SECTION 2: FINDING YOUR PURPOSE
If you ask yourself what you’re doing in college, your reasons could include one of the following:

- Earn a degree
- Get a job
- Make friends
- Explore new ideas and careers

These reasons (and more) are all wonderful—but they are not enough to motivate you to get through the next four or so years of college.

If you ask yourself why you’re in college, does your answer change?

For example, why do you want to earn a degree? Perhaps you are the first person in your family to go to college and you want to make your family proud. Maybe you want to be a doctor so that you can help others, just like the doctor who took care of a sick family member when you were younger.

There are many reasons that people choose to be at K-State. Two students could have the same goal of earning a degree but have very different reasons as to why that is important to them. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that you don’t know yours yet—and that’s okay! College provides a great opportunity to explore different ideas and experiences.

A secret to college-level success is a process called finding your why. Finding your why is discovering what drives you, what makes you feel alive, or what inspires you to keep moving forward. For example, why you want to receive a degree, why you want a particular job, why you want to make friends here.

When we work to find our why, we surface values, perspectives, and ways of being that motivate us and show us what is important. This internal, values-driven motivation is
also known as intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is when you motivate yourself based on internal goals. This form of motivation keeps you moving toward and making progress on your goals even when you’re stressed out, losing focus, or just tired. Knowing your why can help you find sustaining motivation to accomplish your biggest dreams. Once you dig deeper and know what motivates you, you are able to set specific, achievable goals and make your college experience much more satisfying and worthwhile.

Take a look at the following two student examples. When reading, observe what Dan and Haley consider to be their purpose and also why this is their purpose:

“\(\text{I came to college to open myself up to opportunities and enhance my future success. I was eager to learn both material in the classroom and the lessons it had to offer outside, something that you can only attain by attending a university. Personally, my passion has been teaching. I have a desire to learn and by getting my teaching degree hopefully I’ll be able to achieve that by learning from my students each day. I also enjoy helping others, specifically assisting them to reach their highest intellectual potential. If everything goes according to plan, I’ll be graduating with a Bachelor of Science dual degree in History and Secondary Education next spring.}\)”

– Dan Geist

“When deciding what I wanted to pursue in college, I realized there were three themes I was unwaveringly committed to: creativity, culture, and compassion. I sought a place where I could live out these values alongside other passionate people who desired to solve problems creatively, engage with culture curiously, and serve their communities selflessly. At K-State, I found this community in the residence halls, in the classroom, and in the studios alongside upperclassmen, professors and classmates who are dedicated to each other’s welfare and growth.”

– Haley Weinberg

Now that you’ve read student examples, it’s your turn to explore your own purpose.
Using the chart below as an example, think through reasons that you are here in college. Then (and this is the important step), explain why this reason is important to you. This is the process of finding your why. If you’re unsure what your why might be, you can refer back to the student examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason You’re at K-State</th>
<th>Your Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I need a degree.</td>
<td>I need a degree because I want to help make positive changes to support youth in the city where I grew up. A position that I could potentially apply for requires a degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the next part of the activity, choose one of the reasons you listed that is the most important to you—keeping your why in mind—and write a strategic goal that you can accomplish. You can use the chart below as a guide for your reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason You’re at K-State</th>
<th>Your Why</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I need a degree</td>
<td>I need a degree because I want to help make positive changes to support youth in the city where I grew up. A position that I could potentially apply for requires a degree.</td>
<td>By joining student government, I can get experiences advocating and learning about government process. It will also help me get connected at K-State.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe how college success is dependent on knowing your purpose
- Begin to explore your why and find your purpose
- Set goals that are fueled by your why
CHAPTER 7
DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS

Picture this scenario: Everyone in Jenae’s group project is competitive and goal-oriented. To complete the group project, they develop a list of ten things that each group member has to do to contribute to stay on task and ask everyone to compete to see who can complete all their tasks first. Jenae, on the other hand, is not motivated by checking tasks off a to-do list and would rather work at her own pace. By trying to adjust her work preference to check off the items on the list like everyone else, she realizes that she is getting behind and can’t seem to find time to work on the project.

However, Jenae is also an empathetic person. Instead of checking off her list, she decides to think about the project from her group’s perspective by deploying her empathy. When she begins to empathize with the group, she understands why the project is important and realizes she doesn’t want to let her friends down. By finding motivation in empathizing with the group, she can focus on the task at hand and makes it through the list. You can think of this as being people-oriented rather than task-oriented.

This example demonstrates the philosophy that is the premise of the strengths-based approach to learning. CliftonStrengths® for Students is a self-reflection assessment that determines 5 strengths that are uniquely yours. The basic premise of this approach is that by focusing on what you’re good at, you can maximize your success and perhaps compensate for other areas.¹

Some people might view Jenae’s non-competitive nature as a deficit, but we can actually see this as an advantage. In the group work example, Jenae focused on the strength

As you read this chapter, you will:

- Learn the CliftonStrengths for Students philosophy
- Learn how to take the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment
- Explore how to leverage your strengths to reach your goals

of empathy rather than worrying about the lack of achiever. Utilizing the strength of a natural talent rather than spending energy elsewhere helps to accomplish the same goal more efficiently. This process is a strengths-based approach.

Let’s take organizational strategies as another example of using your personal strengths. If you’re someone who likes to plan ahead and organize information, an arranger, using lists or a planner could be a good way to maximize this strength. However, waiting until the last minute would not be a successful strategy for you. Alternately, if adaptability is one of your strengths, you may find a general timeline to be more useful. Learning how to use your strengths to accomplish tasks and overcome challenges will help you in all areas of life, including helping you to be well-received in an interview, navigating a challenge with roommates, or meeting a tight deadline at work.

