

A successful career in science



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smartsciencecareer.com

A career in science

So many options!



If you make the wrong decision, you are stuck with a terrible job!

If you make the right decision, you may pursue a great career in science!

A **great** career in science

You may have seen colleagues who know exactly what they want...

... and follow up on it.

... and get what they want.

You may think: If I just knew what I want, I would maybe do the same!

If you knew what you want, you may pursue a great career in science!

But how do you find out?

The Problem

The problem is – you do not know exactly what you want.

The problem is – there are so many options that might be right.

The problem is – you do not know where to get trustworthy information.

The problem is – you do not know how to make the final decision.

My career roller-coaster

10+ years: Director of the Doctoral School for Medicine & Life Sciences,
Hasselt University, Belgium

100+ local and national events to support young scientists in their careers.

My career has been an emotional roller-coaster:

International mobility

Medicine in Berlin, Germany

ERASMUS in Parma, Italy

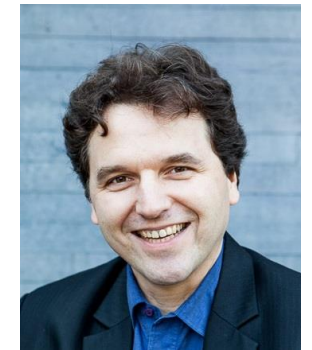
Research stays in Hamamatsu, Japan; Harvard, USA; London, UK

6+ years as anatomist in Berlin, Germany

12+ years full professor for neuroanatomy at Hasselt University, Belgium

10+ years head of department

Since 2020: full professor for neuroanatomy at the Medical School Hamburg, Germany.



The Framework for finding your best career in science

1. Find out what you want in an *experimental* way – not by thinking.
2. Search for jobs and positions that may be relevant for your potential career path.
3. Test your assumptions.
4. Talk to people who are trustworthy advisors.
5. Test your ideas in the real world.
6. Make decisions based on trustworthy information and real-world experiences.

1. Find out what you want in an **experimental** way – not by thinking.

Disorientation about career decisions is normal for 95% of all late-phase PhD students and postdocs.

Most young scientists have no idea what their passions are.

Most young scientists consider a career in academia...

- because that's all they know.
- because that's all their supervisors know
- because the entire academic system is focussed on creating professors

What to do with your academic qualification (PhD, postdoc)?

Typical questions and doubts:

What are my chances to stay in academia (= become a professor)?

Am I good enough to go for a more independent career in science?

Should I stay and become a senior scientist (= become long-term postdoc)?

If not academia, how and when should I switch to another job?

Should I leave academia while I am still valuable?

Am I too old to leave academia and pursue a job outside academia?

Can I come back to academia if I do not succeed in the non-academic job market?

Should I work for a company?

Do I have enough competences and skills that are valuable to a company?

What if I make the wrong decision?



Do not try to figure it out in your head,
you do not have enough information.

Engagement brings clarity, not thought.

