

# Using a Career Journal to Further Your Career Development and Empower Your Job-Search

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How much time do you commit each day -- each week -- to *really* thinking about your career? If you're like most of us, your answer is not much time at all. Sure, we would all love to have the luxury to daydream about our futures, but unfortunately, all too often the realities of the present keep us a bit too preoccupied.

Do you find yourself in any of these situations: Do you have a vision of your perfect job or career, but no pathway leading to it? Are you thinking of making a career change, but have no real clue about your next career? Are you stuck in a dead-end job -- or worse -- have you remained in your current position while others around you have been promoted? Are you a student who is trying to get a handle on both a major and a career path?

Our jobs, our careers, and our lives would -- or could -- be so much better if we used a modified version of an age-old device many of us used when we were younger, the diary or journal. The career journal that is advocated in this article, while sharing some common aspects with a personal journal, is much more structured -- focused on a specific career-related goal -- and designed to empower your career development or job-search.

## Why a Career Journal?

So, why should you consider writing a career journal? Because whether you are a student searching for career direction or an established job-seeker thinking of a job or career change -- or anywhere in between these two extremes -- you'll discover untold things about yourself, about your career field, and about job-hunting, all from simply keeping a career journal.

Using a career journal allows you the time to begin thinking about your current situation, brainstorming potential ideas, analyzing alternatives, formulating plans, implementing your solutions, documenting your successes (and failures), reflecting on your accomplishments, and learning more about yourself and your career. Journaling also gives you to have an outlet to express your emotions (good and bad) about your career progress. But that's not all. Journaling offers many other benefits, as identified in our sidebar, [Benefits of Journaling](#).

Now that the "why" of using a career journal has been identified, the rest of this article will tackle the other key elements of what, when, and how.

## What is a Career Journal?

A career journal, sometimes also referred to as a career development journal, is a tool that you can use to manage your career -- your life. While the possibilities for journal activities are limited only by your imagination, here are some of the more common ways to use a career journal.

All Career Journals:

- Analyzing your current situation
- Brainstorming about your future career goals; seeing yourself in 5 years, in 10 years
- Establishing daily or weekly career-related objectives or tasks
- Developing action plans to achieve your objectives and tasks
- Keeping track of your daily career-related achievements, progress
- Making checklists to keep your progress moving forward
- Discovering and exploring your workplace values
- Writing a personal mission statement
- Preparing a SWOT (strengths-weakness-opportunities-threats) analysis
- Recording key information, such as network contacts, informational interviews, accomplishments, favorite activities, job interview results, etc.
- Expressing your reactions to job and career success and failures

- Writing and polishing your key job correspondence material - cover letters, resumes, thank you letters, etc.
- Practicing job interview questions - and answers
- Gathering salary information; conducting salary research

#### Career-Changer Journals:

- Discerning activities you enjoy doing -- and those you never want to do again
- Discovering potential new career paths
- Identifying and organizing transferable skills
- Analyzing whether further education or training is necessary
- Contemplating ways of breaking into your new career, such as volunteering or consulting

#### High school/College Student Career Journals:

- Taking and reacting to one or more self-assessment tests
- Contemplating, researching, and evaluating various majors and minors
- Tracking internships, volunteer opportunities, and other avenues of gaining valuable experience
- Reviewing key job-search trends and procedures
- Writing and polishing resume and cover letter
- Researching salary information and developing realistic salary goals
- Establishing and building your network of contacts
- Contemplating graduate programs and researching graduate schools

#### Experienced Job-Seeker Career Journals:

- Researching professional development opportunities
- Reviewing key job-search trends and procedures
- Polishing resume and cover letter
- Brainstorming ways to building network
- Researching new employment opportunities

#### Professional Development Career Journals:

- Developing plans for achieving promotions
- Strategizing methods to get a larger raise, bonus, other compensation or benefits
- Preparing for job performance reviews
- Marketing yourself within the company
- Exploring whether further education or training will fast-track your career

Follow this link to see some excerpts from a [sample career journal](#).

### **When should you use a Career Journal?**

By now you should get the idea that the only bad time for a career journal is when you make the excuse that you don't have time to keep one. The great thing about journals is that they will always be there waiting for you -- to reflect on, to move forward with, or to be put away again. And in some ways, the career journal you start now -- wherever you are in your career -- can be the tool you continue to use throughout the rest of your career.

Once you get started on your career journal, remember the one key rule: do not keep it at your place of work. Not only should you not be working on it during company time, but you also don't want the wrong set of eyes to get a hold of it. So, keep your journal at home- - on your computer, in a notebook or binder, or in whatever format you want to use to keep your journal.

### **How do you get started on a Career Journal?**

Starting a career journal is as easy as putting words to paper (or any other medium). Career journals can be as structured or freewheeling as you like, but you should probably start with some sort of plan, some sort of goal. Once started, though, let your journal take a life of its own, leading you in whatever direction that you need. You might start your journal examining the possibility of graduate school, but then hear about a great promotion opportunity the following week; put the graduate research on hold and use your journal to develop strategies for attaining that promotion.

Try to set a regular time of day to work on your journal. Make time for journaling. Once you've established a routine, you'll be amazed at how much stronger your journal will become.

What are you waiting for? Get started on that career journal *today!* You'll be amazed at the new opportunities that await you once you begin.

Looking for more? Check out all of our [journaling resources](#). And if you are serious about keeping a career journal, consider taking our [Quintessential Careers Journaling Course](#).

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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**Have you seen all of our [journaling resources](#)?**