



# SUCCESS

STARTS HERE



Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education

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The Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education processes licensing applications, conducts compliance inspections, and responds to complaints for the more 1,876 approved, private postsecondary educational institutions in California. The Bureau also investigates complaints, combats unlicensed activities, and administers the Student Tuition Recovery Fund, which is used to reimburse eligible students when a school closes.

# The journey to a career is filled with questions.

What career do you want?

What education and training do you need for that career?

Where do you get that education and training?

How do you pay for it?



This booklet from the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education can help you answer some of those questions. It offers tips on finding a career, selecting a school, and even preparing for a job interview. We hope you find it useful. **Success starts here.**

## How do I find a career that's right for me?



Some people know exactly what they want to do when it's time to enter the workforce. Others may have a wide range of interests and aren't so sure.

With so many choices and opportunities, it's sometimes difficult to pick a career path. If you are one of those having some difficulty deciding "what to be when you grow up," here are some ideas to help you with your decision.

## Take a self-assessment.

Self-assessments help you get to know yourself better, and discover what kind of career you could fall in love with and be successful at. The California Career Resources Network has some great self-assessments that can provide some suggestions based upon personal interests, personality type, and personal values. Check them out at [www.cacareerzone.org](http://www.cacareerzone.org) or try [www.onetcenter.org](http://www.onetcenter.org) for skills assessments.

## Look around.

How do you like to spend your time? What do you like to do? What magazines do you read? People are most successful if they are doing something that interests them. If you take a look at what interests you, you can probably find a career associated with that field.

## Ask!

Do you have a job in mind that you think you might like but are not sure? Want to learn what you really need in order to score the job of your dreams? Ask!! People love to talk about what they do. If you are interested in a particular type of job, find someone who is doing it now, and call, write, or drop in to make an appointment to talk with him or her. You don't want to take a lot of time; you can get a lot of information in just 10 minutes.

## Here are some questions you might ask people in the career:

- What is a typical day like for you on the job?
- What kind of education do you need to get started?
- What is most interesting to you about your job?
- Do I need a license or certification?

If you ask about pay, ask about pay ranges: while people love to talk about their jobs, most people don't like to talk about their pay. Keep your meeting or phone call brief. Someone is carving time from their work day to talk with you, and you just want enough information to see if this is something that might interest you. Don't forget to send a thank-you note.

## Find out more.

If you find something that interests you, find out about the job market. Will there be a need for workers in this field by the time you finish school? The California Employment Development Department offers important information about what jobs will be in demand, average hourly

pay rates and salaries, and even what the cost of living is where you'd like to live and work. Find the information at [www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov). Ask possible employers about the job. Call the personnel or human resources office of a possible employer and find out what they are looking for in an employee.

## Some questions you might ask possible employers are:

- What skills and background do you look for when hiring for *(fill-in the name of the possible job)*?
- What type of education or training do you require?
- Does it require a license or certification?
- What is the possibility for advancement from this position?
- What is the starting salary?
- Do you have many of these positions available? How many in a month, year?
- Are there any additional requirements such as a medical exam, drug test, background check, etc.?



### Try it on.

Taking a class in the subject that interests you can help you get a feel for what your training would involve. Sometimes internships are available that would give you some hands-on experience before you commit. This is your future; you owe it to yourself to gather as much information about you and possible career choices so you can make the best choice for yourself.

### Once you decide on a goal, make a plan.

Ask yourself this question and write down all the possible answers: What do I need to do to get from where I am now to my goal? Be realistic but positive. You can do this. If you make the time and effort to take these steps, you have a good chance of finding the career you love and where you will be successful. Avoid the temptation to take just any job, because that's all it will ever be – just a job. Once you have your goal, you're ready for the next step: how to find a school that's right for you.



## How do I find a school that's right for me?

You have a goal in mind for your future. You've determined that you need additional education or training to reach that goal, but how do you know which school and what kind of program is right for you?

There are so many choices. Degree or certificate? Full-time or part-time? Distance learning or traditional classroom? While there may be many different schools or training programs that will get you to your goal, choosing the right program for you may take some thought and research.