Marie Forleo



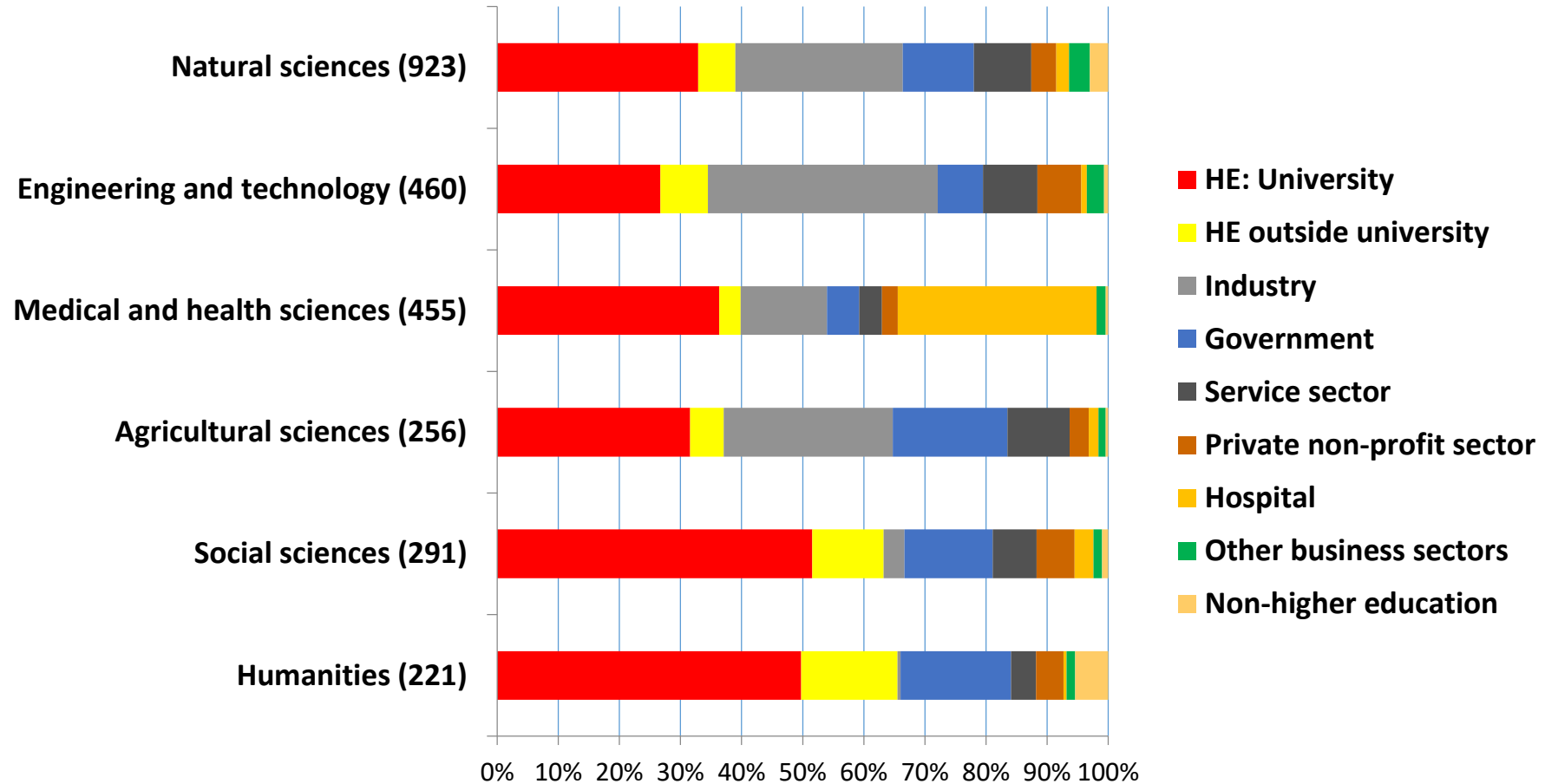
1. Find out what you want in an **experimental** way – not by thinking.

Consider now to change your strategy:

