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# Career Workbook: Problem paths approach

This workbook helps you 1) develop ideas for career paths targeting global problems, and 2) clarify what your ideal role might look like over the longer term.

At the end, you should have a shortlist of longer-term paths — ideas for what you might aim toward doing in the next 5–20 years.

## The structure of this workbook:

1. You'll use three approaches to write ideas for longer-term roles:
  - a. Paths that **aim at top problems**: Generate ideas for roles that tackle the problems you think are most pressing
  - b. Paths that **develop transferable career capital**: Generate ideas for roles that build 'transferable career capital' — skills, connections, or other resources that you will be able to use to tackle a variety of pressing problems
  - c. Paths that **capitalize on your strengths**: Clarify your strengths, skills, and other career capital, and use them to generate more options
    - At the end of this step, you'll have a longer list of potential longer-term paths.
2. Finally, you'll cover how to narrow down your longer-term paths into a shortlist and write out your key uncertainties.

This workbook is adapted from one section of the career series at [80,000 Hours](#).

## How to use this workbook in small groups:

Each section has instructions written in an orange box for time to spend thinking and discussing each section. We recommend groups of 3-4 people.

1. **First, appoint a timekeeper for the group.** This person will set a timer for each timed segment (i.e. set a 5 minute timer for "Take 5 minutes to write your list").
2. **Throughout, feel free to spend more or less time on each section to fit whatever is most helpful for your group.** The given time allotments are *much* shorter than we think you'd spend doing each section on your own — this is so

you can collaborate with a group to get initial ideas and reduce barriers to planning your career individually. As you go, you can modify the time spent on each section if your group needs more time.

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## 1. What's your current best guess of top global issues to work on?

These are key global problems that you think are potentially most pressing. You can revise this later once you're more sure — this is just a first pass at what you think might be most important!

Top 2-5 global issues

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3-10 issues that might be more pressing, but which you're more uncertain about

- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write your list.
2. Discuss: Take another 5 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group.
  - a. What evidence would make you change your mind? Conversely, what evidence would strengthen your belief?
3. (Optional) Write: Take 2 minutes to write down key questions or uncertainties you have about your prioritization. What questions do you need answered in order to have this list feel more certain?

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## 2. Create a 'long list' (10+) of potential longer-term paths that you think might best let you address your priority issues

Here we'll generate a long list of potential long term paths you could pursue to make a difference on a top global issue.

By longer-term paths we mean what you might plan to do beyond your immediate next career step, say over the next 5–25 years. E.g. working in operations at a climate change nonprofit, or becoming an economics researcher working on important questions. (If you'd like more info later, here's more on [what longer term paths should look like](#) and [why to make them](#).)

### Why brainstorm so many options?

Often people rule out potentially great options since they don't immediately seem like a natural match for their current skills, but they might be underestimating their long-term potential.

If you try a potentially-great but uncertain long-term path and it doesn't work out, you'll probably find out fairly soon and can try something else (while probably improving your skills in the meantime). However, if it's successful, you can stick with it for years, continuing to have a big impact. There's an asymmetry, which works in favour of aiming high and **testing out** the most promising options, especially early in your career. ([More on this argument here](#).)

In addition to aiming high, we think people should 'aim broad' - considering a wider range of long-term paths than seems intuitively plausible.

A. Start by generating 5+ ideas for paths that most help solve one of the problems you think is most pressing:

Think about what's most needed to make progress on your top problems, and then generate ideas for career paths that might help you address those needs. For example, if one of your top problems is AI safety, and you think what it most needs is high-quality AI alignment research, you could consider ways to further that research — e.g. becoming a researcher yourself, working at an organisation doing such research to make it more productive, or working in an AI company and helping to promote a culture of safety.

If one of your top problems is climate change, and you think what mitigating climate change most requires is technological innovation, you might list 'running an incubator for green tech startups' as a potential option.

Further resource: [Generate ideas for longer-term paths - 80.000 Hours](#)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

- 9.
- 10.

1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write your list of paths that most help solve one of the problems you think is most pressing.
2. Discuss: Take another 5 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group. Each person shares for 1-2 minutes on the problem they wrote paths for and the ideas they're thinking of. Most people will probably be quite uncertain!
3. (Optional) Write: Take 3 minutes to write down:
  - What questions do you need answers to in order to resolve your uncertainties on this section? What are you wondering about or unsure of?