**Here are some important factors to consider.**

### **Location**

You may be interested in schools all over the country or you may be committed to staying where you are. Consider your situation and decide where you can and want to attend school.

**Answer the following questions to help you decide:**

- Where will I live?
- What are the costs?
- Can I afford to move?
- How will I get to school on a daily basis?
- Are there opportunities for jobs and internships in the community where I move?
- Remember to find out about the availability of quality, affordable day care if that is a consideration for you.
- Finally, will you have the support you need to succeed in school if you move away?



## What is a private postsecondary school?

Some postsecondary schools are public and subsidized by the state of California. Private postsecondary schools are private; that is, owned by an individual, partnership, corporation or limited liability partnership.

### Some attributes of private postsecondary schools:

- Private schools will generally have a few focused programs instead of a wide variety of programs.
- Private schools may offer smaller, more personalized classes.
- Private schools generally offer short, more condensed terms, often allowing you to complete your program in a short period of time.

## Distance vs. classroom.

Distance education is the broad term for any instruction that does not take place in a traditional face-to-face, classroom setting. Some people succeed at distance education while some people know that they learn better in a traditional classroom setting. If you are considering distance learning and have not thought about what it takes to learn, you might want to visit these Web sites:

[www.petersons.com/dlwizard/code/default.asp](http://www.petersons.com/dlwizard/code/default.asp)

or <http://www.adprima.com/dears.htm> and take the distance learning assessment quiz. These are just a few of the many online assessments that may help you make a decision.

## Full-time or part-time.

Many postsecondary schools – any school after high school – do not support part-time study. If you have obligations that keep you from attending school full time you want to ask if the school supports part-time study early in your conversation.



## Watch out for diploma mills.

*Webster's Dictionary* defines “diploma mill” as “an institution of higher education operating without supervision of a state or professional agency and granting diplomas which are either fraudulent or, because of the lack of proper standards, worthless. Such organizations are unaccredited, but they often claim accreditation by non-recognized or unapproved organizations set up for the purposes of providing a veneer of authenticity.” The Internet is filled with diploma-mill Websites.



In researching distance-learning institutions, watch out for diploma mills that have no intention of providing instruction. They simply sell documents.

Any time you don't have to read, submit work assignments related to your reading, take exams or other tests of your knowledge yet still receive credits, it is a clue that the school is probably a diploma mill.

While it may be tempting to get a diploma for little or no effort, they are not accepted by many

companies and are actually outlawed in some states. Instead of having the training you need to begin your career, you'll have a worthless piece of paper.

If your career goal requires you to have a license or certification, call the licensing or certifying entity and ask if they have a list of schools that they recommend.

If the licensing or certifying entity doesn't make recommendations, ask if schools must be approved prior to their graduates being eligible for licensure or certification. If so, ask for a list of approved schools in your area or in the area where you want to study.



How do I know  
what a school  
will provide?

You've gone through the process of choosing a career goal and determined that you need more education. You've chosen a school or at least narrowed down your choices. If one of your choices is a private postsecondary school, make certain you get and read the following materials before you sign anything.



### **Get a school catalog**

The school catalog contains a lot of information. It can answer many questions you have about the school's policies and procedures and the courses you are considering. Read it and save it. If you are ever in dispute with the institution later, you have written documentation of the school's policies and procedures.

### Some of the things a school catalog should contain:

- A list of all programs the school offers. It should include all classes or modules, the length of the program, and the cost of the program including any costs that are not refundable.
- A list of all faculty and their qualifications.
- Information on job placement assistance.
- The attendance policy, including information about making up missed assignments or hours.
- The leave of absence policy.
- The withdrawal policy, including information about refunds. Withdrawal is leaving school after school has started often referred to as “dropping out.”
- The cancellation policy, including information about refunds. Cancellation is deciding not to attend school before school starts.
- The satisfactory academic progress policy. Most schools have a requirement that you maintain grades at a certain level or have a certain amount of time to complete your program of study.
- Disclosures about transfer of credit. No school can guarantee that any other school will accept credits earned for courses or programs taken at their school. The decision to accept credits earned at another school is entirely that of the accepting school.
- Disclosures about licensing or certification if that is appropriate.
- Disclosures about locations of any required internships/ externships.