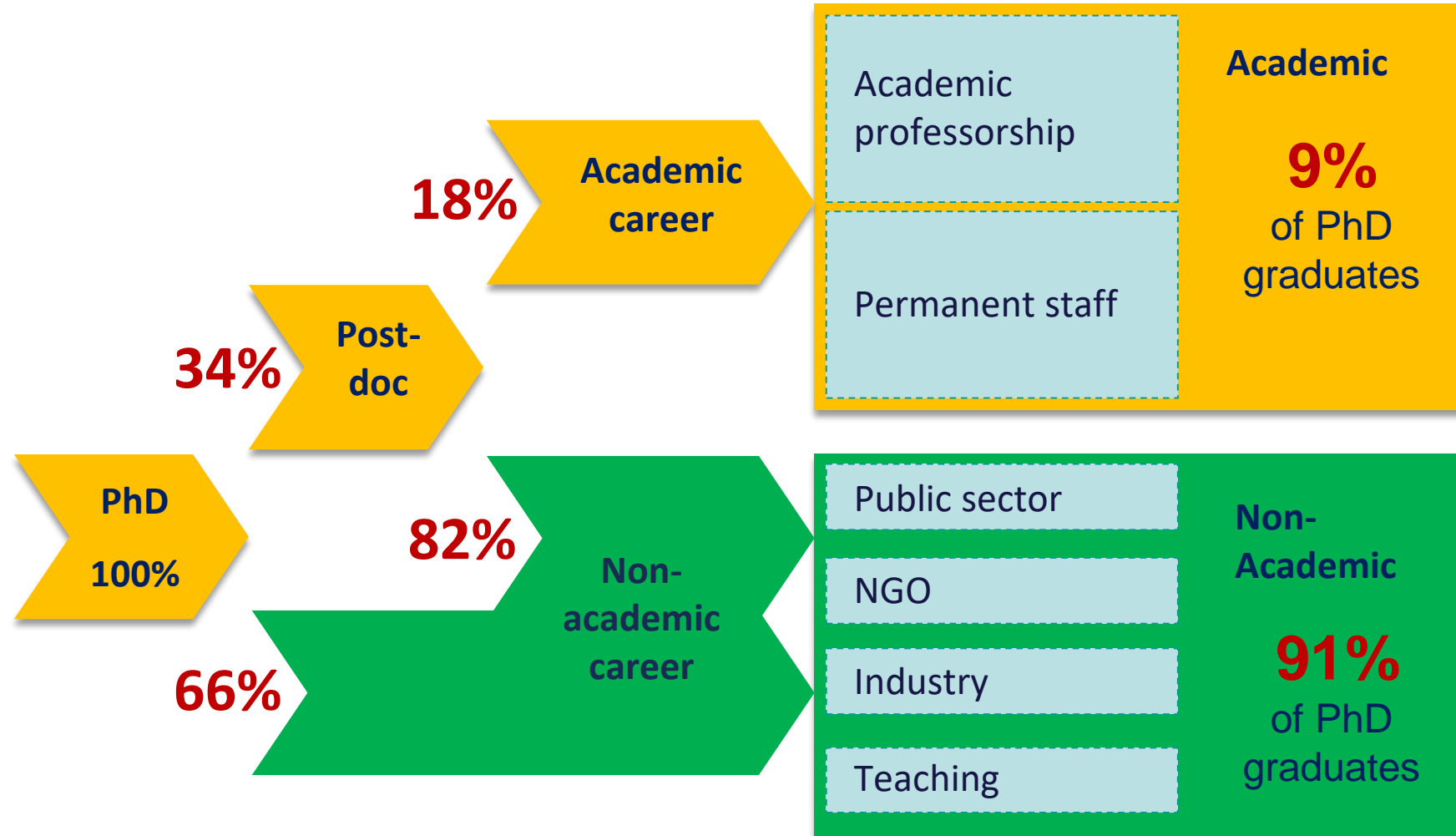
Stop thinking about your career and decide to become active to find out what you want.

2. Search for jobs and positions that may be relevant for your potential career path.

Sector of work 3 years after doctorate (graduates 1990-2007)



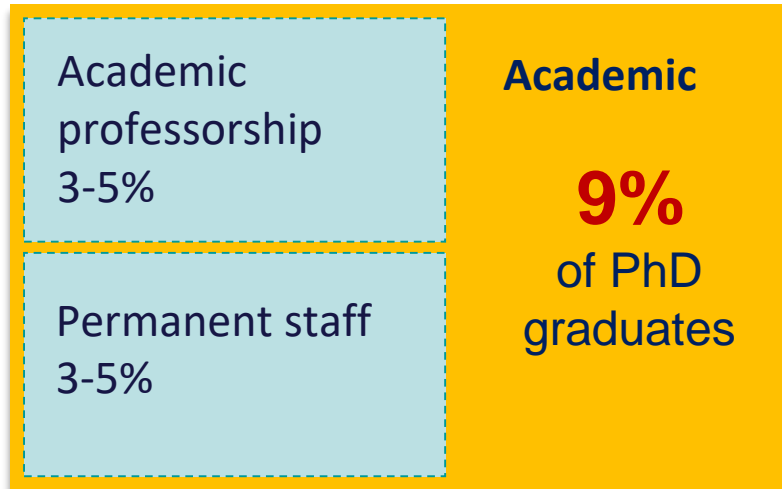
Where do PhD holders find a job?