K-State provides access to the CliftonStrengths® for Students for every first-year student because we believe in the power in knowing ourselves and our talents. Learning about your strengths is a first step in maximizing them to accomplish the goals you’ve outlined for college, completing tasks, and finding lasting intrinsic motivation. Knowing your strengths helps you enact your why.

Are you ready to find out YOUR strengths?

Please follow these steps to find your access code and take the assessment prior to your next class period (these steps are also available at the K-State CliftonStrengths® for Students website, which includes screenshots to help you visualize the process):

1. Sign in using KSIS.

2. From the navigation bar, select: self-service – student success – StrengthsQuest.

3. Highlight and copy your StrengthsFinder access code from KSIS.

4. Navigate to Gallup’s website.

5. Paste your access code and discover your strengths!
Right after taking the assessment, list out your top five strengths. Additionally, reflect upon how accurate you think the strength is. You can use the chart below as a guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Initial Impression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>I’m not sure if this describes me because I don’t check things off a to-do list.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After you finished the assessment, you received a report that described each of your top five strengths in detail. Read through this report carefully, and write a definition of each strength in your own words and how you see it applying to your life. Consider how you interact with your friends, family, coworkers, professors, etc. so you have a wide range of contexts in this application question. You can use the chart below to formulate your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Your Definition</th>
<th>How it Applies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Someone with the achiever strength might be really organized and driven by finishing projects.</td>
<td>In my daily life, I’m hyper-organized with everything I do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Take one of the goals you identified last chapter. Then, write how you would use each of your strengths to achieve that goal. Below, we provide an example of what this reflection might look like.

Goal: By joining student government, I can get experiences advocating and learning about government process. It will also help me get connected at K-State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>How you would use this strength to achieve your goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>I can use my achiever strength to create a check-list of membership responsibilities for joining SGA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the CliftonStrengths for Students philosophy
- Take the CliftonStrengths for Students assessment
- Know how to leverage your strengths to reach your goals
When you think about your success at K-State, what are the words or images that come to mind? Does your vision include:

- academic performance in your coursework or area of study
- making friends and memories
- overall happiness and satisfaction with your time here?

All three are logical conclusions, and the three are closely related.

How often do you consider that your ways of thinking—your behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes—contribute immensely to overall success and emotional wellbeing?

Starting at the university is a completely new experience. Within a handful of weeks of arriving at K-State, everything from the way you live and share space with others, to the way you learn, is completely turned on its head. And yet, no one teaches you “how to go to college.”

Many of us, for better or worse, learn how to go to college through trial and error, which sometimes includes poor grades or even failure during the first semester. From those experiences, you adjust your approach. You might change up your class attendance, how you study and manage time, or even the major you chose upon entry.

The next two chapters are dedicated to the question of what it means to be a successful student. We won’t be as concerned with the technical details about what this looks like in a given class. Instead, we will focus on student behaviors and attitudes. Specifically, we will discuss self-concept, self-efficacy, self-talk, and self-advocacy, and in the next chapter, metacognition. If you don’t understand what these terms mean...
right now—that’s okay! We’ll explore their meaning together throughout this chapter.

**Student behaviors and attitudes**

Ultimately, the goal of this chapter seeks to demystify the behaviors of a successful college student to one simple truth: Your success isn’t based on your natural abilities, but how you equip yourself with the right tools for your success based on the question or challenge in front of you. This idea compliments what you just learned in the last chapter about your top five strengths, but focuses on the behavioral practices mentioned above.

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**Self-concept**

The first semester of college may carry a unique set of bumps and bruises, namely to our self-concept, or how we view ourselves—built from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others. In this new learning environment (college), we invariably take on some risk through our choices. For instance, we have a set of expectations as to what studying and time management might look like, but in practice, we have no idea if it will work here in this new setting.

**Self-efficacy**

The first set of mid-term or quiz grades can often be the most brutal, even if you are used to seeing fairly good scores next to your name. But with all the “newness”, there is a lot of room for missteps. The reason someone might miss the mark could be personal (priority was not on coursework and skipped some classes), or it could be academic (they simply did not know how much studying would be required to demonstrate understanding of the material on the test).

In these hypothetical scenarios, you have a couple of choices in how to make sense of this information. It might cross your mind that you are not “engineering” or “ag” or even “college” material and throw your hands in the air. With this choice, you confirm all the worst conclusions about yourself and what this experience entails. When things get tough, it may be easy to begin to doubt things like intelligence and ability in the face of adversity. Choosing to view obstacles as failures makes you lose your sense of self-efficacy, or the ability to believe we have what it takes to attain our goals, both large and small.

Or you could place this small experience within the grander scope of going to college. You could analyze what has gone wrong, and

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**Reflection Activity**

As you read this chapter, come up with a definition for the following terms in your own words. You’ll know the definition is right if you can easily explain what it means to someone who hasn’t heard of it before!

1. **Self-concept:**
2. **Self-efficacy:**
3. **Self-talk:**
4. **Self-advocacy:**
what might need to change. Surely, you are not the first student ever to do poorly on a Chemistry quiz. What can you do? And does this thing that needs changing start with you and your personal behaviors or with the complexity of the material and how you learn it?