## Read the Enrollment Agreement or Contract for Services.

Before you begin at any private school, you should receive and read a contract. A contract is just that, an agreement between you and the school. Read the contract carefully, and don't be embarrassed to ask questions if something is unclear or doesn't make sense to you. Know what you are agreeing to before you sign. Both you and a school representative should sign the contract but be sure to read the contract carefully before you sign and maintain a copy of the enrollment agreement for your records.

### **A contract should contain the following:**

- The name of the program you are entering.
- The total cost of the program. Any fee or charge that is not refundable should be identified as non-refundable.
- The amount of the Student Tuition Recovery Fund (STRF) fee, separate from your program costs.
- The length of the program.
- The name and address of the school.
- The refund policy.
- Whom to contact if you decide not to attend the school along with when and how to cancel the contract.
- Whom to contact if you have a complaint.

## Understand financial aid information.

If you are receiving or plan to receive financial aid from the school make sure you ask or know the following:

- How the financial aid process works?
- Is the money a grant (*you don't have to pay it back*) or a loan (*you must repay the money*)?
- If the money is a loan, is it a guaranteed student loan or a private loan?
- If the money is a loan:
  - Who is the lender?
  - What is the interest rate?
  - How much time do you have to pay it back?
  - What is the monthly payment going to be?
  - When do you have to start making the payments?
  - Can you afford to make the payments if you don't get a job right away after school?
  - What happens if you can't make the payments?
  - How much money are you going to need when you complete school to make the loan payment and maintain your quality of life? Is that reasonable for the occupation you are pursuing?
- Do you have an alternative to borrowing money? (*Scholarships, a gift from a relative, job, grant, or work study*)



Once you have signed your enrollment agreement and financial aid documents and have a copy of the catalog, make sure you keep these documents in a safe place. You never know when you might need the information.

### **Keep your eyes on your goal.**

You've done a lot of work to get to this point, so continue to do the work you need to do - attend classes and maintain your grades. If you have to be absent for any reason, make sure you contact the school. Know whom to contact and how to reach them in case of an emergency. Document all of your absences for your records. If you fall behind in class or don't understand something ask for help.





## What happens after I graduate?

The first thing to do when you complete your program of study is to take a little time to congratulate yourself. You deserve it! You've completed a very important step in pursuit of your career goal. Finishing school is just one of the first steps to entering the career you have chosen. If the occupation you are entering requires you to be licensed or certified, make the necessary arrangements to apply for your license or take your exam.



### **Collect your diploma and transcripts.**

You probably received a certificate of completion or a diploma when you finished your program. Whether you decide to frame it and hang it on the wall or mail it to your best friend as evidence that you “did it,” make a copy of it and put it with the rest of your school paperwork in a safe place. Also, request at least one copy of your transcript. A transcript is a document that lists all of the courses you took and the grades you received. Most schools destroy student records after a period of time. You want to make sure you have documentation of the courses you took in case you ever need it.

## Arrange to repay financial aid.

If you have loans, you need to make sure your lender knows how and where to find you. Contact your lender and let them know that you have completed your schooling and verify your correct, current address.

Just because a lender can't find you doesn't mean you don't owe the money. In fact, a lender will track you down eventually, and that may cost you more in fees or penalties.

Attend your school's loan exit interview. You will get important information on your rights and

responsibilities. If you have problems paying your loans, talk with your lender. Again, avoiding the fact that you owe money does not make it go away. It is better to be honest and document that you tried to resolve issues rather than avoid them.

Maintain all of your paperwork in a safe place until, at least, your loans are paid in full. You never know when you'll need the information in the loan documents.





