



Step-by-step plan for switching degree programmes

How do you choose a degree programme?

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We are 

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Publication details

This step-by-step plan for switching degree programmes is published by the UvA Student Careers Centre at the University of Amsterdam.

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STEP-BY-STEP PLAN FOR SWITCHING

Are you a first- or second-year student and are you having doubts about continuing your current degree programme? Or have you quit already because the programme did not suit you? Right now, you may or may not have a general idea about your future studies. This step-by-step plan provides you with guidance so you can start looking for a suitable degree programme in an independent and structured fashion. You could also use this step-by-step plan in preparation for a visit to information days at research universities and universities of applied sciences.

Focus on you

From the long list of available degree programmes, which one genuinely suits you? This step-by-step plan will provide you with the tools to reflect on your previous study choice independently, identify your pitfalls as well as explore your talents, qualities and interests. You will use this self-awareness to look for suitable degree programmes. In the end, you will know how to explore your options further and you will draft an action plan. During this process, you will always keep your self-knowledge in mind. Take your time to complete this step-by-step plan and to reflect on the questions.

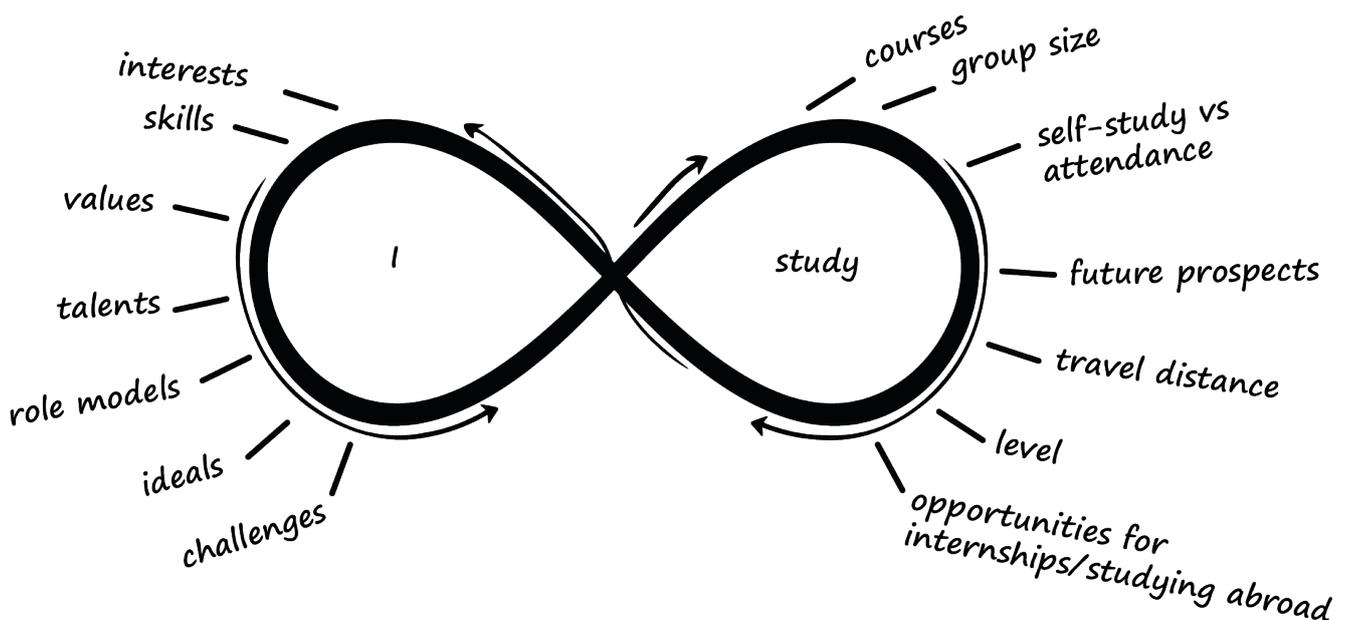


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This step-by-step plan contains a number of reflection questions, which will invite you to consider what you value. All people have their individual set of characteristics and interests. Reflecting on past choices allows you to take targeted action and decide which of the options available to you suits you the best.