**Self-talk**
In this latter instance, a student employs self-talk practices, an internal conversation for encouragement or motivation, to maximize possibility. Despite what you may think, failure is not final; instead, it is the pathway of development and growth. A bad grade doesn’t need to be the end for someone who focuses on developing their inner capacity for self-efficacy. People with this ability to believe in themselves look outward and inward for solutions, because a specific combination may be needed to move forward. For example, students with high self-efficacy would gather information about their study habits, the time spent studying, and maybe visit with fellow classmates or a tutor to gauge if it was a personal behavior or the actual material that is the root problem. This serves as an opportunity to challenge existing assumptions and behaviors and then make the necessary adjustments to attain a desired outcome.

**Self-advocacy**
Enter self-advocacy, or the ability to affect our life circumstances or stand up for yourself. Once you have reminded yourself that you are not the first human to flub formatting a paper during the first year of college, you may have to do some damage control.

When you make a mistake in this new environment, it may feel unfamiliar or uneasy reaching out for help. Up until now, you have spent 12 years of schooling with a very different expectation for support. In high school classrooms, teachers adjust their instructional methods when they observe there is confusion amongst their students. In the university environment, you are responsible for diagnosing confusion. In order to correctly diagnose this confusion, you may want to reach out to those people on campus who can best help you clarify your learning: professors, TAs (Teaching Assistants), LAs (Learning Assistants), or tutors.

It isn’t always possible to erase the error—in some cases, this won’t even be a possibility based on a professor’s grading expectations for a course. However, in some instances, simply reaching out and seeking clarity may offer some insight into how the error occurred in the first place. Similarly, learning where you got off track can add a whole host of solutions to your repertoire on how to adjust or correct your understanding and preparation.

This information has been pretty hypothetical. Let’s explore some common first-year scenarios on the next page.
This chapter has required some critical thinking. Let’s break down these ideas into lived practice. After reading each of the scenarios, write a couple of sentences in response to the questions we pose.

**Scenario 1**
You are taking Geology 103 (lab) and you show up on the third week having printed the incorrect materials for today’s lab. Your professor sends you to Hale Library to print the right one. This takes nearly 40 minutes roundtrip, leaving you with insufficient time to complete the activity.

1. What do you do?
2. Where can you get answers?
3. What are your options?

**Scenario 2**
You are enrolled in Expository Writing 1. You are fairly confident in your reading and writing abilities. You attend all of the classes and engage in discussion. You begin your first paper a couple of days before it is due. You are rushing the night before to make content and copy edits in order to turn in a well-written essay. You receive a C as your first grade.

1. What do you do?
2. Where can you get answers?
3. What are your options?

Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define self-concept, self-advocacy, self-talk and self-efficacy.
- Look at academic failures as learning opportunities.
- Use feedback to develop strategies for future improvement.
Up until this point in your educational career, you have been asked to perform in the role of a very specific type of student. In high school, whether it was for AP Language, Government, Biology or Freshman English, your ‘job’ was fairly clear cut—attend to what is happening in class, be engaged with the unit, listen and problem solve with your teacher/others, and perform well on assignments and exams.

**Metacognition**

Very seldom in this type of learning environment were you asked to think about your own thinking, or practice what experts call metacognition, regarding your learning practices. This was baked into the cake. Your teachers were grade-level content specialists and knew a thing or two about pedagogy, the practices of teaching. Thinking was built into the processes and practices of skill development that enabled you to be a successful student.

This has all been turned on its head in college, especially in the notorious lecture course. Now you are in the driver’s seat of managing your learning and knowledge—and it is coming at you fast.

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**Reflection Activity**

Let’s pause for a second and reflect about thinking—or practice metacognition.

1. When you look back to your high school experiences, what expectations were placed on you?

2. By contrast, what expectations have you noticed during your first semester of college that have differed from your high school experience?
Students often describe their first couple of weeks of college coursework as surreal. Even if they were high-performing students in high school, they now have to sift through large amounts of reading, synthesize lectures and online materials, and devise a method for how to take abstract, theoretical concepts and apply them on their own through problem sets or extensive formal essay writing.

While in high school, your teacher likely introduced a concept, walked you through how to apply the concept, and provided repeated opportunities to practice application, whether through homework, worksheets, or practice essays. This process also included opportunities for feedback and corrections. College-level learning requires you to fill in many of those in-between steps on your own, A professor may introduce a concept, work through a few problems in class as a road map, and then move on. The practice and seeking opportunities for feedback and corrections are now your responsibility.

In college, faculty serve a different role in learning. Additionally, college requires a different set of expectations for what learning looks like and the role students play in their own knowledge and sense-making process.

You have now become the manager of your own learning. This is a perfect point to begin to ask the million-dollar question: “What is being asked of me?”

Each discipline you study has its own unique set of knowledge, questions, and tools for creating understanding. As a successful metacognitive learner, your job is to figure out how to embrace the thinking of the discipline you are learning and use those unique skills and tools to make meaning, solve problems, or whatever task is asked of you.

Whoa! That’s a lot to digest. Let’s look at an example.

In high school history, you likely learned information that was transmitted by your teacher. In particular, you made sense of a historical moment, for example the Civil War, by learning about what happened, who was involved, and what events had a significant impact on the course of history. You often did some reading and memorized important dates. Then you demonstrated that you knew the information about the Civil War on a standard, multiple choice exam. You may have gone farther and complicated the ways people ‘remembered’ the Civil War by reading contrasting viewpoints or historical accounts. All in all, you worked with others, including your teacher, to create meaning and understanding.