### **Look for a job.**

If your school has placement assistance, take full advantage of the services that are offered through your school. Remember, you didn't come this far to ease up now. Do the research, make the phone calls, and follow through. You are responsible for your own success.

### **Prepare your resume and cover letter.**

If your school did not offer a workshop in writing a resume and cover letter, get some help. There are many sites online that are free of charge and offer instruction or ideas on writing an effective resume and cover letter.

Some sites provide examples so look around for the best one for you and get started. Many new job seekers will write a resume using the template on their personal computer. Don't use any template that includes grids. Most employers recognize these as a template and it leaves them with the impression you are not resourceful.

## Three pieces of advice as you write your resume and cover letter:

### 1. One size does not always fit all.

Adjust your resume and cover letter to the needs of the organization. Read job announcements and mission statements to find out what is important to the company and highlight those areas on your resume and then reinforce those skills or abilities by mentioning them in your cover letter. Look for “buzzwords” in the mission statement that you can use in your cover letter.

For instance, if a mission statement or job announcement uses the phrase “team approach” or “team environment,” it would make sense to highlight your ability to work well with others by defining yourself as a “team player.” Those buzzwords are clues to what the company has determined is important.

### 2. Don't include or highlight anything on your resume that you don't want to do.

You may be the best window washer in the United States, but don't include that on your resume if you don't want to at least talk about washing windows.

Include the information that is important to the job you are seeking, don't feel you need to include every job you had since high school unless you gained a skill or ability that will be useful in your new career.

### 3. Double-check your spelling and punctuation.

The worst thing that can happen to a job seeker is to spend time, energy, and effort to write the perfect resume and cover letter only to be rejected because the person you sent it to is put off by typographical errors. Even if spelling and punctuation is your strong area, find someone to review the resume and cover letter for you.

## Look for job leads.

If your school has a constant stream of job leads that you can follow, that's great! But you need to take charge of your search. Again, there are many sites on the Web that offer job advertisements free of charge. Don't forget to go back to the people you spoke with as you were researching possible careers. Often the people working in the profession know of current or future openings or have ideas where you can look for jobs.

## Get ready for interviews.

If you are called for an interview, make sure you are prepared. Most interviews focus on questions and conversation about three subjects: You, the company, and the job. Make sure you have as much information as possible about all three. Be on time for the interview. Dress to make a good first impression.



As a student in a private postsecondary school in California, you have certain rights.



## Student Bill of Rights

## Student Bill of Rights

As a student in a private postsecondary school in California, you have the right to:

**Career information**—Accurate facts about job availability and salary ranges if the institution makes claims to prospective students regarding the starting salaries of its graduates.

**A catalog**—A comprehensive listing of current and accurate information regarding programs, policies, procedures, and a list of current administrative staff and faculty, including their qualifications.

**A contract**—An enrollment agreement that states the program and the number of credits, clock hours, or units required to complete the course, the length of the program covered by the enrollment agreement, and the cancellation and refund policies.

**Cost information**—Clear and honest disclosure of all tuition, fees, and other charges related to the cost of receiving your education.

**Financial aid disclosure**—Full disclosure of all financial aid and loan information including rates, terms, and any deferment or forbearance options.

**Quality faculty**—Instructors who are knowledgeable and current in the areas they are teaching.

**Quality materials**—Textbooks, teaching materials and equipment that are current and in good condition.

**Refunds**—The ability and right to withdraw from school at any time and receive a refund for tuition paid but not used.

**Retention/placement information**—Information about the number and percentage of students who start and complete programs and the number and percentage of graduates placed in jobs.

These rights are committed to you by schools that have signed a voluntary agreement. To make sure your school has agreed to this pledge, check with the school or visit the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education online to [www.bppe.ca.gov](http://www.bppe.ca.gov).



**Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education**

### **Mission statement**

The Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education exists to promote and protect the interests of students and consumers through:

- Effective and efficient oversight of California's private postsecondary educational institutions.
- Promotion of competition that rewards educational quality and employment outcomes.
- Proactively combating unlicensed activity.
- Resolving student complaints in a manner that benefits both the complaining student and future students.



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