

Decision making is the process of choosing between two or more courses of action. Though we make decisions daily, some decisions can be more complicated than others. Career decision-making can involve choosing a major, internship or job, graduate school, or post-graduate year of service program. Being well informed on decision making methods can be helpful in reaching a decision you are comfortable with.

Decision Making Approaches

Making a final decision is only part of the process, the work completed prior to making a decision is the piece that allows information to be gathered for making a well-informed decision. To begin the decision-making process, take a moment to consider how you have made decisions previously. Most people will either utilize an intuitive (“gut feeling”) or analytical (facts and figures) approach.

Intuitive

While some think of the “gut feeling” as simply emotional, it is actually a combination of one’s past experiences and personal values. An example of this could be a prospective student who enrolls at Marquette because they just “had a feeling” while they were touring campus. These feelings are valid and worth delving into through questioning. What were those feelings? What were/are they tied to? Why were/are those feelings important?

Analytical

Analytical decision-making focuses on the facts and figures of a decision more than the initial emotions intertwined in making a decision. An example of this could be a prospective student who partakes in a Marquette campus tour and then following that tour, utilizes the information they received while on campus to aid them in deciding on enrolment. How does the major they are interested in rank amongst other colleges? What are the success rates of previous graduates? How reputable are the professors?

Both intuitive and analytical approaches to decision making have their benefits and pitfalls. Applying both approaches when making more complicated decisions can lead to a more well-informed decision.

Before Deciding

Though it may seem obvious, figuring out what the decision is that needs to be made is the first step in this process. Once you have accomplished this step, you can move onto information gathering.

Information Gathering

Depending on the type of decision you are making, the information you will gather will vary. Consider what is most important to you and gather information revolving around that. One can very easily gather more information than is necessary for making their decision and unintentionally become overwhelmed.

Values

When considering what is most important to you, identifying and acknowledging your values can be helpful to the process. Values are standards that are important to your satisfaction. Career decision-making values might include declaring a major that is oriented towards helping society, stability, or future required education. Within the job search process, career decision-making values might include applying for positions that are within a certain geographical location, stable, or offering future opportunities for advancement. Think about what your values are as they relate to the decision you will be making.

Information Analyzing: Decision Making Methods (Weigh the Evidence)

There are multiple methods for analyzing information and utilizing it to make a decision. Again, there is no one *right* method to analyzing information. Consider utilizing a method that feels natural for you. You may even decide to use more than one method. The methods below are just a few that could be utilized; please note this is not an all-inclusive list.

Pros and Cons List

The Pros and Cons List has been around for many years. For some, it offers a simplistic way of looking at a situation and analyzing the information gathered. The method involves clearly articulating and making written note of the possible positive (pros) and possible negative (cons) outcomes of a decision; this can be easily displayed via respective sections.

When utilizing the pros and cons list method, consider having an Unknown or Uncertain section at the bottom of the page. There may be some unpredictable outcomes requiring you to gather additional information. If there are outcomes you then gather more information for, place them within their respective section – either pro or con – as appropriate. The hope when utilizing this method is that one of the sections will begin to stand out more than the other, making your decision clearer.

Decision Matrix

The Decision Matrix is particularly helpful when making decisions with multiple possible outcomes. This method works best when those possible outcomes have similar factors that can be compared.

It is recommended that you utilize a spreadsheet for this method so that you can keep all your information properly organized. In the top row – minus the furthest left column – you’ll list out all your options. In the furthest left column – minus the top row – you will list all the factors you would like to compare. The hope when utilizing this method is that you will begin to more clearly identify which factors are of more importance to you.

	St. Wayne University	Clements College	Smith University
Salary + Benefits	\$42,000 + Benefits	\$48,000 + No Benefits	\$44,000 + Benefits
Distance from Family	2-hour drive	7-hour drive	20-minute drive
Flexibility of Schedule	Yes	No	Yes

Beverly Ryle Prioritization Grid

The Beverly Ryle Prioritization Grid is a great tool to utilize when you need to prioritize your preferences. This could be a matter of prioritizing your post-graduation geographical location, prioritizing your values prior to a job search, or prioritizing your majors of interest – just to name a few.

The Ryle Prioritization Grid can be utilized for a list of a few items or up to ten items. You will list out your preferences in a numbered list; the order does not matter. You will then rank each preference’s importance in comparison to the other preferences on your list. It is highly recommended that you utilize the digital version (<http://www.beverlyryle.com/prioritizing-grid>) of the grid for calculating as the final results can be cumbersome if not utilized. The hope when utilizing this method is that your top preferences will be clearly displayed towards the top of your final list.

Making a Final Decision

Information gathering and weighing the evidence are only part of the decision-making process; eventually a final decision must be made. Once you have reached this step, it is now time to act upon that decision. Do keep in mind, that you can always – and should – review your decision periodically to insure you are still satisfied. If your level of satisfaction has changed, it may be time to re-enter the decision-making cycle. It is expected that this cycle will happen multiple times throughout your life as it relates to your career decisions.

If after taking all the previous steps you are still feeling unsure, it could be that you are experiencing decision making roadblocks. Roadblocks can take the form of not enough information, too much information, too many external opinions, self-doubt, fear of making the *wrong* decision, and emotional attachment just to name a few. It is very important to reach out for help if you feel stuck and unable to make a decision. Each person’s life circumstances can influence what decision making looks like for them.

Decision making can be difficult, but it does not have to feel impossible. Outside of speaking with family or friends, there are valuable resources on campus to be of assistance to you:

- The Career Services Center [414-288-7423]
- The Counseling Center [414-288-7172]
- Campus Ministry [414-288-6873]