Steps involved in making a choice

How does the decision-making process actually work? Psychologist Otto Taborsky distinguished six phases of a decision-making process such as a study choice. These phases and their various elements are incorporated into the present step-by-step plan.



Choices? How does it work in your head?

- 1) **Realising that you need to make a decision**
You can commit fully to a decision only when you are aware of the need to choose.
- 2) **Accepting uncertainty**
You cannot foresee what the future will hold, so you must accept a nagging sense of uncertainty over the period ahead.
- 3) **Exploring the options freely**
You will gather information on a range of degree programmes with an open mind.
- 4) **Comparing the options**
You will compare the degree programmes and define their main requirements for you.
- 5) **Making a conscious decision**
You progress from having several options to making your choice.
- 6) **Carrying out your decision***
You will be energised by having made your decision, take action and carry out your decision.

** While Phase 6 (Carrying out your decision) is not treated in a separate chapter, it is still a key element of your decision-making process. At the end, we will present you with a number of tips on how best to approach this phase*

Good to know: No well-defined future prospect

Bachelor's programmes provide you with a broad foundation in a particular field of study. You may place your own emphasis in the course of the degree programme by choosing electives, a minor, a work placement or a specific topic of your Bachelor's thesis, for example. Making these choices during your studies will shape your personal study career. It is not only likely but even rather common that you will not have a well-defined vision of your future prospects. Although you cannot be sure of how your choices will turn out, you should not hesitate to start from your talents, interests and ambitions.

Note for non-EU students: You always need to comply with the requirements of your student residence permit and visa. Also when you would like to switch programmes. You need 50% of the ECTS of your study programme each year, to be able to stay in the Netherlands. Further there can be other restrictions on switching programmes due to your visa and BSA. Please **always** contact the student counsellors (uva.nl/studentcounsellors) for your options.

2. CURRENT SITUATION – WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Clear your mind



You should clear your mind before we get started. It may help to write down your thoughts and feelings. What do you already know about your future choice? Where do you still have doubts? Have you already made a longlist of possibilities or do you have a choice between two options? Do you prefer to take a gap year or continue with a new degree programme immediately? Below, write down all your thoughts on the next step in your study career: any dreams and doubts, questions that you wish to be answered, and so on.

You have now committed all your dreams and doubts to paper. Reading them over, what is the first thing that you want to tackle? Write down:

.....

.....

.....

3. REFLECTION ON YOUR PREVIOUS DEGREE

A host of factors may have fuelled your current doubts about your degree programme. Some students will have chosen a programme which was close to their interests but which did not suit them completely in the end – or not at all. Other students may find their degree programme to be too theoretical and to lack practical applications. You should consider which lessons you may learn from your previous study choice before you start looking for a new programme.

1. Why did you choose your previous degree programme?

2. What aspects of your previous degree programme did suit you? (*Examples are specific courses, topics, teaching methods, and so on.*)