In your college US History class, your teacher functions less as the container of knowledge and more as a guide. Here you must build from the ground up, forming a broader idea of “What is the Civil War?”. This might require you to think, like a historian, about the social, economic, and political conditions that shaped peoples’ experiences and choices during that time. You may be given multiple, competing readings that do not create a clear picture of what was going on. You will have lectures, notes, and prompts on how to make sense of all that you have learned, but ultimately the thinking is your own. You could still see the familiar multiple-choice exam, but there is a lot of variation in how faculty choose to have you demonstrate your understanding. You may be asked to complete oral exams, presentations, essays, and group projects during your time at K-State.
Metacognitive learners, no matter the situation, use questioning and reflection to piece together what is happening in front of them, and their own internal sense-making process.

**Metacognitive practices**

This sense-making process will be context and content dependent. However, some common behaviors among successful metacognitive learners are:

- Making a plan on how to learn
  - Note-taking strategies
  - Synthesizing material across learning environments
- Monitoring learning
  - Questioning/find confusion
  - Seeking outside assistance to clarify understanding
- Evaluating what was learned
  - Making connections

The management of one’s learning is time-dependent as well. This is happening at each interaction with the content: reading independently, listening and taking notes in class, and studying for finals. Rather than cramming understanding or finding meaning at the end of a given set of concepts, the learning is spread out over time through the successful student’s interaction with the material. This often leads to deeper meaning-making, and increased confidence when it comes to testing.

In the past two chapters, you have explored some of the important tools of the successful student, namely self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and the complementary metacognitive practices that support learning. As you have likely concluded, acquiring these ways of thinking, and the accompanying skills and behaviors, has little to do with your specific coursework, or the questions being asked by your professor on an assignment. Being a successful college student has everything to do with how you manage yourself and the material from your classes in this new challenge called “going to college.”

Consider yourself a scientist in the experiment of life as a college student. Over the next 4 years, you will be collecting information on how to do a vast number of unfamiliar things—living with hundreds of people, managing your time to study for numerous classes, gauging which information your professors will highlight on mid-terms and how you will be asked to demonstrate your understanding. In each instance, you will have a hypothesis of what this might look like and you will test it. “I study like this for Introduction to Biology.” “I plan an essay for Expository Writing using these resources.”

After some time, you will begin to build up some information about yourself and this system. This information will confirm that you are indeed onto something—that your thinking, skills, and behaviors are confirming what you thought was needed in Introduction to Psychology or Physics 1. Other data will indicate that you need a different, improved hypothesis—a different combination of thinking, skills, and behaviors.

You may feel like you have failed when your data indicates you need a different hypothesis. Failure, missing the mark, getting more data—whatever you want to call it—is an opportunity to reflect on all the parts that go into being a successful student, and make the necessary adjustments. Given that no one has ever taught us how to “do college”, this experimental approach allows each one of us the space, flexibility, and time needed to grow, and that’s all learning really is—growing into a stronger, more knowledgeable, capable human.
You've got this!

Now that you've read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define and explain what metacognition is
- Practice using metacognition in your college experience

Reflection Activity

To reflect on this chapter, consider what information you have taken in throughout your first semester.

1. What do you enjoy doing? Where have you succeeded?
2. On the other hand, what has been challenging? Where do you have room to grow?
Finding a major that works for you
You may have a very clear vision for your future, or you may have no idea what you want, or you may be somewhere in between. All of those are totally normal! It’s also okay to change your mind. Honestly, there are an endless number of careers, and there’s many you’ve probably never heard of that would be a great fit for you. You might be surprised about the variety of majors that can lead you down your desired path. Did you know there are K-State graduates with English degrees who went to medical school and became doctors? Your college major does not lock you onto a single career track for your whole life, so find a good fit for your interests and strengths. Finding a major that interests you and capitalizes on your natural abilities will make it easier to find success.

The first step to finding your fit is considering who you are:
- What are you interested in (subjects, impacts, etc.)?
- What skills, abilities, or aptitudes do you have?
- What is important to you/what do you value (family, financial stability, freedom)?
- What do you not enjoy that you would like to avoid, if possible?

As you read this chapter, you will:
- Find a major that works for you—or confirm you are in the right major
- Develop a degree map to insure you take the necessary courses
- Consider extra-curricular activities as strategic benefits to your college and professional success

CHAPTER 10
FINDING OR MAXIMIZING A MAJOR
From this brief exploration, do you feel that you’re in the right major? Are there instances that a specific major isn’t required for your field? If you’re feeling uncertain about your major, use the Career Center’s Career Exploration resources. Through the Career Center you can:

• Take free career assessments
• Explore available majors and careers
• Attend Major, Minors, and More! – an annual exploration event, typically in October
• Enroll in EDCEP 120 – a career planning course
• Attend career counseling and workshops (to schedule, create a Handshake account)

These resources may or may not lead you to a precise major or career, but they will help you recognize some areas to explore.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by choosing your major and career because nothing seems like a fit—or everything does—you can also get support with this process through Counseling Services’ Career Development Services:

• Take a career assessment, followed by a scheduled interpretation ($31-$35)
• Attend Individual Career Counseling
• Enroll in EDCEP 202 – Career and Life Planning

Even if you’re confident you’ve already found your fit, explore career possibilities through the Career Center and your department. The world is full of diverse opportunities that may be new to you, and you might stumble upon something new that excites you. Go read the Career Center’s Ten Major and Career Myths to make sure you have all the information you need to proceed with your chosen major.
Your major is important to your college experience. It can have a big impact on how engaged you are in your college experience—both in and out of the classroom. The more engaged you are, the more successful you are likely to be in school, and the more you will learn and grow as a person. That growth can lead to a lot of professional success in any field. Finding a good fit that you enjoy instead of getting caught up in the myths will help you enjoy your college experience and lead to future success.

