A mindful and informed approach
A lot of PhD students assume that they don’t need to think about their future until their last year, when it’s time to find a job. But the transition out of grad school is stressful enough—why make it worse? There’s a lot you can do at any stage to figure out what you want to do and make sure you’re prepared.

Know Yourself
When you’re a PhD student, a lot of people (including you) tend to assume that you have a certain set of skills, personal values, and goals for your life. But you’re a unique individual! You need to know what you enjoy and value in order to decide what career would be a good fit for you.

What are your interests?

• What problems do you think are most important or pressing?
• What problems do you find most intellectually or emotionally engaging?
• How do you want to contribute to the world?
**What skills do you enjoy using?**

- Scientific knowledge
- Critical analysis, evaluation of literature, interpretation of data
- Creativity, innovative thinking, experiment design
- Communication – writing, editing, speaking, presenting; for scientists or non-scientists
- Teaching, training, mentoring, guiding, providing feedback, serving as a role model
- Planning and organizing projects, time management, budget management, data and resource management
- Leading, creating vision and goals, motivating others, working with a team, delegating responsibilities
- Seeking advice and feedback, negotiating difficult conversations, dealing with conflict

**What do you value about your work and work environment?**

- What kind of work makes you feel creative, committed, tireless, decisive, passionate, determined, fulfilled?
- Do you prefer to work by yourself, with a partner, with a team of equals, or as the leader/supervisor of a team?
- What kind of rewards do you find motivating?
  e.g. challenge, influence, respect, gratitude, security, independence, wealth, power, fame, popularity, public recognition, helping others, changing minds, …

**Quick fix for self-assessment: Online tools**

- Imagine PhD (imaginephd.com)
- MyIDP (myidp.sciencecareers.org)

**Some useful introspection**

**Achievement stories**

1. Brainstorm up to 10 achievements from any time in your life. For this exercise, we’ll define an achievement as a time when you had a TASK, you used certain TOOLS or MEANS to work on it, and the OUTCOME was something you’re proud of, regardless of whether other people know about it. Think of times when you were at your most creative, passionate, committed, and tireless.
2. For each story, consider the following questions:
   a. What was your INTEREST in the task?
   b. What SKILLS did you use to complete the task?
   c. What did you VALUE about the outcome?

**The Really Big Picture**

Option 1: Imagine yourself on your deathbed. If you’re happy and at peace, what were your most important accomplishments? If you’re full of regret, what did you fail to accomplish?

Option 2: Imagine you have five years left to live. In terms of your work life, what is it that you most want to accomplish in your remaining years?

Option 3: What situation or need in your community, nation, or world most moves you to want to take action? What situation do you notice yourself complaining about the most? How could you ultimately be most effective in working on these problems?