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B. Now brainstorm 5+ ideas for paths that give you a lot of good transferable career capital:

Developing transferable career capital means aiming to build skills, connections, reputation, and other resources that will give you good options to work on top problems in the future ([more detail](#)). E.g. you could aim to work your way up in government, or become known as an expert in operations management. Write 5+ ideas for paths that would put you in a good position to work on top problems in the future.

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

1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write your list of paths.
2. Discuss: Take another 5 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group. Each person shares for 1-2 minutes.
3. (Optional) Write: Take 3 minutes to write down:
  - What questions do you need answers to in order to resolve your uncertainties on this section? What are you wondering about or unsure of? What could help you learn more?

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### C. List 5 of your most important strengths and pieces of career capital

For this method, first clarify your strengths, skills, and other career capital—e.g. maybe you excel at communication, have experience in information security, etc. ([More on how to do this](#)) Try to list 3–6 strengths or other assets:

What strengths do you have to offer?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

1. Write: Take 4 minutes to write your list of most important strengths and pieces of career capital. (You'll discuss after the next section!)

How might these strengths be used to contribute to the problems you think are most pressing?

Now brainstorm another 2–5 ideas for longer-term paths that would allow you to capitalise on these assets. For example, if you find you're particularly creative and good at building systems, that might suggest you could try a role in operations management.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

1. Write: Take 4 minutes to write your list.
2. Discuss: Take 7 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group. Each person shares for 2-3 minutes about their strengths and possible paths.
3. (Optional) Write: Take 3 minutes to write down:
  - What skills haven't you explored that you might want to test further? What could you do to test your fit for various skills/paths above?

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D. Generate any more options for longer term paths you can think of

Not considering enough options is one of the most common decision-making mistakes, so here are even more questions to help you come up with ideas:

*Elimination – if you couldn't do any of your top options, what would you do instead?*

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*Good luck – What would you do if you knew you would have a high chance of success? What's something that's scarily ambitious?*

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*Ideal world – What would you do if money were no object? What is your dream job?*

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*Imagine asking your friends and connections – What do they think might be ideal for you?*

- 

*Combinations – are there any ways your top options could be combined to get the best of both worlds?*

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*In-between options -- are there any paths that seem like they don't fit neatly into any well-known category of careers, perhaps falling between categories?*

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*How might you be ten times as productive, or have ten times as much influence, or be ten times better at making decisions, in under ten years from now?*

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*How might you put myself in the best possible position to help solve pressing global problems?*

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1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write about any (one or multiple) of the prompts above.
2. Discuss: Take 5 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group.
3. (Optional) Write: Take 3 minutes to write down:
  - What skills haven't you explored that you might want to test further? What could you do to test your fit for various skills/paths above?

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### 3. Narrow down your ideas into a 'short list' (3-6) of your most promising longer-term paths.

Now that you have brainstormed lots of options for long term paths, it's time to narrow them down to a shortlist of the most promising options.

You can choose what factors to use to compare options, but we suggest:

- Targeted impact: How pressing the problem each path addresses, and how much does it help you solve it?
- Transferable career capital: How much will each path give you general purpose leverage to contribute to solving pressing problems?
- Personal fit: what are your chances of outsized success? (& [relative fit](#) if working with a community)

[Other advice from 80,000 Hours](#) has more guidance on how to assess your paths based on the factors you choose.

Again, don't worry if you're uncertain — you'll write your uncertainties below and come back to them.

Your shortlist of 3-6 promising longer-term paths

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write your tentative shortlist.
2. Discuss: Take 5 minutes to discuss what you wrote with your group.

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#### 4. What are your biggest uncertainties about your shortlist?

Ask: “what information could most easily change my ranking?” For example, do you know how competitive it is to become a professional journalist, and how strong an indication your current experience is for whether this route would be a good fit? Or, how effective are government positions in improving the world?

If you learned that some of your top options had worse (or better) backup options than you thought, would that change your ranking?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What concrete actions can you take to investigate and resolve these uncertainties?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1. Write: Take 5 minutes to write about any (one or multiple) of the prompts above.
  2. Discuss: Take 5 minutes to discuss your thoughts with your group.
  3. (Optional) Write: Take 3 minutes to write down:
    - What skills haven't you explored that you might want to test further? What could you do to test your fit for various skills/paths above?
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