

# Careers Without Fears

A Self-help Tool

## Introduction

While one of the main reasons students give for going to university is to improve their career prospects, choosing a career can be stressful.

Fearful situations trigger what Psychologists term the 'threat' response (Sutton, 2022). In the case of looking at careers, it can lead to three possible reactions:

- Fight (being angry and resentful about careers and the world of work).
- Flight (actively avoiding employability activities).
- Freeze (ignoring careers to the very last minute).

Choosing your career can feel like a huge, scary decision. But it does not have to be. Careers Without Fears offers you three ways to think about making a career choice. This Self-help Tool is designed to reduce the fear and neutralise the threat response.

It is based on the approach of 'Cognitive Reframing' which is widely used in coaching / counselling (Morin, 2022). This entails finding more constructive perspectives on a situation. Most situations can be seen in different ways. But we easily get locked into one view. By considering alternatives, we can change how we see and feel about it.

This does not mean that you should pretend that choosing a career or getting a job is not somewhat stressful. In fact, denial or suppression is an unhelpful approach to managing emotions. But rather, by seeing the situation differently you can reduce the threat to manageable levels. The goal is to say 'yes it natural and normal to feel a bit of stress; it is OK, I can handle this.'

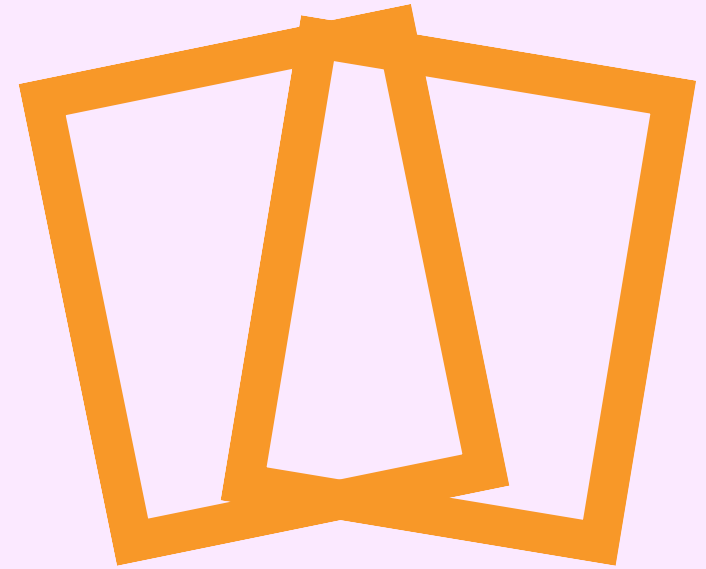
## This tool is designed to...

- Give you new perspectives on what it means to choose a career.
- Reduce the stress / threat associated with choosing a career.
- Help you feel safe and OK to think about careers.

## Consider using this tool if you...

- Feel very anxious about careers.
- Know you will put off thinking about careers because it is too stressful for you.
- Have a lot of emotional energy tied up worrying about careers.

## How to use this tool:



Each of the three reframes are standalone. See which works best for you. At the end there is some extra advice on how to make these reframes even more effective.

# 1

## **One, I can always change my mind.**

Rather than thinking of your career choice as a life sentence, see it as potentially temporary. The notion of staying in one profession, let alone one organisation for life, is increasingly being replaced by more fluid work patterns.

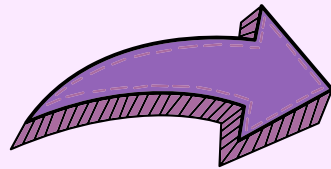
Research in 2017 by LV shows that the average UK worker will change jobs every 5 years (Hope, 2017). More recent research by CIPD shows that 20% of UK workers plan to change jobs in the next 12 months, and that 23% of these planned to get a different type of job (2022). Moreover, younger people are also more likely to change jobs than older workers are (ONS, 2021).

To give a personal illustration, since leaving university, the author has worked for 7 organisations and had 6 different professional job roles, ranging from delivering training workshops across the UK and Ireland, through to leading a team of 45 people.

Reframe from: 'I will be stuck with this forever' to 'I can always change my mind.'



**"I will be stuck with  
this forever"**



**"I can always change  
my mind"**

## 2

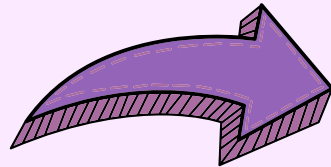
### **Two, it is just a job, it does not define me.**

Graduate recruitment literature can sometimes make it seem that the employer wants your heart and soul as well as your skills. Talk of ‘following your passions’ and finding your vocation can also make it seem that your job must be an important means of expressing your individual identity. And it can be. You will spend a lot of time at work, which is why finding something that is agreeable is desirable.

