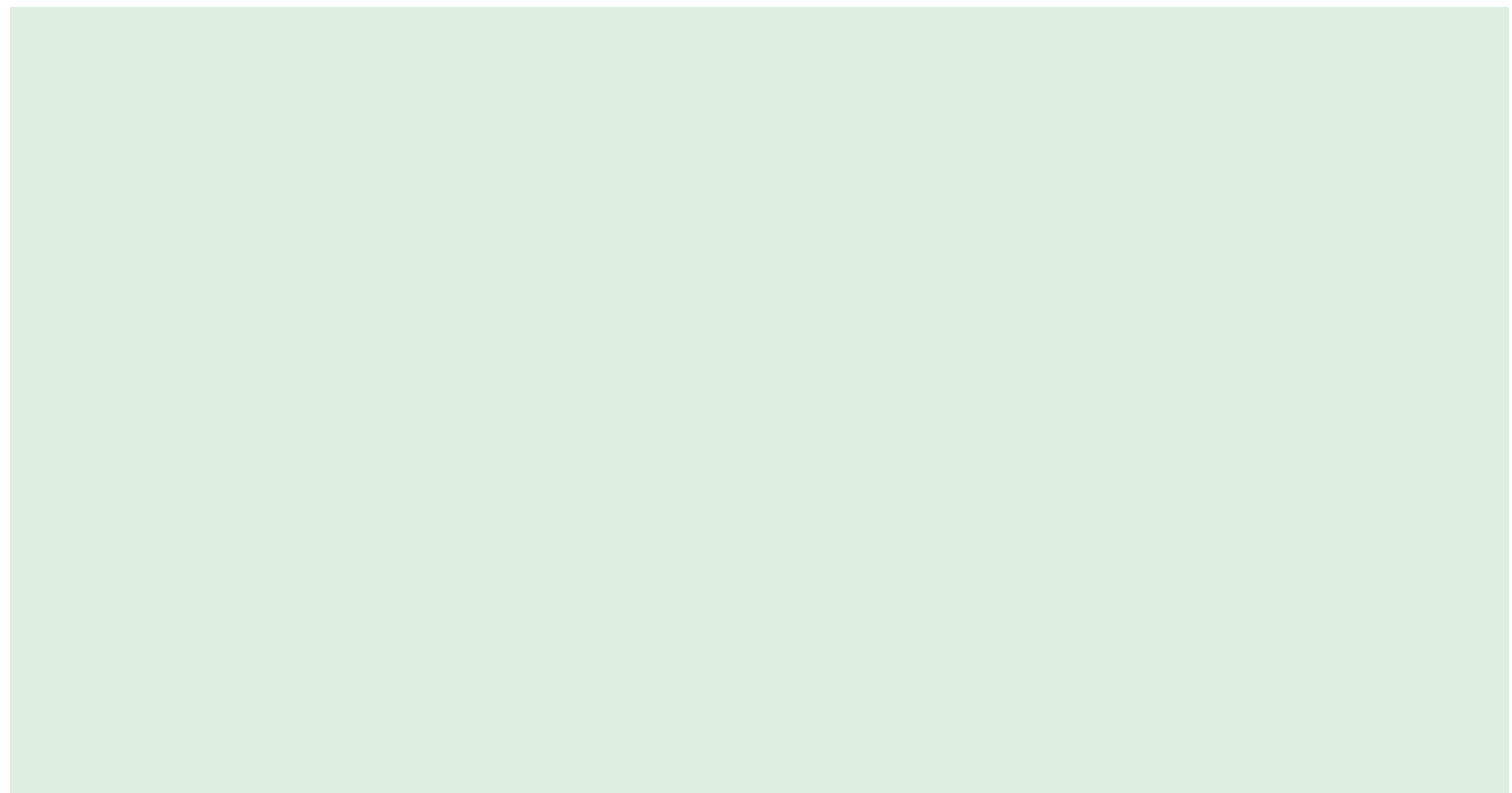
Keep in mind that Flow is task specific, which means that not all aspects of the activity will produce Flow. For example, a pilot may only experience Flow during takeoff and landing but not while engaging in any of her other related job duties.

No job is interesting or enjoyable 100% of the time, but by being intentional in thinking about what you enjoy doing and what gives you the experience of Flow, you can increase the likelihood of satisfying your interests at work and experiencing enjoyment in your career.

REFLECTION:

We want to consider Flow in your own life. When you can identify times that you've experienced Flow and understand why those activities were so enjoyable, you can begin to explore how you could increase the Flow you experience in your career.

Given the information above, can you think of a time when you may have experienced Flow (either at work, volunteering, or in a hobby)? What were you doing? If possible, identify and explain 2 - 3 examples.