**Maximizing your major**

Once you find the right fit, make the best of your experience. Earning your degree is more than just completing required coursework. You should focus on how to develop yourself into the professional you want to be through the courses you choose, the activities you get involved in, and the employment opportunities you take.

The first step in making the best of your major is to create a degree map—a plan for what classes you’ll take during your entire time as a K-State student. Creating a plan helps you graduate on time and have the know-how to adapt your program of study to reflect changes in your goals as you progress through college. As you choose your courses, explore your interests, play to your strengths, and find opportunities for growth so that you’re fully prepared for all the future career possibilities that interest you.

To create a degree map, you’ll need the following:

- Your DARS Report from KSIS (learn how to access DARS and read DARS), to see your progress in your degree requirements.
- The Undergraduate Catalog, which documents your degree requirements, pre-requisites for classes, and course schedule specifics.
- Your academic advisor to help you understand DARS and the catalog, and to provide feedback on your plan.

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**Reflection Activity**

After reading through the Ten Major and Career Myths, reflect on the following questions:

1. What was your reaction to reading the myths? Were you surprised? Or did they make sense to you?
2. Choose one of the myths you think is the most important to keep in mind. Explain why you think people might have this misconception or misunderstanding.
Below is an example of one semester of a degree map in list format. A list form degree map is the easiest format to design your own sequence and plan. This table will repeat for each semester you plan to be in school.

**CHEMICAL ENGINEERING (128 hours)**

Effective Fall 2018

If your program has a prescribed structure, such as engineering or physics, your college may provide you with a degree map to follow, often in a flowchart format. Below is a sample flowchart provided by the College of Engineering. The flowchart format clearly shows the prerequisites that lead up to later classes. If your program doesn’t provide you with a flowchart, you can use this model to generate your own.
With a degree map in place, your next step is to get involved in extra-curricular activities that build your skills and knowledge towards your goals. You can:

- Attend campus events that broaden your perspective in productive ways.
- Join clubs that build skills and knowledge and demonstrate your commitment to important areas.
- Find part-time jobs and internships that build relevant skills and knowledge.

You can also find campus events and organizations that fit your goals:

- Read K-State Today for announcements of events and opportunities.
- Read emails, especially from your college and department.
- Create a K-State 360 account to find campus events and track your participation in on-campus activities. This is a great resource, and you can earn points for free things through your participation!
- Check out Orgsync to connect with groups, organizations and programs.
- Create a Handshake account to search for jobs and internships.

Participating in student groups and volunteer organizations can be especially important. Student groups are a great place to meet other individuals who share your passions and who can provide a support network. Department and volunteer activities can also build your skills and experiences so that you are more prepared for your professional future.

Another great way to get the most of out of your major is to form strong relationships with peers and professors:

- Take advantage of available mentor programs. A mentor can answer questions, offer advice, and make sure you’re aware of opportunities.
- Make friends with classmates so that you have a support network as you progress and are challenged to take on new experiences. Once you graduate, these friends may be the start of your professional network.
- Get to know your professors. Professors can connect you with interesting opportunities and may help you network with professionals. If you form positive relationships, they can write letters of reference when you apply for jobs or internships, and they may even nominate you for scholarships or awards. It’s a good habit to go to office hours early in the semester so that your professor can get to know you and you can impress upon them how invested you are in their class.

Through your extracurricular involvement you can apply things learned in your classes, build a network for support and connections to professional opportunities, and enhance your skills. There’s a lot to be gained from careful planning and active engagement in the full campus experience beyond the classroom.
Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

✓ Feel more comfortable with the major you have chosen or have narrowed your search for a major
✓ Provide your advisor with a degree map to guide your enrollment conversation
✓ Identify extra-curricular activities that will enhance your college experience and your professional success
Finding a job ad
Finding jobs and internships while in college is an important part of your professional development. Recognizing gaps in your essential skill sets and finding a job that allows you to develop one or more of those skill gaps can be a great opportunity for growth.

For example, if you know you want to lead a marketing team, one of the skills you’ll need to demonstrate is strong communication skills. You might look for an on-campus office job where you will be expected to answer phones, respond to emails, answer in-person questions, and produce departmental flyers and brochures. This work may not seem directly related to marketing, but it gives you an opportunity to practice some key skills and to put those skills on your résumé.

The Career Center recommends that you also keep in mind the following:

- Begin with fewer hours to allow adjustment to college and a new schedule.
- Put academics first and commit to work hours you know you can manage.
- Seek positions that will build references and professional contacts.
- Seek employers who offer flexible hours and will support your commitment to your academics.

Once you decide what kind of job you want to look for, use your Handshake account to search for on-campus and local work opportunities, as well as internships.
Handshake is a great resource provided by the K-State Career Center, through which you can:

- Find and apply for jobs and internships
- Schedule appointments with your career advisor
- Sign up for Career Center events, fairs, workshops, and interview and information sessions with employers.

The Career Center also has tips for finding part-time work on campus and in the community.

Some of your first-year courses may also encourage you to sign up for LinkedIn, a professional networking site. You can use this site, much like your Handshake account, to find potential jobs or connections.