However, it does not necessarily need to be the thing that defines you. There will be other important things in your life: your family and friends; your hobbies and leisure pursuits; your community involvement and volunteering, for example. You may even run a small business on the side alongside your ‘day’ job. For a lot of people these outside activities can be more important than their (main) job.

Furthermore, the meaning and importance that work has for you is likely to change over time (Super, 1980). Becoming too absorbed in a job runs the risk of burn-out (Schabram, & Maitlis, 2017). In fact, the theory known as ‘Career Anchors’ argues that for some people, the thing they value about their job is not the work itself, but the freedom it brings to do things outside of work (Schein and Maanen, 2016).

Reframe from 'My career defines me' to 'I am much bigger than any job.'






# 3

## **Three: I do not need the job to be 100% perfect to be happy.**


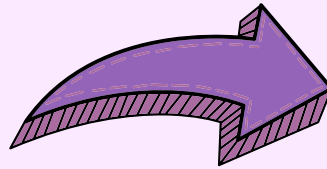
We all want to find a career that is right for us. But what if we get it wrong? What if we do not find our 'dream job'? Sometimes we can talk about career choice as if it was a pass or fail exam. One small error and you are doomed. But actually, it is quite different. Jobs are complex things entailing a wide range of tasks. Most include a mix of stuff you like and stuff you do not like, often in the same day! Obviously, the more an occupation entails things you enjoy and are good at, the better. But few people find jobs that are 100% to their liking.

Not only that, but people are complex too. We have all got different sides to us and are likely to find different sorts of careers appealing to a greater or lesser extent (Yates, 2019, p79). We do not stay the same either. Over time your priorities will change. The great job with lots of travel that was so exciting when you were single, may seem less attractive when you have family commitments. Your abilities and ambitions will change too. The authors of the popular book 'Designing Your Life' reckon that we all have 'in' us a number of potential careers, and probably more than we can fit into a single lifetime (Burnett and Evans, 2017).

Reframe from 'I need to get my career choice 100% right' to 'My job can be good enough without being perfect.'



"I need to get my  
career choice 100%  
right"



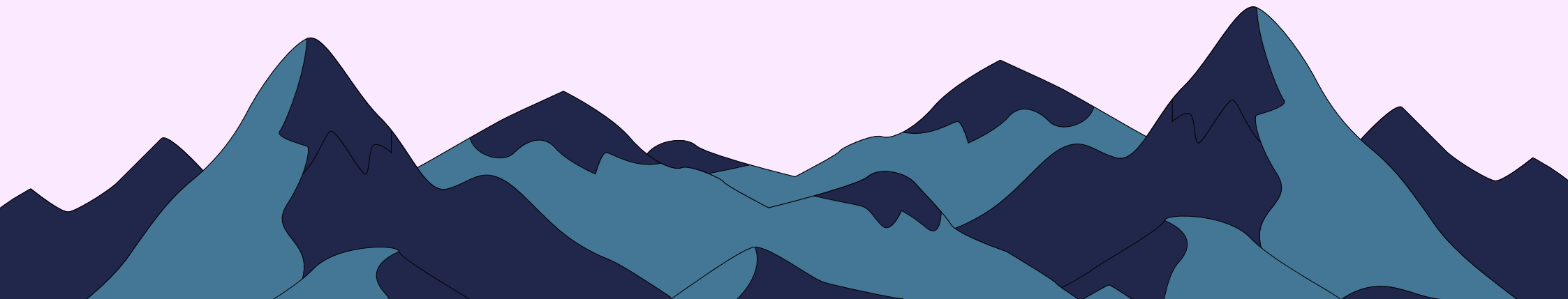
"My job can be good enough  
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## Pause, Reflect, Act.

- Which of these reframes worked best for you?
- Can you improve the way they work for you by rewriting them using your own words and terms?
- If there are other things that worry you about career choice, try to create your own reframes for them.
- What do you want to do practically to take forward the insights from this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Which other Self-help Tools would you like to look at next?

If you want to make your reframe especially powerful and persuasive, pretend you have to justify it to someone else. Take 5 minutes to write down all the reasons you can think of that make it true. Then read it aloud and conclude by saying, 'And that is why I believe this to be true.'

**NB: Because everyone is different, this tool may not work for you, so please also look at our other Self-help Tools.**



If this exercise has been uncomfortable to complete, or has simply raised issues you wish to consider further, you are welcome to talk through your feelings with a member of the [Careers and Employability Service](#) in a confidential setting by booking a careers appointment via the CES website, or by using the [Wellbeing Services](#).

## References and Resources

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking Fast and Slow. (1st ed.). Allen Lane.

[Prospects.ac.uk](#) provides the widest range of graduate career profile and information on different job sectors.

[Target Jobs](#) provides a wide range of graduate careers information.

**Dave Stanbury, Feb, 2023**



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 would love to hear from you and share good practice. We would ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we have used. Thank you.