

# **MY CAREER CHAPTER: A DIALOGICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

PETER McILVEEN

**The Author:**

Professor Peter McIlveen is at the School of Education at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. He teaches and researches educational psychology and counselling psychology topics, including career counselling, career development learning and adult learning, and the construction of professional identity. He has served on national professional bodies, the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA), the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), and the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS), and he is International Fellow of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (UK). He is a member of editorial boards of international journals including Journal of Vocational Behavior, Journal of Career Assessment, The Career Development Quarterly, International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, and the Australian Journal of Career Development. He is Director of a research unit, the Australian Centre for Career—Employability—Learning for Living (ACCELL).

Contact: [peter.mcilveen@usq.edu.au](mailto:peter.mcilveen@usq.edu.au)

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## Writing Your Career Autobiography

Choosing or changing your career pathway is an important process. It can be exciting and challenging, but it can also be quite a lot of work. You will need to think about yourself in ways that will allow you to get a clear understanding of your career potential. Most of all, you will need to look at the big picture of your career and life broadly. Feeling your way through some options and trying on alternatives will require your commitment to being open to new experiences. The outcome of a wide career exploration will be a much better careerlife decision. The writing process you are about to complete will take you through your inner personal life and out to the broader influences of your career. The outcome will be a unique and personal story about you.

You will go through a series of steps from 1 to 7. Each step builds upon the previous one and goes toward completing this chapter of your career autobiography. To get you started, work through the first step containing some warm-up questions.

### Step 1: Some Warm-up Questions

Answer the following warm-up questions in your mind. Don't spend too much time on each. Write some brief notes at the bottom of the page if you need to.

- Do you want to work in a rural or metropolitan area?
- How does the current employment market affect your career plan?
- How does current government policy affect your career plans?
- What level of financial security you would like for yourself?
- What role does your family play in your career plans?
- Have your career thoughts been influenced by movies, TV or music?
- What are your friends doing and how do their choices affect you?
- What work have you done and how has it influenced your direction?
- What skills are you particularly good at?
- What skills are you not so good at?
- What would be the ideal imagined future for you?
- What values do you have that would drive you away/toward a particular work?
- No matter how small, how would you describe your greatest achievement?
- What type of knowledge do you seek?
- What would you like to study?
- Do you have any illness that would change your career preferences?
- How does your cultural background affect your career thinking?
- How does being male/female affect your career choices?
- How does your career plan impact upon your personal relationships?

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**Notes:**

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## Step 2: Pondering the Big Picture of Career

We know that career is not just about your interests and work. Every person has a unique career and one that is affected by a whole lot of different influences present in life—some obvious and others not. This second step will help you to see the big picture of your career.

The figure on the opposite page shows the big picture of career. See how there are influences that are quite personal toward the inside of the circle (eg, self-concept, skills) and see how there are influences that are about your interpersonal life (eg, peers). Even broader though, there are influences that reach all the way to your society and environment (eg, geographical location, employment market) depicted on the outer of the circle. All of these influences affect your career in some way, some more than others, and some not at all. See how the past, present and future has been included to indicate that the influences change over time. Also note the lightning bolts which symbolise how your career can be affected by chance events. Finally note how each influence is surrounded by a dotted, broken border; this indicates that in reality, the influences are not separate from one another, rather they overlap and relate with one another.

For now, just have a look at the figure and consider each influence for a few moments. You may choose to write some notes as you ponder the big picture of your career.