You may find your department also has a jobs board, a web page, or communicates to students about opportunities via a departmental listserv or newsletter. Some departments maintain Facebook and Twitter accounts where they notify students and alumni of relevant employment. Staying connected to your department will allow you to stay up-to-date in many areas.

It’s also important to know that not all opportunities are communicated through job ads. Your peer and professor network may encourage you to contact someone they know. You may take the initiative to reach out to a professional about opportunities they may offer even though they haven’t expressed they are looking—your inquiry will show them you are ambitious. For example, if you know you’re interested in biomedical research, you might email a professor who is doing that type of research and ask if they have any openings in their lab. Even if they don’t, they may be willing to offer you a spot when one becomes available down the road or know of a similar position in another lab.

There are many ways to gain valuable work experience while going to school. Look at available jobs on Handshake, reach out to employers that interest you, and meet with your career advisor. You’ll find a wealth of opportunities to develop professionally while you’re in school.

**Analyzing a job ad**

When you find a job you’re interested in, you want to think critically about what’s important to the job so that you can tailor your applications materials to the position. If your résumé and application cover letter focus on things the employer has indicated are important, you make it easier for them to identify you as a good fit for their position.

Read through the job ad and make a list of necessary skills and responsibilities. Then reorganize your list by importance to the employer. You may recognize what’s most important by considering the following:

- key words that appear multiple times in the ad
- percent of work time that a skill may be used or a task performed
Finally, for each skill or responsibility, note an experience you’ve had that demonstrates you have the skills and experience to do the job. Relevant experiences can include:

- Previous jobs
- Classes you’ve taken
- Volunteer experiences
- Projects you’ve completed

Your list of important skills, requirements, and your relevant experiences can help you determine how to organize your résumé and to decide what to focus on in your application cover letter.

**REFLECTION ACTIVITY**

Read the following job ad and then answer the questions that follow.

Student office assistant
Educational Supportive Services is seeking a student office assistant to assist the Student Services Coordinator and Administrative Specialist with file management and program outreach and promotion.

The student office assistant is responsible for:

- Scanning student applications and managing electronic student files.
- Creating promotional materials: posters, bookmarks, brochures, etc.
- Managing social media presence on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.
- Analyzing student surveys to plan and schedule requested services, including workshops and community events.
- Representing the program at browsing fairs and other campus events.
- Other duties as assigned.

After reading the position description, answer the following questions:

1. Make a list of the actions/verbs that an applicant could use in their résumé.

2. What are the top three skills or tasks you think are most important? Why?

3. For each of the top three skills, can you think of an experience you’ve had that would demonstrate to an employer that you had that key skill?
Researching the employer

Another step that can help you focus your application content effectively and make meaningful connections is by researching the employer. If you demonstrate in your cover letter that you put in the work to learn about them and that you are genuinely excited about what they do, they will more easily grasp your enthusiasm for the position.

To research a potential employer:

- Go to the company/entity website to see if they have “Recent News” or “Press Releases” and read about recent things they have done.
- Google the company/entity to see if you can find any news articles from the past 6-months to a year that talk about positive things the company/entity is doing that impress you.
- Check out glassdoor.com to see what others are saying about the company/entity.
- Read industry journals, to see if there are any trends in the industry or field that you find interesting. Look for information on trends in the company’s business or trends in what your target department does. Don’t limit your research to the company name.

This research may help you learn about cutting-edge technology, shifts in necessary skills, and more. Demonstrating knowledge of the company and industry through your cover letter can give you a significant edge, but only after your résumé convinces them you have their essential qualifications.

**Reflection Activity**

For this reflection activity, you will practice the steps of seeking a job opportunity:

1. Create a Handshake account.
2. Through Handshake, find and print a job post for a local, part-time job you could work as a student.
3. Identify the top three skills needed for this job.
4. For each skill, describe one experience you’ve had that developed that skill (three total experiences).
5. Explain how this job helps you develop towards your long term professional goals (three or more sentences).
6. Research the employer (company or campus office), and write two sentences explaining what you like about them. Be specific and recognize an achievement or a unique quality they possess. For campus offices, the search tool on the k-state.edu website is a great place to start.
7. Keep track of this job post and your answers. You will refer back to them in later chapters.

After completing this activity, consider the following questions:

1. Through the activity, what did you learn about the job search?
2. What part of the process was more difficult, or what questions do you still have about finding a job or internship?
Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Find and analyze a job ad to see if your skills, knowledge and experiences are a good fit
- Identify the important skills and knowledge necessary for a job and communicate how you are a good fit for the job
- Research an employer to show your interest in the organization
A traditional print résumé is a document that highlights your relevant work history, education, and community engagement in a format that can be quickly scanned for relevance. A well-designed résumé presents you as a professional and detail-oriented individual.

If you’re not sure where to start with your résumé, start with the list of skills that are important to the job. A template may be appealing with a well-balanced layout and nice font choices. However, templates limit your control of the organization of your content, and how you organize your résumé will have a huge impact on how you are perceived.

Organizing your résumé

There are three typical organizational patterns for a résumé:

- Standard or (Reverse) Chronological
- Functional or Skills-based
- Combination

You should choose a résumé structure that emphasizes your key skillsets or experiences by organizing them into sections that make it easy for the employer to see that you’re qualified. On the initial review of candidates, most employers spend seconds looking at a résumé to decide if the candidate is worth further review. To make it past the initial skim, you need to stand out. The best way to move beyond the application and get invited for an interview is to create a dominant impression with your content.

