

Build Experience Guide

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Introduction

The **Build Experience Guide** is designed to help students identify their existing skills and strengths as well as develop new career-related skills. A common myth is that your major and degree will determine your career path, but in truth, your experiences help navigate a career that may encompass many jobs and skills beyond a single major. Your college experience provides access to a multitude of opportunities to build career skills, however only few students venture beyond their academic studies. [Gallup educational research](#) shows that *extracurricular internships, projects, and activities are most fundamental to initial career success*, yet students are the least likely to engage in these critical opportunities.

Utilize this guide for tips and resources on how to find opportunities to develop practical in-demand skills as well as create a plan, set goals, and track your progress.



Build Experience encompasses the second and third of four milestones in our [Roadmap to Career Success](#). Once you have successfully completed the activities outlined in this guide, you will be ready to move onto the fourth milestone - *Launch Your Career*.

Building Experience & Career Self-Assessment

In order to determine what you want to do with your career, it is important to understand how your personal preferences, strengths, skills, and interests connect to the world of work and career options. We refer to this process as “self-assessment.” Self-assessment can help you identify your strengths as well as areas of growth. After completing the activities in this guide, you will have a better idea of the types of skills you can develop through courses, student activities, volunteering, work experiences, and internships.

Get started with these two (short) self-assessment activities:

1. Complete the *Am I Career Ready?* survey on [Focus2](#) to evaluate your competency level in the top skills valued by employers.
2. Fill out the [Skills Inventory](#) worksheet to identify your top skills and strengths.

Want to keep exploring your preferences?

Check out the [Major & Career Exploration Guide](#) to learn about additional career self-assessments available through the SJSU Career Center.

What's next?

Learning about industry and job specific skills.

Skills Analysis Worksheet

Now that you have a better understanding of your skills, it's important to identify what skills are in-demand in your field of interest.

Find a job or internship of interest on [SJSU Handshake](#) and use the prompts below to review the position description for needed skills and experience, as well as potential gaps in your current skillset. The goal of this activity is to help you assess what you need to develop in order to be a strong candidate for a specific position.

Job/internship of Interest:

Below, list the skills, knowledge, qualifications, and characteristics required for your position of interest. Check the ones you already have and identify any gaps.

Skills: transferable, technical, creative skills, etc.

Knowledge: subjects, topics, theories, etc.

Qualifications: degrees, certificates, experience, etc.

Characteristics: feature, quality, or trait.

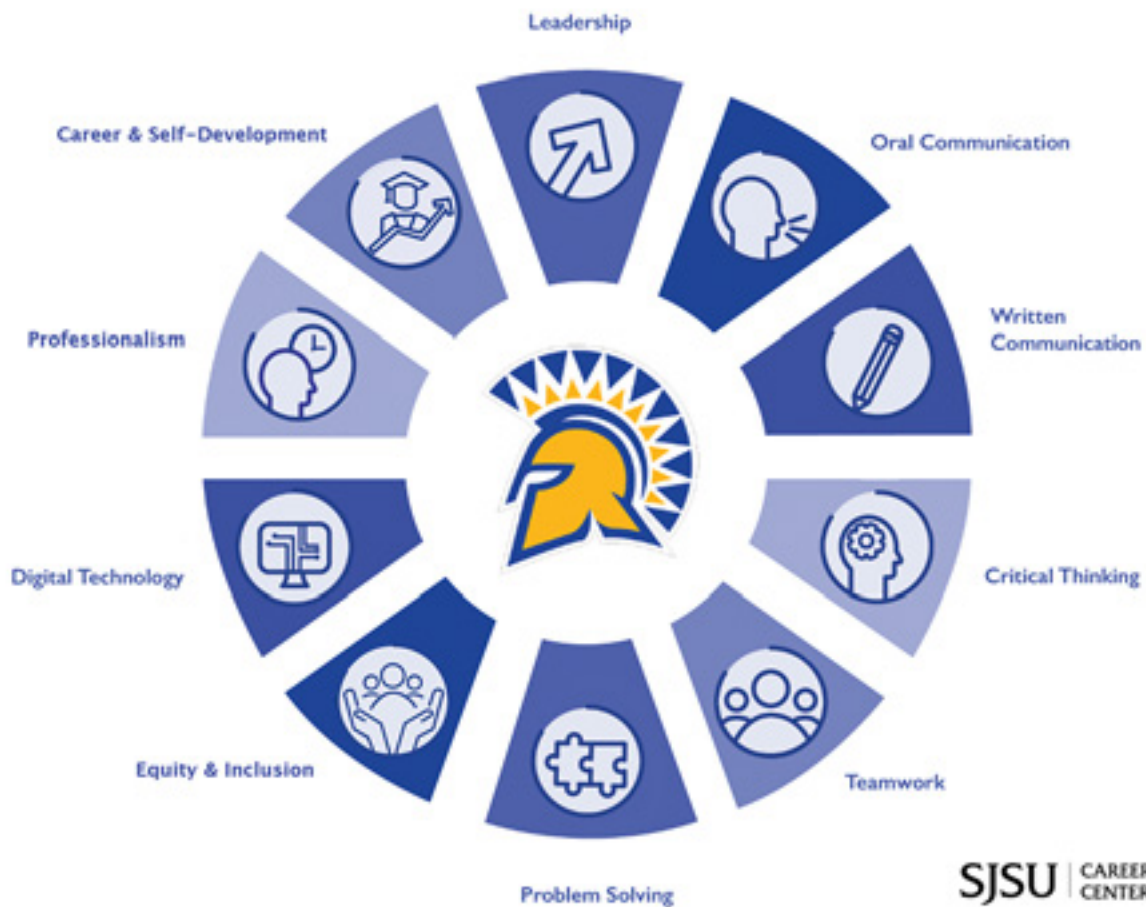
List the gaps you identified from the lists above. Next, identify how you can develop in those areas (e.g. internships, volunteer work, Lynda.com course, etc.).