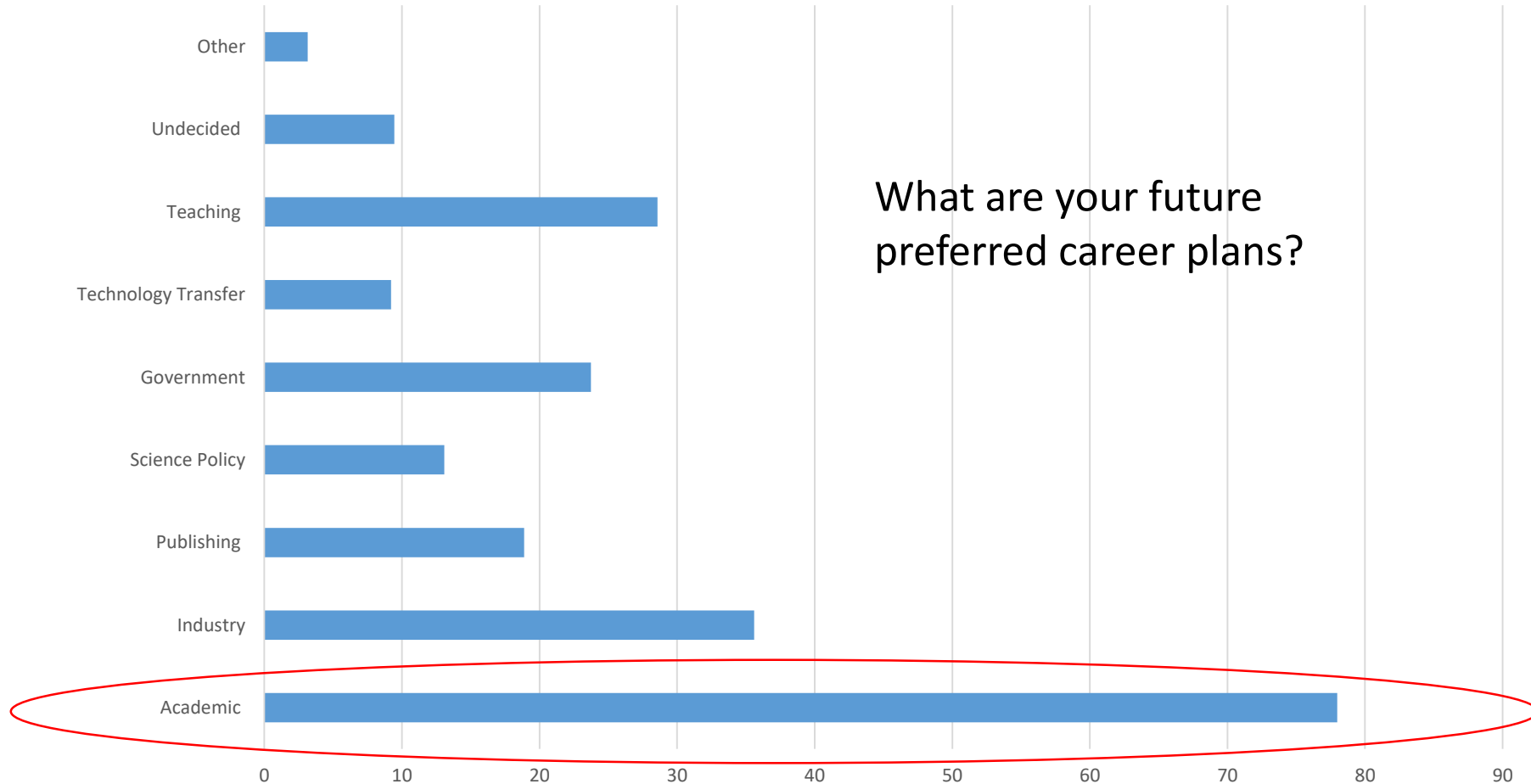
What are my chances to stay in academia?



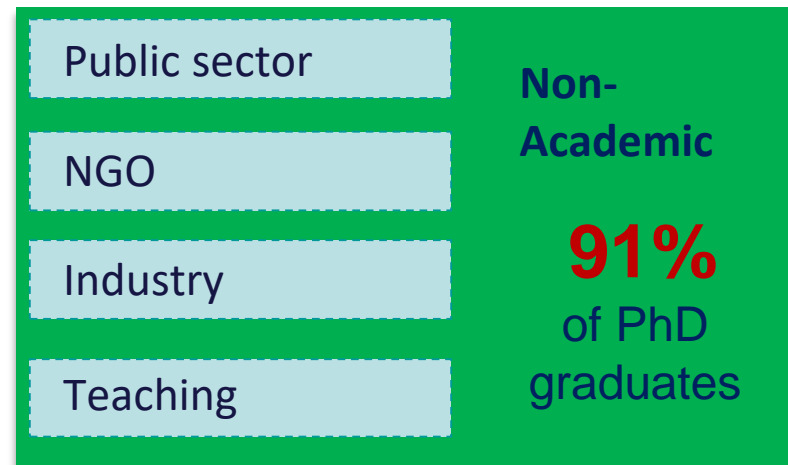
Success rate to become a professor: 3-5 % of all PhD holders



Nearly 80% of postdocs envision a career in academia



Success rate to find a job
outside academia:
91% of all PhD holders



Only 2.5% of doctorate holders are unemployed (ECOOM, 2012)

A career in science

So many options!



