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# Feed Your Imagination

A Self-help Tool

Introduction

To improve your ability to imagine things, it helps to understand how imagination works. Contrary to what we might believe, imagination isn't about generating ideas out of thin air.

Try this quick experiment. Imagine a stapler inside a yellow jelly (or jello). Most people can do this quite easily. But how? The answer is that imagination relies heavily on memory. When we imagine new things, we do so by combining old things we've seen elsewhere (Hammond, 2019). So, if you know what a stapler looks like, and have seen a jelly wobbling on a plate at a party, you can take the extra step of imagining what the stapler looks like set inside a translucent jelly. For some people who've watched the UK (or American) sitcom 'The Office', this question was super-easy to answer because you will have actually seen this, when Tim plays a practical joke on Gareth. (If you haven't watched this, then you can find it on YouTube).

The point is that to imagine careers we might do in the future, we need to feed our imaginations and create a rich stock of ideas that we feel familiar with.
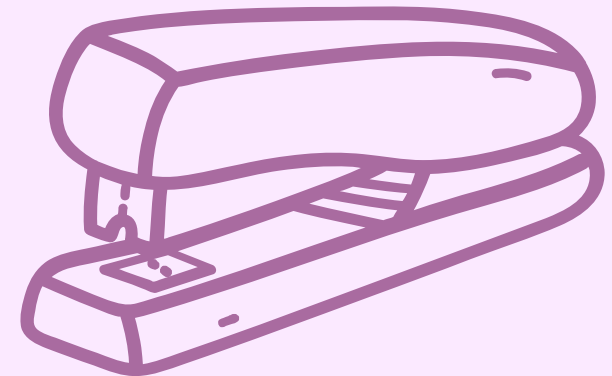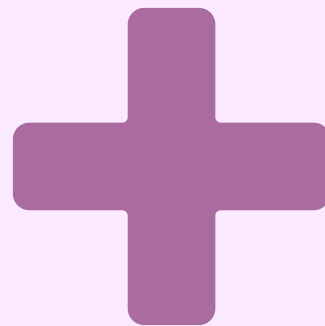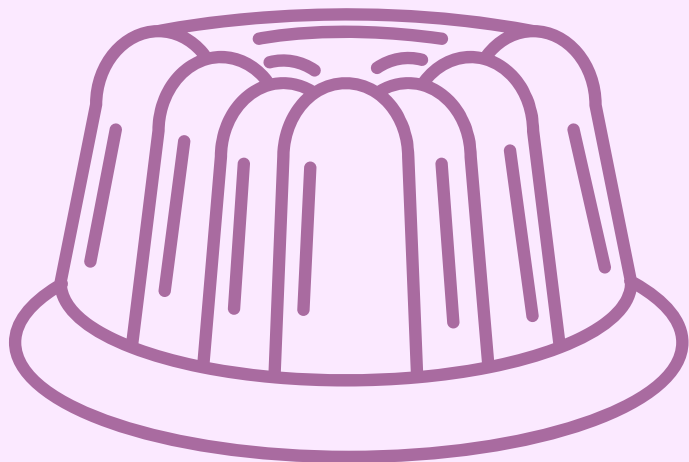
This tool is designed to…

- Give you new career ideas.
- Make unfamiliar careers come to life.
- Increase your openness to new career ideas.

Consider using this tool if you…

- Feel you can't imagine what you might do in the future.
- Think your range of ideas is limited.
- Think your ideas feel distant and unreal.

How to use this tool

1 Create a target for the number of new careers you want to know about

The idea is to feed in lots of new possibilities. So, don't be limited by what appeals. Use this opportunity to deliberately mix things up and think outside of the box.

For example, you might decide to find out about 20 new jobs over the next month (five per week).

2 Choose a good time of the day to find out about these jobs

Research suggests that we are more receptive to new ideas when we are sleepy. So, rather than choose your prime time of the day, choose a point where you are starting to relax (May, 2012).

3 Pick some careers to find out about

It doesn't matter too much how you do this, as the purpose is to generate fresh ideas. Of course, if you have specific careers in mind but feel you just don't understand them enough, then that's different, and you'll want to focus on these. To broaden your thinking, you could:

- Ask friends or family to choose careers for you to research.
- Use one of the online resources listed below, and pick ideas at random.
- If you find it hard to pick ideas at random, you could choose ten careers, write then on pieces of paper and pick five out of a hat, or number the careers 1–12 and roll two dice.
- Look at all the jobs listed for a particular sector.
- Look at all the professions starting with a specific letter.
- Pick any job you've heard of but have never looked into.
- List all the graduate jobs you know people do in your street/area/church/mosque etc., and check them out.
- Web search random careers (e.g. 'I wonder if there's a career in being a vegan/pet Instagrammer/influencer?'). Make up your own search combination.
- Take a career that you think might appeal and look at all the other careers related to this, using the Prospects website's career profiles (see the 'Alternative Careers' section at the end of each profile).
- List all the careers you think you could never do (but which appeal on some level), and check them out.

4 Watch a career video (or read a career profile)

It's that simple! Try to put your mind in neutral, and suspend judgements. Let it sink into your subconscious. Ideally, watch the same video a few times. This helps activate the 'familiarity effect' – a well-researched phenomenon that means just encountering a new idea several times helps us take it on board, more than if we only come across it once (Wikipedia, 2022). Afterwards, you may like to jot down key words or brief thoughts, but don't feel you have to. Watching and hearing people talk about their jobs is a great way to bring careers to life. There are lots of places online, including:

- This Student Can video bank: hud.ac/qce
- iCould: https://icould.com
- BBC Bitesize A-Z careers videos: hud.ac/sq0
- Department for Education: hud.ac/sq1
- Get Career Confident: hud.ac/sq2
- Graduate career advice/recruitment websites also have a mix of interviews with graduates and employers. For instance:
  - Prospects jobs profiles usually have a couple of 'day in the life of' articles: hud.ac/sq3
  - Target Jobs has its own YouTube channel: hud.ac/sq4
- Try Googling large national companies, as most have online video content.

Pause, Reflect, Act

- Which <u>people</u> did you identify with?
- What <u>settings</u> do you think you would have felt at home in?
- Which <u>activities</u> appealed?
- Which <u>careers</u> stood out as being attractive?
- What new ideas/insight have you got now, that you didn't have before?
- What ideas do you want to follow up next?
- What do you want to do now practically, to take forward the insights from this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
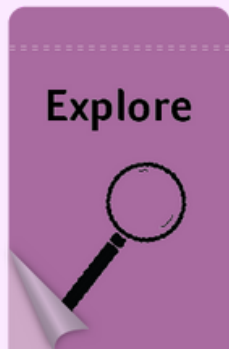- Which other Self-help Tools would you like to look at next?

NB: Because everyone is different, no one solution is a magic bullet, so please look at our other Self-help Tools as well, and use the ones that work best for you.

References and Resources

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Explore

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