

# Career story: Finding a career path after a general degree

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This career story from a university graduate who completed her double degree in visual arts and Arabic. The account is a great resource for understanding how many people try multiple jobs to determine where their interests and lifestyle will fit best. When reading this career story, reflect on what you have learnt in your degree and how this can help you find a career path.

At the back of this resource, you will find more information as well as sample questions on learning from biographies and career stories.

## Kristy's story

*“Pursuing an interest can make finding a career to fit that interest challenging.”*

Kristy completed a double degree in Visual Arts and Arabic three years prior to the interview. In deciding to do this degree, Kristy followed her interests rather than worrying too much about a career. Kristy discovered that career options are not as obvious for graduates of general degrees than for those of professional degrees. Universities may give students a list of potential roles they can pursue after their general degrees, but getting one of these roles may not be easy. Equally, the pathway to it may not be obvious.

As she progressed through her degree, Kristy became increasingly concerned about what she would do when she finished. She spoke to one of the university's careers advisers about options. She expected a list of jobs that she would be qualified for and would be able to apply for when she finished. She received this, but found it wasn't that helpful. There was no clear pathway from her degree into any of the jobs on the list. As Kristy said:

*“The fact that I was doing a general degree meant I didn't fit into any box or career path... you feel like you are on your own when it comes to finding a job.”*

Kristy's response was to seek more advice, including from older, trusted friends, her parents, and from academic staff at her university. From academics, she learned that the most reliable income for people working in visual arts was from education, whilst practicing visual arts 'on the side.'

During her studies Kristy gained extra experience by studying in Jordan for eight weeks. This helped her enormously with her Arabic language skills, which proved important for her employability as she subsequently did an internship with a publisher in Dubai. The internship was also useful in showing what she wasn't interested in! She was involved in page lay-out in the internship, something she didn't enjoy much.

Kristy was advised to get more experience through voluntary work. She visited an elderly lady once a week and found the experience so profound, it helped her decide what direction her career should take.

When Kristy graduated, she applied to do a Master of Art Therapy. She was told at her interview to get at least a year's experience in working with people, so she did voluntary work for MS Australia.

She worked with a 97 year-old woman, "one of the most beautiful things I have done." But again, Kristy found that the experience showed her what she didn't want to do: she decided against art therapy as a profession.

Kristy has taken opportunities as they arose and these have taken her a long way from her original degree. Even though she doesn't have a background in science, she eventually took a position in science outreach to schools and enjoyed the work immensely.

Kristy has had a couple of positions since graduating, including work in science outreach for school-aged children in metropolitan and country Victoria. This was unexpected as she didn't have a background in science, but she enjoyed it and learned a lot.

She now works three days a week in educational assessment and spends two days a week in self-directed study of Arabic. She likes the balance, saying that the paid work exercises a different part of her brain to the creative work she does by herself.

People have been essential to Kristy's career. Her opportunities usually came by word of mouth. The advice of people she respects has helped her find her direction.

In terms of developing her career and finding jobs, Kristy says that people have been important. All her opportunities have come through suggestions made by people she knows. Her volunteering and her work and study in the Middle East were also crucial in developing the skills relevant to employment.

When going for a position, Kristy thinks the most important thing a candidate can take to an interview is stories. Anecdotes and explanations will demonstrate a candidate's ability, experience and character.

### Things to consider

1. Kristy's career has taken her to roles far from her degree disciplines. Thinking beyond your studies, what things have you really enjoyed doing? Can you think of roles in your discipline where those activities are valued?
2. Kristy thinks the most important thing a candidate can take to an interview is stories. What stories could you take if you had an interview tomorrow? Think about sport, music, volunteer work and leadership roles as a starting point.

## Learning from biographies and career stories

### What do you see when you meet a professional?

Most of the time, we see only the role someone holds now. It is likely, however, that the person has experienced a career with lots of twists and turns.

Get the most out of reading career stories or biographies by asking yourself some of the questions to the right.

1. What do you expect you will have to learn during your career?
2. What might you need to do in order to keep learning?
3. What differences, common issues, and links can you make to your own career journey?
4. Identify and reflect on key decision points in your personal and professional development, and then consider:
  - a. Who played a significant role at these times?
  - b. To whom did you go to for advice?
  - c. What can you put in place for the next time you face a major decision?
5. Biographical accounts raise a number of challenges and opportunities. These include innovative collaborations, work within other sectors, diverse locations, and different modes of work. Look for examples of these in your discipline and reflect on what might be of interest to you:
  - a. What interests you, and what can you do to make this a reality?
  - b. What challenges do you foresee, and how will you prepare for these?
6. Biographical accounts often tell us something about the interests, passions, and motivations of the people involved. Can you think of ways to combine your interests and your future work?
7. What would you like to achieve as a professional?

This resource was developed by Sarah Richardson, Philip MacKinnon, Marian Mahat, Lisa Schmidt and Dawn Bennett.