What are the possibilities?

Academic

Professor (Research and/or teaching)
Senior scientist (Researcher)
Tech transfer officer
Career development officer
Research officer
Science communication officer

Publishing

Editor (Books, Journals)
Copy editor
Production editor
Copy writer

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-book-publishing-jobs-2316066>

Company

Market Research Analyst
Business Development Manager
Competitive Intelligence Analyst
Product Manager
Management Consulting
Quantitative Analyst
Healthcare Information Technology Specialist
Operations Research Analyst
Medical Communication Specialist
Medical Science Liaison

<https://cheekyscientist.com/top-10-list-of-alternative-careers-for-phd-science-graduates/>

3. Test your assumptions.

Learn more about the potentially interesting jobs!

For example:

Google search

Job descriptions on career websites

Job offers

4. Talk to people who are trustworthy advisors.

Where do I get trustworthy information?

Your supervisor

Maybe well-intended advice, maybe hidden agenda

Maybe competent, maybe incompetent

Maybe outdated information

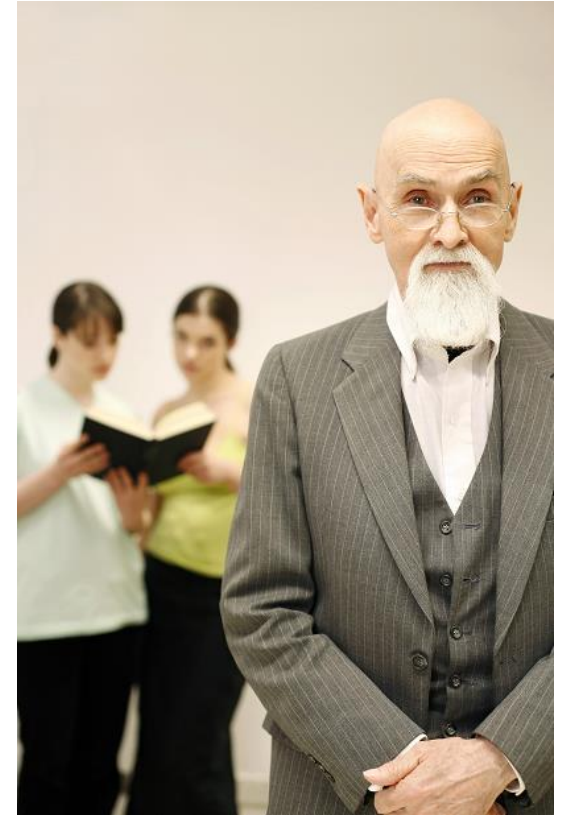
Where do I get trustworthy information?

Other experienced scientists (older colleagues, head of department, dean...)

Maybe well-intended advice, maybe hidden agenda

Maybe competent, maybe incompetent

Maybe outdated information



Where do I get trustworthy information?

Other young scientists

Similarly disoriented

Maybe not trustworthy advice (2nd hand opinions)

Maybe competitors for similar positions



Ask colleagues who have the jobs that interest you!

5. Test your ideas in the real world.

Contact colleagues who have the jobs that interest you!

Find and ask at least 1-3 persons who have jobs that may be right for you.

Ask several persons with different viewpoints.

Prepare questions – what do you want to know about their jobs?

If possible – organize practical experience!

6. Make decisions based on trustworthy information and real-world experiences.

Collect and double-check the info you get!

Discuss with family and friends – based on real-world experiences.

Make a clear decision and work on it!

Qualify yourself for the career path you have chosen.

You may have objections!

I do not have the time to talk to multiple colleagues!

→ Start with 1 or 2

I am embarrassed and do not know what to ask....

→ Start with 1 or 2 that are not so dramatic if you mess it up.

→ Write down 5-10 questions you definitely want to discuss.

Why should they answer me?

→ Most people like to help and to talk about themselves 😊

Challenge!!

Find ONE person (friend, family member, friendly colleague) that would be happy to give you advice.

Ask this ONE person to tell you about their career for 10 minutes.

Post below a comment that you did it - and how easy or difficult it was.

If you like this video - please share it!

Please share it with a friend or colleague who may like or need it.

I just want to get the message out.

In the comment section please type in what you thought about the video.

Tell me any question you have.

Thank you for being here, I am looking forward to see you in the next video:

A postdoc may be the best or the worst job decision in your career!