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**Notes:**

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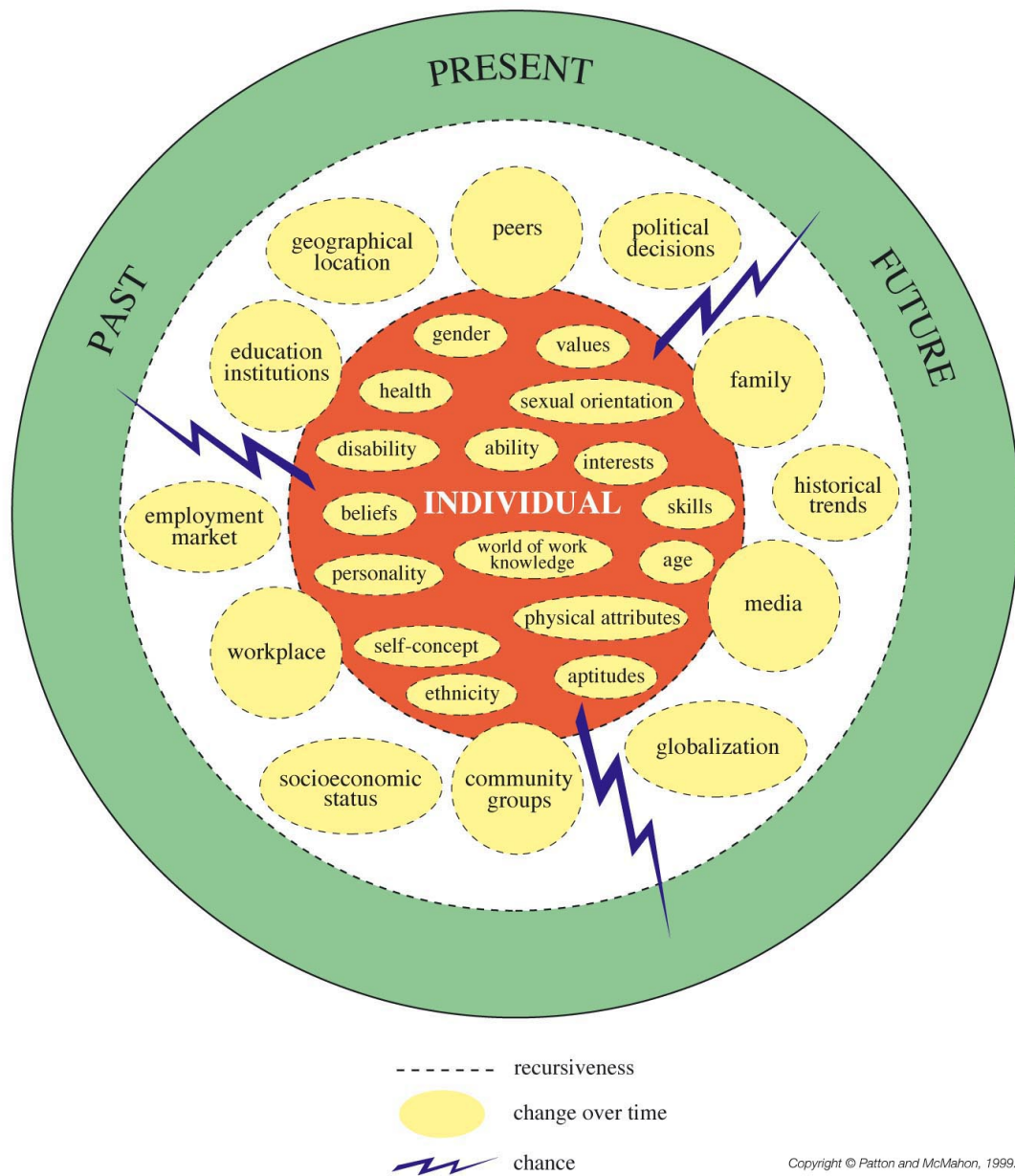
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Diagram of Systems Theory Framework, copyright © 1999 by Patton & McMahon, reproduced with permission.

### **Step 3: Compatibility of Personal and Social/Environmental Influences**

Understanding your career broadly requires you to understand the big picture of your career in some more detail. Finding links between the influences of your career, shown in the previous diagram, can help you better understand the detail of your career. So before you go on to write the first draft of the manuscript of your career life, you should do a little creative brainstorming. You can do this brainstorming by seeing if each influence is compatible or incompatible with one another.

Step 3 will enable you to think about how your personal influences relate to your broader social and environmental influences.

Look at the matrix of influences on the opposite page. Notice how the personal influences run down the left side and the social and environmental influences run across the top from left to right.

Work your way across the matrix and compare each influence with one another. Are they incompatible or are they compatible? You rate any two influences with respect to their relative compatibility using a five point scale ranging from:

- Very much incompatible = -2
- Mostly incompatible = -1
- Neither compatible nor incompatible = 0
- Mostly compatible = +1
- Very much compatible = +2

An incompatibility would mean that they clash in some way. For example, you may hold strong Values about your choice of work and your Peers think you should do a career that is perhaps threatening to your values (eg, you value the environment and yet your friends say that working for a mining company would be great). In this example, you would put -2 in the box intersecting Peers and Values because -2 would indicate that they are highly incompatible at the moment.

Alternatively, your Peers' suggestions and your Values may be compatible in that you feel good about the mix of your work and values and confident to take on the career recommended by your peers; that is, there are no problems or inconsistencies and a +1 is put in the intersecting box. Work your way across from left to right, then go on to the next influence down on the left column.