3. What did not suit you?

4. How could you have taken a different approach to exploring degree programmes in hindsight?

Pitfalls in decision-making

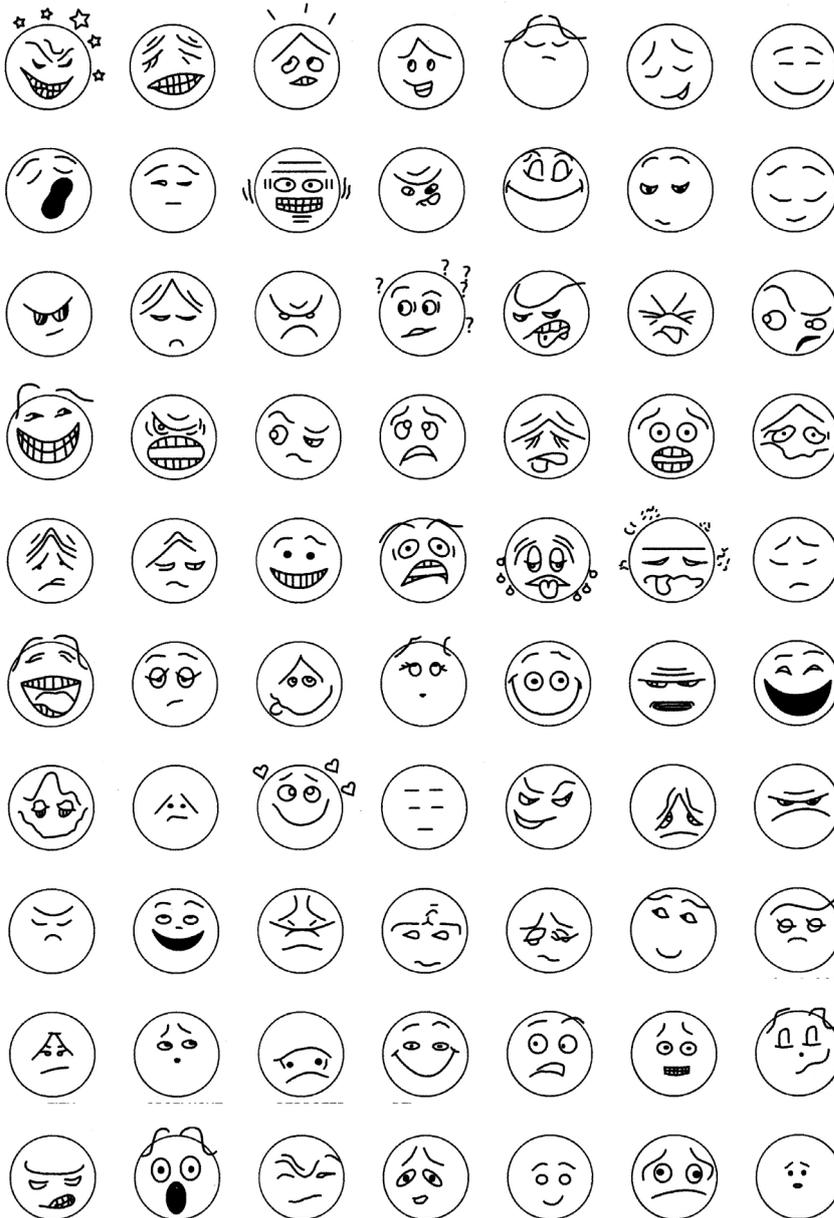


Consider the pitfalls below. Tick the pitfalls that you recognise for yourself:

- Haste makes waste** – ‘I rushed into a choice without exploring my options.’
- Procrastination** – ‘I put off making a decision for too long.’ By postponing the decision, you keep reducing the period of time during which you can make a good choice.
- Self-evident truths** – ‘I finished university preparatory education, so I have to attend university.’ Many people adhere to this notion, but they may miss out on an interesting undergraduate degree programme with an applied emphasis (HBO).
- The perfect programme** – ‘The degree programme should fit me like a glove.’ You should not look for perfection in a degree programme, as you will never enjoy each and every component.
- Lack of an alternative** – ‘I was not selected for my favourite degree programme, but I failed to explore the alternatives.’ If you gather enough information on your alternative degree programmes, you can be certain that they have enough to offer.
- Job guarantee** – ‘I feared that I would be unable to get a job with my preferred degree programme, but I now regret that I took up a different programme.’ Bachelor's programmes usually provide you with a broad foundation and do not train you for a specific profession.
- Boundaries** – ‘I would have liked to take a different degree programme, but my environment disagreed.’
- Tradition** – ‘I have a father and grandfather who followed this degree programme, so I decided to tread in their footsteps.’ You should not forget that everyone is different and that you are allowed to pursue your own interests.
- Proximity** – ‘I did not want to take a degree programme at the other end of the country.’ If this distant degree programme may suit your interests much better, what is keeping you?

How are you feeling?

What does facing another study choice mean to you? Below, select and circle the two faces that best represent your feelings about your study choice. Write down a word in the margin to describe the emotion associated with this face.