Gap:

How to Develop:

In-Demand Transferable Skills

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) conducts an annual skills survey which outlines the top transferable skills that employers seek on student resumes across various industries. The chart below shows the top 10 skills listed in the [NACE 2021 report](#).



What's next?

On the next few pages we'll outline definitions and examples of how you can build these top skills while at SJSU.

Skills Definitions & Examples

Teamwork/Collaboration: Both teamwork and collaboration involve a group of people working together to generate ideas, make decisions, or complete a project/goal.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Participate in group projects in class and/or through volunteer and internship roles • Serve on a committee or student board • Participate in team sports, theater productions, and other activities outside of your comfort zone	

Problem Solving: The ability to work through challenging situations in the classroom and workplace. This skill will help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Participate in contests and competitions • Take on projects that involve complex problems • Analyze case studies from your discipline area (in class, professional associations, or industry publications)	

Critical Thinking: Identify and analyze a subject/issue/problem by evaluating the merits of different positions or perspectives; support the analysis with relevant evidence and information and draw well-supported conclusions.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Take GE courses which fulfill the critical thinking requirement • Participate in class discussions, share points of view, and reason conclusions through logic and evidence • Join clubs related to debate, current events, political issues or focus on issues that are important to you	

Oral/Written Communication: Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms. This includes public speaking skills, clearly expressing ideas to others, writing/editing memos, letters, and complex technical reports.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Conduct class presentations in person and virtually (Zoom, Livestream, etc.) • Present at conferences or other events • Run a meeting for a committee for a professional group • Visit the Writing Center for support in writing assignments for classes • Connect with your career counselor to review resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn or other online profiles	

Leadership: Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. Use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Participate in activities that demonstrate leadership (live or virtual) such as student clubs and organizations, volunteer work, and peer tutoring/advising/coaching • Volunteer to take a lead role on a class or work project • Coach a team or motivate others as a peer mentor	

Digital Technology: Leverage existing digital technologies to ethically and efficiently solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Complete a LinkedIn Learning (free to SJSU students through one.sjsu.edu) course or certificate • Participate in projects that help build and demonstrate tech skills • Build your own website or online portfolio and use social media for marketing and sharing information	

Professionalism/Work Ethic: Communicating effectively and appropriately to facilitate being productive in class projects and work. Employers want workers to be responsible, ethical, team-oriented, and to possess strong communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Take initiative and do your best at all tasks including when volunteering, completing internships, and during part-time jobs • Be courteous and respectful to all people you work with (in and out of class) • Keep commitments and communicate clearly to manage expectations	

Career & Self-Development: Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and outside of one's organization.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Meet with your career counselor to develop a career plan and check in on progress at least once per semester • Attend career-related events posted on SJSU Handshake • Attend networking and career exploration events offered by professional associations and student organizations	

Equity & Inclusion: Demonstrate awareness, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage with and include people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, identities, abilities, and experiences.

