

Go With the Flow

A self-help tool

Introduction

This tool takes a positive approach to applying for graduate careers when you haven't made a definite career choice. If that sounds the opposite of what you were expecting to hear, read on to learn how you can turn this situation to your advantage.

Usually when we think of applying for careers, it is assumed that you have chosen your career. After all, if you haven't how will you know what to apply for?

However, experience suggests that quite a few people actually develop good careers though a more open and flexible approach, based upon a flexible approach to what's available at the time.

Imagine that you want to apply for graduate jobs, as you are getting close to the end of your course. You've spent quite a lot of time thinking about and researching careers but still can't quite fix on one. What are you going to do? One option is certainly to keep trying to call it. We have a lot of tools in the Toolkit to help with this, and obviously you can also book an appointment with someone in careers to get expert help.

But if you've narrowed your list of choices down to say two or three that you like and look fine to you, then you might want to 'go with the flow', and embrace the situation rather than postpone your job search indefinitely (Pryor and Bright, 2011).

The self-help tool **Go with The Flow** encourages you to gently lean into this situation and see it as a positive.



It is based upon the experience of how some people actually get work after university. Researchers have shown that chance plays a key role in career development (Galunic, 2020), so why fight it? While some people will consider their options, make a definite choice and then look for corresponding vacancies, this linear model isn't the only way to organise your career plan. If you stick with it, it may stop you from moving on.

Finding a job and developing a career take place in the context of uncertainty. What jobs will be advertised, when and when? Which career will I really like most? What will happen after you send your application in is also unknown. Management experts, recommend that an effectively way of dealing with uncertain situations is to take an experimental approach (Ansell & Boin, 2019). Identify some sensible options, take and action and see what happens. Or in the words of the Elvis Presley song, it's time 'for a little less conversation and little more action.'

This is a flexible and proactive approach which means you can crack on with applying for jobs. And if it works for you, you'll find that instead of having to choose your career, your career has chosen you!



This tool is designed to...

- Help you think positively about being uncertain which career is 'best' for you.
- Empower you to take a proactive approach to discovering your career path.
- Provide practical advice so can make this approach work for you.

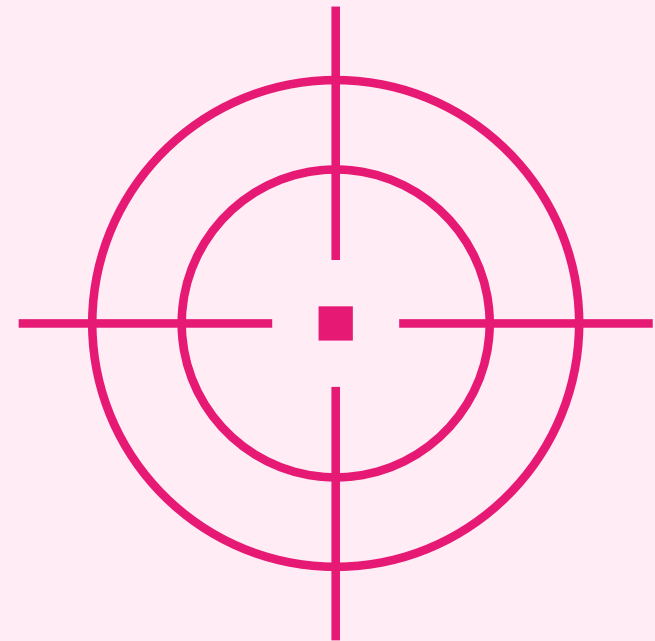
Consider using this tool if you...

- Want to start applying for jobs and have a small number of careers which look good to you.
- Feel comfortable with managing uncertainty in this way.
- Feel you have a fair amount of skills and knowledge given where you are in your education or career that are relevant and provide a good base for quality applications.

How to use this tool

First, make sure you are genuinely ok with the two or three careers you're going to go for.

This approach is NOT about applying for jobs at random. It is about flexibly responding to relevant vacancies that pop up that are within your 'target area.' We strongly advise against applying for jobs at random as it is very difficult to focus your efforts and over time can leave someone feeling demotivated and confused.



Second, make a plan to manage your job application efforts.



Consider how long a quality application will take you and then set a target for the number you will make in a week, given your study and other personal commitments. A good quality, well-researched application takes quite a few hours, so be realistic! This is an important step as you need to limit the amount of applications you try to do. Otherwise you can get overwhelmed and start to feel anxious. If there are more vacancies than you can apply for at a particular point, don't worry. Your flexible approach means that you have made the net wider than if you were only looking for one career. And to quote Richard Branson (2016): 'Opportunities are like buses, there's always another one coming'.

Third, make sure you're in 'the zone' for each application you make.

Because you are looking at several careers, you'll need to work a bit harder to think and feel yourself into a job application. However, it's really important you tap as much enthusiasm as you can if you're to write a strong application which authentically expresses your strengths and interests. So think:

- What might appeal to me?
- What pros could this offer me?
- Why might someone who know me well say 'go for it'?

Finally, make this a smooth and efficient learning journey. You'll be making quite a few applications. So, note down who you apply to / when so you can keep on top of this project. Save application content so you can pick out the best bits for other future applications, though always tailor for each job / company (so no crude cut and paste) and ensure that you don't copy info about one company into another's application form!

Pause, Reflect, Act

As you make each application take some time to reflect upon the processes and what you can learn from it. Try to record your learning next to each application you make.

- Did you feel it was easier to make some applications than others, and if so why?
- Did you feel more energised by some than others, and what do they have in common?
- Which roles are you getting a better success rate with in terms of invites to interviews?
- Are there things you can do to make it easier to find the jobs you're after (e.g. using LinkedIn groups, or the information on local jobs from the Careers Service)?
- Are there things you can do to make it more likely you be successful in your applications? For instance:
 - Advice on job applications and interview from the Careers Service: [Application and recruitment](#)
 - Attending networking events.
 - Gaining more in person work experience:
 - Doing an online training package to get even more relevant skills and experience: [Opportunities Catalogue](#)

- What does this tell you about where to focus your efforts and energies?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other related Self-help tools you'd like to use as well?

NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

References and Resources

- Ansell, C., & Boin, A. (2019). Taming Deep Uncertainty: The Potential of Pragmatist Principles for Understanding and Improving Strategic Crisis Management. *Administration & Society*, 51(7), 1079–1112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399717747655>
- Branson, R. (2016, May 9th). *Opportunities are like buses - there's always another one coming* <http://virg.in/tdi>. [Image attached] [Status update]. Facebook. Retrieved 18th October 2023 from <https://www.facebook.com/RichardBranson/posts/10153614236295872:0>
- Galunic, C. (2022, November 18th). Careers and Chance: How much control do you really have? *Insead*. Retrieved 3rd October, 2023 from <https://knowledge.insead.edu/career/careers-and-chance-how-much-control-do-you-really-have>
- Pryor, R and Bright, J. (2011). *The Chaos Theory of Careers*. Routledge.

If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.