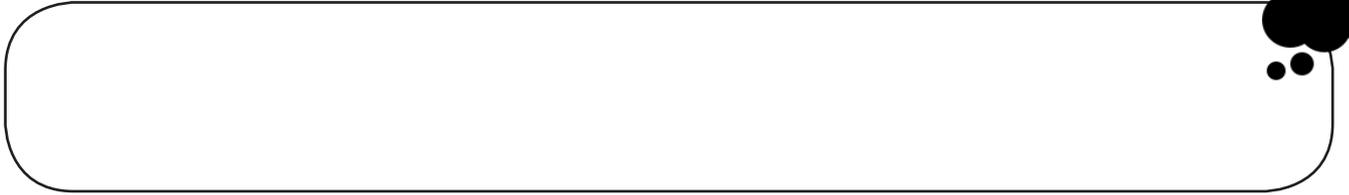
Emotion 1:

Emotion 2:

A degree programme which is too difficult or which does not make you feel at home could cause sadness or thoughts of inadequacy. Having decided to quit could even come as a relief. You may also feel lost, not knowing what to do next. Switching programmes can generate any of these varying emotions. Tension and doubt are part of the decision-making process. Which degree programme is right for me in the end? Will the new programme be too demanding? What are the job prospects?

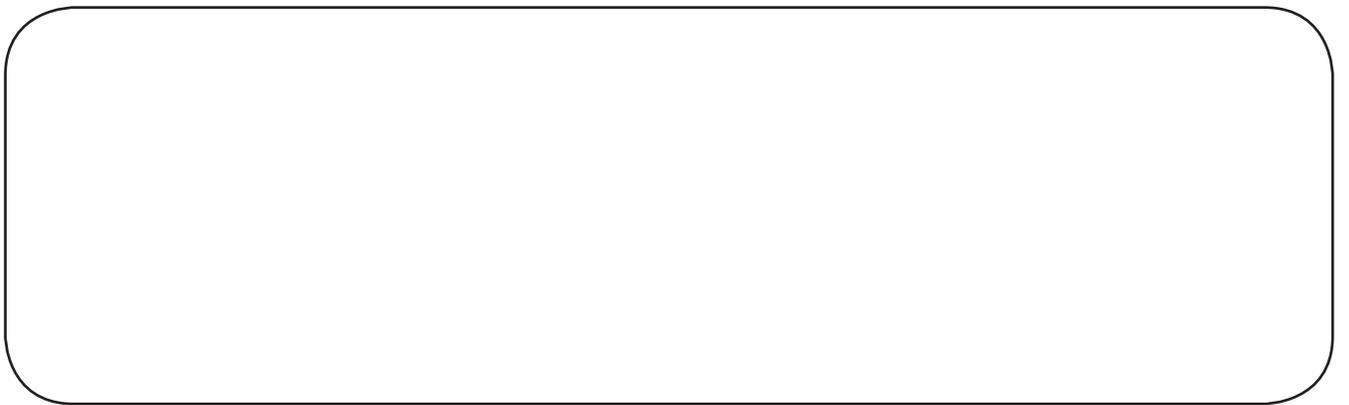
Do you dislike not knowing what next year will bring? If so, it might be tempting to make a new choice as soon as possible. Accepting that uncertainty is part of the process will offer you the space to go through the next steps and allow you to explore the options with an open mind (Phase 2 of Taborsky's decision-making process).

Which thoughts and feelings do you wish to have during this study choice process? Draw or note them here:



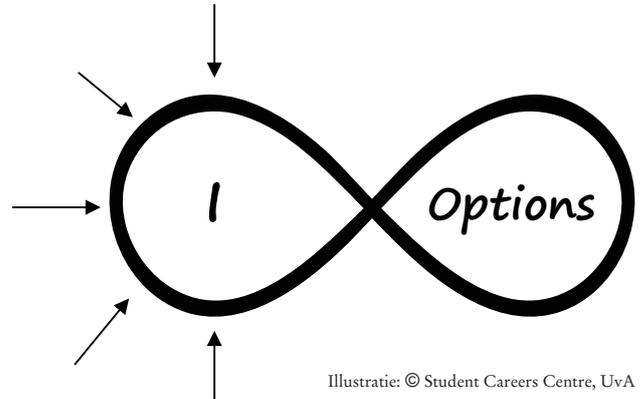
Reflection: Reflect on Chapters 2 and 3. Which lessons can you learn from the way that you chose your previous degree programme? What would you like to do differently this time?