The standard or chronological résumé organizes your experience in reverse time order and emphasizes your work history. Many résumé templates are based on this type, but it’s not usually an ideal structure for college students because their work history is
unlikely to create a clear cumulative effect or dominant impression.

You can find examples of chronological résumés on pages 11, 13, 29, and 31 of the Career Center’s Résumé and Interview Guide. Melissa Jones’s résumé on page 29 is a great example of chronological résumé structure working well. Because all of Melissa’s listed experience is in schools working with kids, it emphasizes her preparedness for a teaching position. If your work history doesn’t similarly make obvious your qualification, try one of the other structures.

Look at John Q. Jones résumé on page 11 as another example. He states that his objective is to get an internship in banking. Typical internships in banking usually ask for the following skills:

- Prepare credit spreads for loan requests
- Assist with preparing loan documentation.
- Understand cash management tools.
- Maintain confidentiality of customer information and records.
- Conduct sales visits and customer calls.
- Identify opportunities for sales.
- Learn compliance policies and regulations.

In a quick few seconds, bank staff will see that John was a “Farm Worker” and a “Clerk,” which may not connect strongly with the banking internship. However, if they review the details of John’s work experience, they will notice that John has some similar experiences and skills. John might be more successful with another résumé structure.

The functional or skills-based résumé structure organizes your experience around key skills. Your job ad analysis can be extremely helpful here. If you can think of 2-3 categories of skills that are important to the job, those categories can be used as the major sections for your résumé, and you can list experiences from work, volunteering, class projects or units, and even hobbies as evidence of your relevant skills. This is a great structure to use when your work history doesn’t demonstrate your qualifications well.

Michael H. Katzen’s résumé on Page 24 of the Career Center’s Résumé and Interview Guide is a great example. Michael identified the key skills needed for the job: communication, organization, and leadership. He made those the major sections of his résumé, and under each he provided experience from work and volunteering.

The last résumé structure is the combination résumé. It combines the strengths of the previous two. It is part chronological experience and part skills emphasis. Most of the examples in the Résumé and Interview Guide are combination résumés because that structure works very well for most college students. Combining the structures works when you have several experiences that support your qualification for a job but you need to demonstrate additional skills or don’t have enough related experiences to fill out the page.

Don’t forget to consider other sections necessary to show your qualifications: certifications, computer skills, and more. Create the sections you need to highlight the essential skills, just like Sam Flyerman’s
résumé on page 23 of the Résumé and Interview Guide. For example, you might include an objective or professional summary. An objective or summary is useful for résumés dropped at career fairs, but it may not be helpful when responding to a job ad because it can sound generic when your goal is the same as every other candidate: to get that specific job.

Overall, you control the dominant impression your résumé creates through how you frame the content. Additionally, your résumé may control the conversation you have with employers at career fairs and interviews. When you select your content, make sure your details are things you can discuss in more depth. If you can’t, it’s best to leave that detail off the résumé.

Writing and designing your résumé
When you’re ready to generate content to develop the résumé framework you’ve selected, consult the Résumé and Interview Guide. You’ll find the following sections helpful:

- Inventory your skills, select relevant details, and communicate them clearly, pages 5-8.
- A list of action verbs to describe your skills and responsibilities, pages 9-10
- Example résumés—be sure to read the note boxes on each for helpful tips—pages 11-35.
- A checklist of essential details and formatting requirements—pages 3-4. For a quick list of the absolute essentials, you must have the following details:
  - Contact information: your name, one address, one phone number, and one email—an email that you check at least daily, preferably with an appropriate address.
  - Education: University, major(s), minor(s), expected graduation date; GPA is optional.
  - Work history: level of detail depends on relevance.
  - Engagement: volunteer, affiliations, honors, scholarships, etc.
  - Note: after your first year of college, remove anything from high school unless it is highly relevant. This is why getting involved during your first year of college is so important!

If you need ideas for designing your résumé, the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) has some great basic Résumé Design guidelines that will help you balance your content across your page, maintain consistent alignment, and select effective texts.

Once you have a solid draft of your résumé, it’s always a good idea to get feedback. Schedule a meeting with your career advisor using Handshake or make an appointment at the Writing Center. Both locations can offer great feedback to improve your résumé.

When you’re all done, save your résumé as a PDF, keeping a copy in another format for future editing. Unless asked to submit as a Word document or other option, PDF is the best format for maintaining your design and layout—other formats can be distorted in transfer from one version of software to another.
You’ve Got This!

Refer to the job post and engagement activity responses you developed for Chapter 11, and respond to the following questions:

1. Which résumé structure do you think would best represent your qualification for that job? Why?

2. Create an outline of that résumé, including the major sections and the subsections. For example, in a skills-based résumé, your major sections would be skills and the subsections could be relevant experiences:

   Communication
   - Journalism Club
   - Public Speaking Project
   - Cashier at Pizza Hut

3. Review the job post. What key words can you incorporate into your résumé? If the job post is vague, reference the action verbs on pages 9-10 of the Résumé and Interview Guide, and find at least five verbs that you could use in your résumé to show you have relevant skills. Use these verbs to describe your experiences:

   Journalism Club
   - Composed “Citizen of the Month” columns, featuring exemplary students who contributed to the community.
   - Contacted area businesses seeking sponsorship.
   - Promoted the club at recruitment and outreach events.