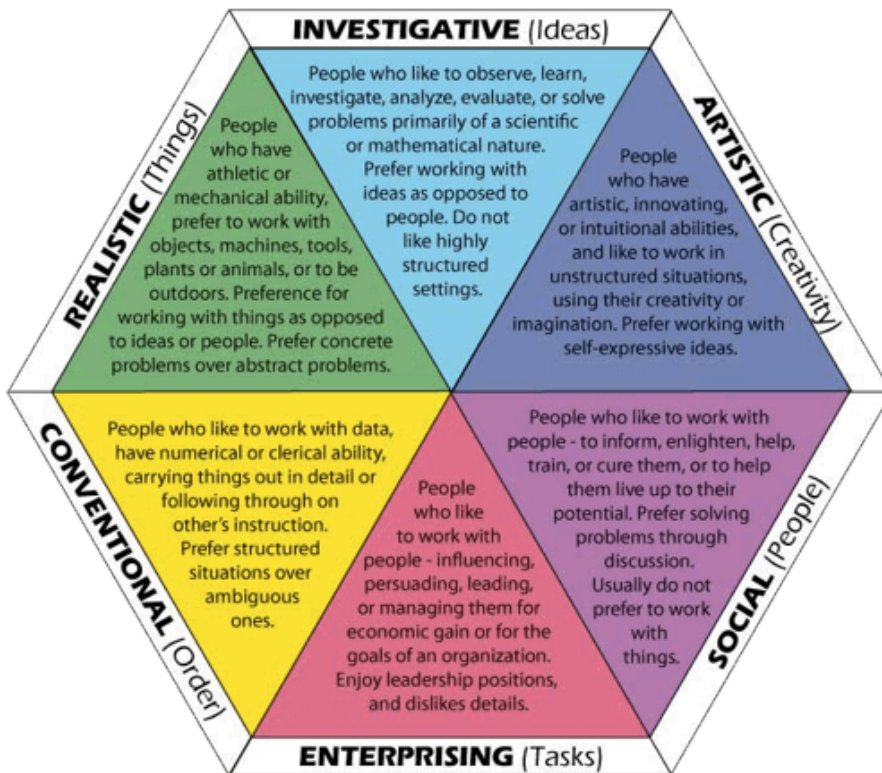
What did you enjoy about these activities? Try to be as specific as you can.

Considering the examples of Flow you identified and the things you enjoyed about these experiences, what are some other activities that could potentially lead you to experience flow?

Clarifying Your Career Interests

Decades of career research have shown that individuals are likely to perform better and achieve higher satisfaction at work when they engage in duties and responsibilities that are interesting and enjoyable for them. Therefore, this is why understanding your interests is an essential step in career planning.

When you can identify the subjects, topics, and industries that you enjoy and the activities, tasks, and responsibilities you like to do, you can begin exploring careers that may be a good match for you.



John Holland's theory of career choice is one of the most prominent theories in the career development literature.

The research that underlies his theory identified six different "types" that can be used to explain people's interests and to describe work environments.

The key point of Holland's theory is that working in an environment that matches your type leads to greater satisfaction at work.

The six different types are as follows:

- **Realistic** ("the doers")
- **Investigative** ("the thinkers")
- **Artistic** ("the creators")
- **Social** ("the helpers")
- **Enterprising** ("the persuaders")
- **Conventional** ("the organizers")

By identifying your interest types, you can begin to identify careers that could be a good fit. While interests are not the only criteria to consider when choosing a career, they're a great place to get started!

REFLECTION:

By this point, you may have completed your **Strong Interest Inventory** assessment, which is based on Holland’s theory, and your counsellor may have reviewed your results with you. Your goal here is to clarify your interests (what you’d like to do at work) and create a list of careers that could align with those interests. You’ll need to review your report in order to answer the following questions.

Referring to the General Occupational Themes section of your report (Section 1), please list your top three themes (e.g., Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and/or Conventional). Do you agree with these results? Why or why not?

Referring to the Basic Interest Scales (Section 2), please list your top 10 interest areas:

1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

Referring to Your Strong Occupations (Appendix), please review all the careers. The “Top” column shows the occupations that are in your top 25% for satisfaction (one star), similarity (two stars), or both (three stars). We recommend that you pay particular attention to occupations with more stars. Ask yourself, would you enjoy the duties and tasks of each career? In order to answer this question accurately, you’ll need to read about the duties and tasks of each career on onetonline.org (full list of resources can be found [here](#)).

Please create a short list of at least 10 careers that seem interesting to you.

1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

Do you notice any themes or patterns in the careers you listed? Do they have similar types of duties and tasks? Please list the similarities you notice (e.g., working with clients or customers; using my hands to fix things; organizing information; giving presentations, etc.).

Refer to [page 182](#)

CAREER CRITERIA SUMMARY



Take a moment to list the results of your Strong Interest Inventory (*if you have completed this assessment*), as well as any Industries, Tasks, or Responsibilities you are drawn to in the “**INTERESTS**” section on your Career Criteria Summary!