Write down:



4. SELF-EXPLORATION – WHAT ARE YOUR AMBITIONS, SKILLS AND INTERESTS?

Before you can start looking at possible degree programmes, you must first identify your interests, ambitions, qualities and skills.



It is often difficult to answer key questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘What can I do?’ or ‘What are my strengths?’ Going through these questions step by step will give you a better insight into what matters to you. For the next exercises in this chapter, you may move beyond your studies and take a broader perspective.

Interests



Try to write down your answers as specifically and elaborately as possible.

1. Imagine that you are a film director and are asked to make three documentaries. What topics would the films be about? Try to write down the topics in as much detail as possible.

2. Imagine that you inherit €1 million from a distant relative on the condition that you start your own business. What kind of products or services would your company sell?

-
3. Make a note of any interesting subjects that you learnt about recently; for example, in your free time, through your hobbies, via membership of a club or on your travels. These subjects may also include online or offline articles that you enjoyed reading.

4. Imagine that you were allowed to try someone else's job for a week. Who and what would you pick?

People that you picked:

Their field/line of work:

5. Imagine that you could have dinner with a celebrity. Who would it be and why? What would you ask this person?



Reflection: Reflect on the five answers that you have given above. Can you detect overarching themes among your interests?

If you struggle with this reflection, you may also ask a friend or parent to have a look at it.

Qualities



You will now focus on your qualities. Complete the list according to how you are rather than how you would like to be. Which of these characteristics have you developed well and which suit you less?

1. Tick the extent to which the following characteristics apply.

Characteristic	++	+	+-	-	--	Characteristic	++	+	+-	-	--	Characteristic	++	+	+-	-	--
Ambitious						Flexible						Organised					
Analytical						Funny						Patient					
Assertive						Goal-directed						People-oriented					
Attentive						Helpful						Perfectionist					
Balanced						Honest						Persistent					
Caring						Idealistic						Persuasive					
Cheerful						Imaginative						Philosophical					
Clear						Independent						Practical					
Combative						Inquisitive						Proactive					
Courageous						Inspiring						Precise					
Creative						Intelligent						Realistic					
Demanding						Introverted						Reliable					
Dedicated						Intuitive						Resourceful					
Disciplined						Level-headed						Responsible					
Discreet						Logical						Sensitive					
Engaged						Multifaceted						Serious					
Enterprising						Open-eared						Skilful					
Enthusiastic						Open-minded						Sociable					
Entrepreneurial						Optimistic						Sporting					
Extraverted						Orderly						Thoughtful					

-
2. Select three to five strengths and write them down below.
Of course, you may add any characteristics not listed.

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

3. Select three poorly developed characteristics and write them down below.
Of course, you may add any characteristics not listed.

1.....

2.....

3.....

Activities and skills



The above section dealt with qualities, which are general descriptions or character traits. Now, you will consider your well-developed skills. Skills are activities which you improve through practice and which almost anyone can learn (such as driving). While some activities require more talent than other ones, you should in principle be able to develop all skills. Gaining insight into your skills levels at this moment may benefit the decision-making process for your study choice

1. Which activities energise you?

Tip: Think of the moments during which you lose all track of time.

2. Tick the extent to which you possess the following skills.

Skills	++	+	+-	-	--	Skill	++	+	+-	-	--	Skill	++	+	+-	-	--
Advise						Gather/process information						Organise					
Analyse						Give/receive feedback						Perform precision work					
Arrange						Handle ICT						Plan					
Build/produce						Improvise						Play music or sing					
Categorise						Influence						Set boundaries					
Collaborate						Instruct						Speak in public					
Conduct interviews						Invent						Supervise/coach					
Coordinate						Listen						Take initiative					
Deal with conflict						Manage						Teach others					
Design/structure						Mediate						Use language					
Draw/paint						Motivate/inspire						Work on a project basis					
Empathise						Negotiate						Write					
Entertain others						Offer commercial insight											

3. Below, write down your top 5 of strong skills.

Of course, you may add any skills not listed.