<i>Examples of How to Develop</i>	<i>My Plan (What will you try?)</i>
• Research company policies around DE&I (e.g. read mission statements, identify support programs, etc.) • Set a goal to attend a diversity-focused event at SJSU and step outside your comfort zone to meet new students, faculty, and staff • Test your own assumptions and keep an open mind of various points of view	

For more work skill definitions and tips on how to improve core work skills, check out this [Glassdoor article](#).

What's next?

Now that you have reviewed top skills and how you can build them, we'll provide a sample roadmap to help you prioritize the experiences you want to have each year that you are at SJSU.

Build Experience Roadmap

As you now know there are *many* opportunities to build skills. Some activities may be more in line with your goals than others. Use this sample roadmap to develop a timeline of activities you want to experience during your time at SJSU.

First Year

- ☐ Join [student clubs and organizations](#)
- ☐ Volunteer in the [local community](#)
- ☐ Get an [on-campus job](#)

Summer 1

- Conduct career research
- Get a summer job or volunteer position

Third Year

- ☐ Become a [club officer](#)
- ☐ Lead teams and projects in or outside the classroom
- ☐ [Study abroad and away](#)
- ☐ Participate in [contests and competitions](#)

Summer 3

- Start an [internship](#)
- Develop skills through [LinkedIn Learning](#)
- Build your [professional network](#)

Graduate Students

- ☐ Volunteer in the [local community](#)
- ☐ Complete an [internship](#)
- ☐ Join [student clubs and become an officer](#)
- ☐ Join professional associations
- ☐ Attend and present at conferences
- ☐ Conduct and publish [research](#)
- ☐ Become a TA or teach a course

Second Year

- ☐ Lead or coordinate a project in or outside the classroom
- ☐ Take [service-learning courses](#)
- ☐ Identify [skills](#) gained in courses

Summer 2

- Start an [internship](#)
- Develop personal projects to build skills
- Conduct informational interviews in [SJSU² Mentoring & Meetups](#)

Fourth Year +

- ☐ Attend conferences
- ☐ Complete senior projects
- ☐ Participate in [research projects](#)

Summer 4

- Get a [full-time job](#)
- Join professional associations
- Expand your [professional network](#)

Build Experience Resources (On and Off Campus)

Below are some resources for connecting your skills to real world experiences. If you need additional guidance, connect with our [Career Counseling Team](#).

On-Campus Opportunities

Activity	Resources & Tips	Next Steps <i>Which activities do you want to try? When can you participate (semester/year?)</i>
☐ Student clubs and organizations are made up of student members who share common goals, objectives, and interests. Clubs provide opportunities for student leadership, skill development, and networking.	• SJSU Student Involvement • Campus Leadership Catalog	
☐ Getting an on-campus job is a great way to start building work experience even as a freshman. For information on federal work-study, visit the Financial Aid Office website.	SJSU Handshake is the main source for on and off-campus employment opportunities, but here are some other campus employers to check out: • Associated Students • Student Union • Spartan Eats • Martin Luther King Jr. Library • Police Department • Orientation Leaders • Peer Connections • Writing Center • Resident Advisors/Housing	
☐ Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich learning experiences, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities.	• SJSU Center for Community Learning and Leadership • SJSU Community Service Learning Minor • CommUniverCity	
☐ Building research experience can be very helpful when applying to graduate programs or preparing for research-based jobs. Build skills in analytical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, following procedures and more.	• SJSU Office of Research • Research and Innovation • SJSU Research Foundation • SJSU Student-Faculty Collaborations • SJSU McNair Scholars Program	