4. Create a résumé, or edit your existing one, that you could use to apply for the position you found.

5. Print it, and bring it to class.

Now that you’ve read this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify and utilize a résumé organizational format that fits your needs
- Write and design an effective résumé
- Make adjustments to your résumé for greater impact
Cover letters are an introductory letter that introduces you as a candidate for a professional position. You may have applied for jobs that didn’t require a cover letter, but as you start looking for more career-specific internships and jobs, cover letters will likely be required.

Cover letters are your opportunity to emphasize your key strengths to a potential employer and to help them view you as a memorable and unique candidate. It might help to think of a résumé as the big picture view of your experiences and the cover letter as the street view. A good cover letter zooms in to give a detailed view of the most important parts of your professional history.

Read over Willie the Wildcat’s example cover letter on page 48 of the Career Center’s Résumé and Interview Guide. This letter is well-organized and easy to read. One of its strengths is that it uses numbers to quantify experiences so that readers can get a sense of scope and scale of the work he did. That’s great in both résumés and cover letters. Unfortunately, instead of using body paragraphs, it lists items much like you would on a résumé. It misses an opportunity to add depth.

Now read the cover letter on page 46 of the Résumé and Interview Guide. Jacob Gellar is descriptive about his work experiences so that Ms. Kearns can develop a clearer picture of Jacob’s abilities. When he writes, “I consistently exceeded my sales goal and was named ‘Employee of the Week’ on several occasions,” Jacob becomes a more memorable candidate because he has shared something very specific and unique that also highlights his strength as an employee. That’s the goal.
Many people find cover letters challenging because they hate writing about themselves, but they’re much more manageable when you break them down into their key parts.

**Parts of a cover letter**
While each cover letter is different, below we describe the sections of an effective cover letter.

**Header**
- Your address: use your résumé header across the top to create stylistic cohesion between the résumé and cover letter.
- The date: leave a line space above and below the date, separating it from the address information.
- The recipient’s address: insert a line space below to separate it from your greeting.
- An effective greeting: use the recipient’s name if possible (e.g. “Dear John Doe:”). If you can’t identify the recipient’s name, try something like “Dear Selection Committee,” being as specific as possible. Avoid overly generic greetings such as “To Whom It May Concern,” which can sound stuffy and outdated.

**Introductory paragraph**
- Open by mentioning the specific position you’re applying for and how you heard about it.
- Share a 1-2 sentence summary stating who you are, and why you’re interested and a good fit.
- Connect to the company by noting in one sentence why you’d want to work for them, how you’d benefit them, or how you’re invested in the field. This is a great place to share details from your research on the company or industry. When you’re claiming to be enthusiastic about a job, specificity reads as sincerity. Don’t be generic.
  - Weak example: I’m really excited about the opportunity to work for Birchwood Paper Products.
  - Stronger example: I’m really excited to contribute my knowledge of supply chain management to source environmentally friendly materials for Birchwood Industries. My experience will help move Birchwood from 5th to 1st most environmentally friendly company in Kansas.

**Body paragraphs**
Write 2-3 body paragraphs. While in school, you might focus the first paragraph on academic accomplishments and the second on employment experiences. Only use a third paragraph if you need to do so to fill the page. For each paragraph:

- Open by declaring that you have an essential skillset or qualification they want.
- Share a specific, concrete example that illustrates that skillset. The specific story will help the employer to remember you as a unique individual.
  - Weak example: “I have completed numerous projects using Excel in both my coursework and my internship at Pencil Industries. Many of the projects used formulas, and I had to analyze the data to make business recommendations for case studies in class and at the internship.”
• Stronger example: “In my internship at Pencil Industries, I organized five years of invoice records into Excel, and set up fields and formulas that helped the team to identify and evaluate trends in client turnover. The data sorting capabilities assisted us in creating an incentive plan to retain clients, which resulted in a 5% increase in profits over the next six-month period.”

  • Tell the employer how your skills and experience will benefit them. Be as specific as possible.

Concluding paragraph
  • In a single sentence, remind them of your enthusiasm for the position and/or your qualification. This can be another great place to share a bit of your research on the company.
  • Tell them how they can most easily reach you and when.
  • Thank them for their time and energy with a statement of appreciation.

Closing/salutation
  • Sincerely / Appreciatively / Very respectfully, etc.
  • Create a gap of 3 line spaces before typing your name. This large space is for your signature. If you really want to demonstrate that you know the formalities of a letter, print, sign, and scan the letter, or add an image file of your signature to this space.
  • Type your full name after the space.

You can find example cover letters on pages 46-48 of the Career Center’s Résumé and Interview Guide. Once you have your content in place, make sure your formatting is professional.

Additionally, it’s always a good idea to have someone review your cover letter to make sure it creates the impression you want. If you've formed strong relationships with faculty or professionals, ask them if they’ll read it over and give you feedback. Use the support of your network to put forth your best foot.

Formatting your cover letter
Aim for stylistic cohesion with your résumé, by doing the following:

  • Single space your letter and use a line space between paragraphs. (This format is known as block format.)
  • Use the same body font you used in your résumé.
  • Keep the letter margins the same size as your résumé.
  • Use the header from your résumé as the address header for your cover letter if possible.
  • Submit the letter to employers in PDF, unless directed to do otherwise, to avoid formatting incompatibility.
YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Now that you've read this chapter, you should be able to:

✓ Write your own cover letter
✓ Identify weak areas in a cover letter and edit accordingly
✓ Format your cover letter to reflect the style of your résumé

Reflection Activity

Refer back to the job post you found for Chapter 11. As you read about the parts of the cover letter, write your own letter applying for the position.