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

4. Select three poorly developed skills and write them down below.

1.....

2.....

3.....

Feedback from your environment



Answering loads of questions about yourself might be hard. The people around you often see clearly what makes you unique. You may send the questions below to a number of people in your environment. Pick three to four people who know you well, preferably in different roles (e.g. part-time job, hobby, family, friends). Ask them to answer the questions below in writing (e.g. via email) and ask them to be honest about you. Saving this feedback is a good idea. Factor in roughly a week for people to respond if you contact them by email. While you may use social media for this purpose, be aware that you will likely receive shorter answers.

1. What is my greatest 'talent'? How did I demonstrate it?
2. What are my interests? What do I talk about a lot?
3. What knowledge and skills do you value most?
4. How do I handle things?
5. How am I in a group?
6. Are there any areas of improvement (in my interaction with others) that I could target?
7. What specific activities/line of work do you see me doing in the future?

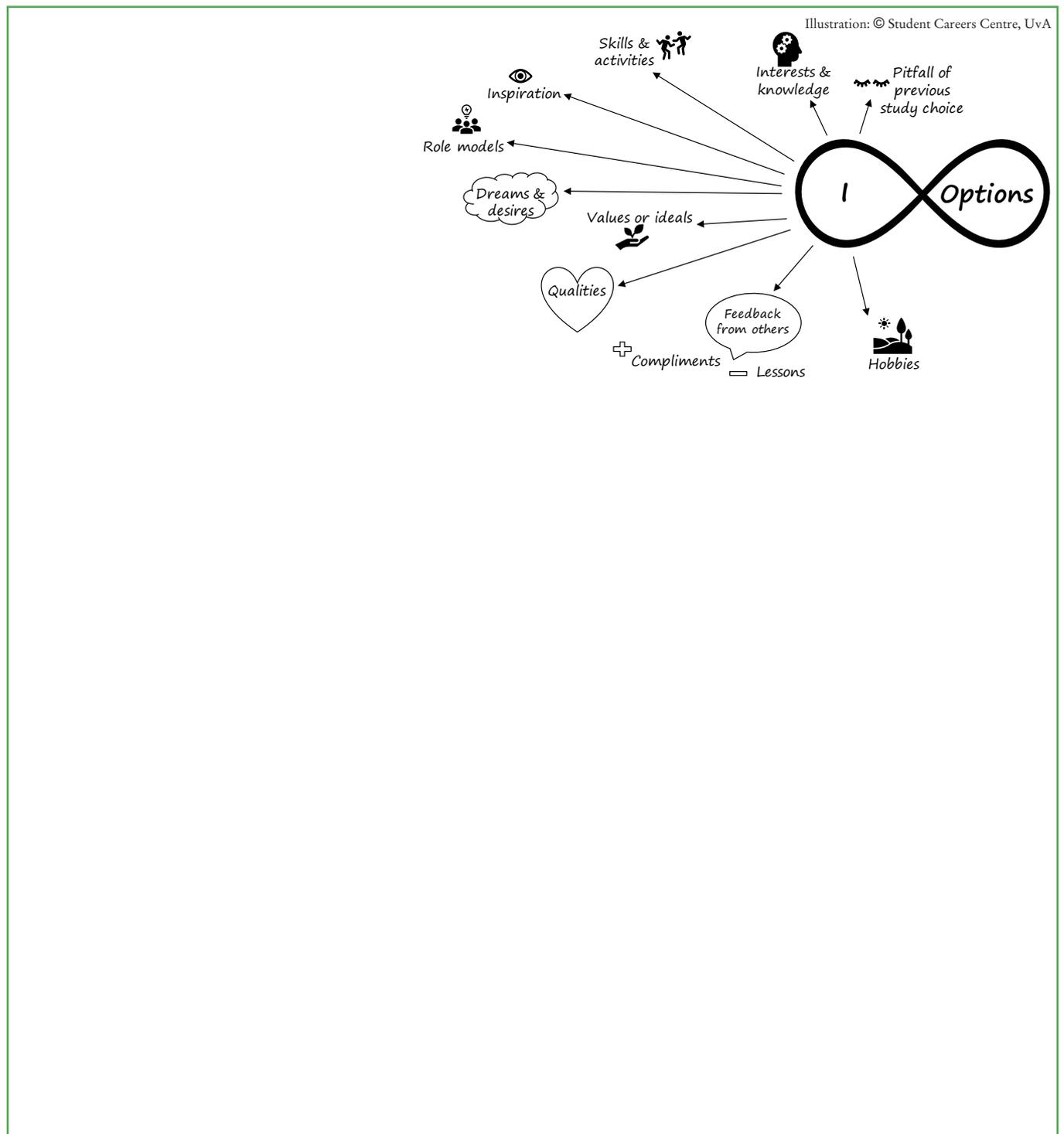
Compare the answers that you receive. What are the similarities and differences? Do you recognise yourself? If not, enter into a conversation.