Off-Campus Opportunities

Activity	Resources & Tips	Next Steps <i>Which activities do you want to try? When can you participate (semester/year?)</i>
☐ Study abroad is a program where students can take classes and complete college studies in a foreign country for a semester or academic year. Students have the opportunity to learn new languages, experience different cultures, and gain a better understanding of living and working abroad.	• SJSU Study Abroad & Away	
☐ Volunteering involves giving unpaid time and work to an organization, community, individual or cause. It provides an opportunity to develop new skills and build experience.	• Volunteer Match • Idealist	
☐ Networking is the process of interacting and connecting with classmates, faculty/staff, alumni and co-workers to exchange information and develop professional and social relationships. Building and maintaining a professional network is highly important to career success during and after college.	• SJSU² Mentoring & Meetups • LinkedIn • MeetUp	
☐ Internships are short-term (3-6 months) work and learning experiences for current college students at a company or organization. Can be paid or unpaid and offered for academic credit. Internships provide an opportunity for students to “test reality” and gain experience in a professional work environment.	• SJSU Handshake	
☐ Contests and competitions are events where individuals or teams compete for a prize. Competitions are a great way to build confidence as well as develop new skills and expertise.	• Check with your major department to find out whether there are competition teams/clubs related to your major. • SJSU Silicon Valley Innovation Challenge • SJSU IDEAS Club	
☐ Professional associations and organizations are a key resource for students interested in pursuing professional development and connecting with like-minded professionals in your major, industry or occupation.	• What Can I Do With This Major? List of Professional Associations for Specific Majors • Professional Associations	

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Develop a Plan & Take Action

Now that you have an idea of how to build transferable skills, it's time to develop a plan and set goals of what you'd like to achieve.

Goal setting is a way of keeping yourself on track in an intentional way while you are a student at SJSU. Trying to do everything at once can be overwhelming, so breaking tasks down by semesters, months, or even days, can help you make progress towards reaching your goals. Setting aside a particular time or amount of time to work on building experience and developing skills will keep you motivated and on track. To help you with this process, we've created the **Build Experience Action Plan (BEAP)** which is based on setting S.M.A.R.T goals.

S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting to Build Experience

S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym you can use to remind you how to set effective goals to stay on track with your career development. Goal setting and strategic action toward achievement of goals are both skills for career and personal success. Review the steps below to set strong SMART goals for your career.

Specific	What exactly are you hoping to accomplish?
Measurable	What evidence will determine that you've accomplished your goal?
Attainable	Are you able to take the steps that you will need to take to complete your goal?
Realistic	Are you able to successfully complete this goal? Does this goal help you achieve your long term career goals and ambitions?
Timely	What is a realistic timeline to complete your goal?

To learn more about career goals, check out the [How to Set Clear Career Goals](#) article by Handshake. To get started with setting your own career goals, fill out the Build Experience Action Plan (BEAP) on the following page.

Build Experience Action Plan (BEAP)

Setting clear milestones and deadlines can help you stay on track for career success. Utilize the worksheet below to start planning your S.M.A.R.T. career goals for your time at SJSU. As you are developing your plan, keep in mind S.M.A.R.T. goals are *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely*.

First Year

Goal (Specific)	Deadline (Realistic, Timely)
What steps will I take to meet this goal? (Measurable, Attainable) See column 3 of your Build Experience Resources page)	

Second Year

Goal	Deadline

Third Year

Goal	Deadline

Fourth Year

Goal	Deadline

Make Your Experience Count

Building experience during your time at SJSU is about more than just what skills you learn, but also what you do with that knowledge. Experiences that allow you to use your learned skills in the larger community will help you stand out to future employers.

This is a guide that you can revisit again and again as you go through your journey at SJSU. As you identify new skills related to your career area of interest, or gain experiences that change your focus, you can always make new goals throughout college and beyond. Managing your career doesn't stop with your diploma.

You've reached the end of this guide, but there's still more to do to prepare for a successful life-long career. Now that you have the skills and knowledge needed for your career journey, it is time to refresh your resume, cover letter, online profiles, and job search strategy. Learn how to find career opportunities and effectively communicate your hard-earned experience to potential employers by visiting the [Launch Your Career](#) webpage.

Stay on track by following [Your Roadmap to Career Success](#) and checking in [with your career counselor](#) on the progress of your *Build Experience Action Plan (BEAP, pg. 12)*.