Reflection: Self-exploration

Summarise the preceding chapters before you start considering your options. You will be able to consult this useful summary at a later stage. The mind map below may be of assistance. Reflecting on your answers in this chapter, what are your strengths and interests? What are your weaker points? What are lessons to be learnt?

Complete this mind map:



5. EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES

You have gained a better insight into your interests, skills and qualities. The next step is to find out which degree programmes match these characteristics. It is crucial during this exploratory phase that you keep an open mind (Phase 3 of Taborsky's decision-making process). You will have a chance to compare your options and make a choice at a later stage. There are hundreds of degree programmes at research universities and universities of applied sciences. You do not need to choose just yet. Take your time and get inspired.

Exploring the options with an open mind

How and where can you look for degree programmes? Which sources of information are there? What do certain programmes and associated professions entail? A great deal of information is available online and during information sessions. You are advised to start exploring the possibilities early on. It is vital to gain experience with degree programmes (through information days, taster sessions or meeting students, for example).

The time has come to take action!

When gathering information on degree programmes, always keep the results of the 'Self-exploration' chapter in mind so you can prepare yourself for choosing a suitable programme.

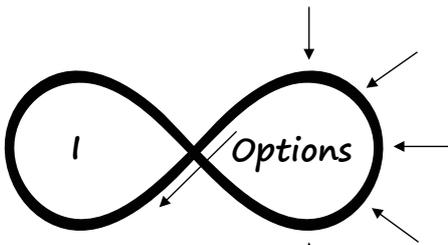


Illustration: © Student Careers Centre, UvA



Reflection: Take another look at the lessons that you learnt during the orientation process (Chapter 3). Which negative thoughts or objections are holding you back? How can you prevent or overcome them?



What will you do differently this time? Which step in gathering information will you emphasise more this time? (Examples include shadowing, asking questions during information days, investigating the course content further, meeting students, attending taster sessions, and so on.)



Connecting your interests with degree programmes

To connect your interests with degree programmes, we recommend that you take a free study choice test provided by Icares. This brief test connects several programmes with your interests.

TAKE THE TEST!



Visit icares.com, choose your language and take the free study choice test. Completing the test will reveal a number of degree programmes. Programmes on the first page of results will provide the best match. Please note: There is no guarantee that the first couple of hits will be a perfect match. Click the individual degree programmes to read a description.

Tip: At the top of the overview, you can filter results for university or HBO bachelors. This choice might present you with fresh information.

Tip: Would you like further insight into specific professions? An Icares occupational test is also available. You may get in touch with the Student Careers Centre if you wish to take this test. Contact details can be found on the final page. While this job test is free as well, a careers adviser of the Student Careers Centre must use their personal account to provide you with access to the test.

Which degree programmes do you want to investigate further?

Make a list below of programmes that interest you. Describe what appeals to you – how do they relate to the results of the ‘Self-exploration’ chapter? Which doubts remain? These doubts may concern the curriculum, the entry requirements, the level or your gut feeling. Which matters do you want to investigate further and how?

Degree programme	Attractions	Doubts	Action plan

Get started!

You will need to get started on finding good and relevant information. In the above diagram, write down which activities you will carry out this week. Make at least one change to your previous study choice process.

Explore the curricula and courses

You now have a list of degree programmes. A lot of information can be collected on your own. Degree programmes at the UvA will list the courses on studiegids.uva.nl. You may also browse the prospectuses of other education institutions to learn about their courses and programmes. Below are some tips for you to consider:

- Look at the curriculum. What are the three years of the degree programme like? Where is their focus?
- Look at the content. Which courses are taught? What do these courses entail? Which topics, research areas and literature do they discuss? Do they include self-study and/or tutorials?
- Look at other matters that interest you. For example, is there an opportunity to do an internship? Can you choose electives or a minor? Can you study abroad?

You may use the diagram below to record your experiences. After you have gathered all this information on each degree programme, note in the final column what appeals to you and what does not.

Degree programme	Curriculum	Contents	Other	+ / -

Gain experience



While you have already conducted a lot of research by now, you can obtain valuable information by participating in the taster sessions of a degree programme or meeting students. Do not skip this step during your orientation process. Do you feel at home in this degree programme? Does the information available online correspond to your experience? You can only find out through your own observations. As a result, you may well strike a number of degree programmes from your list and become more aware of which programme suits you.

Tip: Remain up to date on upcoming information sessions. Include these ‘personal appointments’ in your calendar, reserve enough time and prepare well for them.

All education institutions organise information sessions (such as shadowing, taster sessions and information days). You can talk with lecturers and students of different degree programmes during these occasions. If you missed an information session, you might know someone taking a degree programme whom you may shadow.

Tip: Prepare for all sessions and ask any questions that have not been covered by the information which you found online. Always write down your questions as well as your doubts and bring them along to any information sessions that you attend.

6. COMPARE YOUR OPTIONS

From longlist to shortlist

Using the longlist of degree programmes that appeal to you, you can start comparing your options. Remind yourself what matters the most to you by reviewing your answers in Chapters 3 and 4, especially your mind map.

1

2

3

Is a particular programme beginning to emerge? If so, you can move on to the next chapter. If not, compare the remaining degree programmes using the diagram below. Consider the most crucial aspects as well as any practical matters. What are the key differences between both programmes?

	Programme 1	Programme 2
Crucial aspects <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••		
Practical matters <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••		

Do the feasibility check

- **Deadline:** By when must you enrol?
- **Admission requirements:** Do you still need to complete a certain course before you can be admitted? Is there an enrolment restriction?
- **Level:** Is the degree programme too easy or too hard? What are my chances of finishing this Bachelor's programme?
- **Theoretical or applied:** Do I prefer to take this degree programme at the university or HBO level?
- **Finances:** How much does it cost to follow this Bachelor's programme?

7. MAKE A CONSCIOUS DECISION

Choosing your Bachelor's programme



Does this degree programme excite you? If so, congratulations!

It is often energising to make your final decision. You can now enrol in Studielink.

Some nagging doubts about excluding other options may linger. This part of the decision-making process is common. However, you can trust that you have made a careful decision. If you miss any crucial components, you should verify whether you can take them in a different shape or at a later stage of your studies. After making your choice, you will probably feel inspired and energised, and will want to share your choice with others. You can tell them the following:

- What does the degree programme involve?
- Why am I so enthusiastic about it?
- Why does it suit me?

If you find it hard to answer these questions, you may not yet know enough about yourself or the different programmes. Go through the above chapters once more.



How does a decision-making process work in your head?

It is often difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when not knowing exactly what you want turns into being convinced of what you do want. Most of these decisions are taken subconsciously and develop into a point of view only later. You will notice that it has become easier to talk about with others. Although you are not completely convinced yet, you are starting to back your choice as a result of your internal debate.

Support in follow-up action

For questions on admission to a specific degree programme or the content of a study programme, we recommend that you get in touch with the study adviser of the programme in question.

Would you like to discuss this step-by-step plan or do you need more guidance? The study career advisers at the UvA Student Careers Centre support students in making future choices on a daily basis. There are several ways to get in touch with the Student Careers Centre.



studentcareerscentre@uva.nl



www.uva.nl/switchingprogrammes



Telephone consultation hours: Tuesday-Friday from 09:00 to 10:00 on +31 (0)20 525 1401

Good luck!

UvA Student Careers Centre
career.uva.nl