	Job Market	Finances	Industry Trends	Location	Media	Community & Social Life	Family	Peers	Workplace	
My Career										
Interests										
Skills & Abilities										
Values										
Knowledge										
Age										
Gender										
Health										
Sexuality										
Culture										
Morals										
Education										
Dreams & Aspirations										
Emotional State										
Work										

Make notes of your thoughts, feelings, significant compatibilities and incompatibilities:

**Notes:**

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#### Step 4: Writing the Manuscript

Now that you have overviewed the influences of your career and how they relate to one another, it is time to get on with the actual writing. There are a number of ways in which you can think about your career. The key is to trigger your mind into action. The act of thinking and then writing causes your mind to generate conscious and unconscious career planning processes. These processes have a cascade effect and from this you will be sure to think outside the square you are currently in.

The learning task you are about to complete is an important step in your career exploration. You are required to write a short chapter about yourself. The task is a little different, however, because you will complete sentences that have been started for you already. Each part-sentence relates to a specific part of your career—past, present and future. Your job is to complete the sentence whilst thinking about how it relates to you and your career.

Here is an example. Let us say that the sentence-part begins with “*My friends say that I should....*” You should complete the remainder of the sentence and make sure it mentions something about your career. In this example it could have been, “*My friends say that I should go to university*” or “*My friends say that I should do what makes me happy, but I’m not sure what would exactly!*” The idea is to let yourself write honestly, even if the sentence is confronting, or even if you are unsure. Write something!

After writing a past, present and future sentence for each influence, you will then estimate how you emotionally feel about each influence. This is done circling the most relevant description of how you mostly feel in relation to an influence: *very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative*. Very positive may indicate joy, excitement, or real confidence. Very negative may indicate anxiety, anger, or depression.

You will also complete a sentence on how much of an impact an influence has upon your career and life at the moment, by circling *very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative*, and then describing why it has such an impact. A very positive impact would mean that it is related to positive, successful outcomes, whereas a very negative impact would mean that it is having bad effects upon you.

Have a go. Remember what you are trying to do. You are not going to solve all of your career problems right now. But, you are going to give your mind a kick-start to brainstorming your career options! You are going to write a chapter of your own personal career autobiography. This will take some time—there is no need to hurry. You can refer back to the diagram and compatibility matrix of the influences to help you work through the story.



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**My Career**

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In the past, my career

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The main issue for me and my career at the moment is

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I hope that in the future

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my career because

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Career has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my life because

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**Interests**

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Some time ago I was interested

---

I am interested in

---

I am keen to learn about

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my interests because

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Being interested in things has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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**Skills and Abilities**

---

I was good at

---

I am generally good at

---

I want to be good at

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my skills and abilities because

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Putting my skills and abilities to good use has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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**Values**

---

In the past I really valued

---

The most important thing in my life is

---

My most important values will affect

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my values because

---

Fulfilling my personal values has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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**Knowledge**

---

I once learned that

---

I know a whole lot about

---

I want to learn about

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my knowledge because

---

Gaining more knowledge has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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**Age**

---

When I was younger

---

My age allows me to

---

By the time I reach retirement I want

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my age because

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My age has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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**Gender**

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When I was younger I thought that

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Being a male/female effects my

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I believe that males/females should

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my gender because

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Gender issues in the workforce have a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Health**

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Health was

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At the moment my health is

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My health will

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my health

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How healthy I am has a very positive / positive / indifferent / neutral / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Sexuality**

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My sexuality has

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An intimate relationship

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In the future I hope

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my sexuality because

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Having a successful intimate relationship has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Culture**

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My cultural background has given me

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I am

---

Other cultures could help my career by

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my cultural because

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My cultural heritage has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Morals**

---

I have always believed strongly that

---

I believe that career

---

What I believe in the future

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my morals because

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My morals have a very positive / positive / indifferent / neutral / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Education**

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At school

---

Studying or training for a career is

---

Future studies or training for me will

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my education because

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Study has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Dreams and Aspirations**

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I used to dream that

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---

My dream is

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---

I can see myself in five years time growing

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to dreams and aspirations because

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Living out my dreams has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Emotional State**

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Over the past few weeks I have felt

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When I think about my career issues, I feel

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I wish I could feel

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my emotional state because

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How I feel has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Work**

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My work experiences have taught me that

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Work is

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---

I hope to work

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my work because

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Work has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Workplace**

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---

Some time ago I thought that I wanted to work for

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At the moment

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---

An ideal workplace for me would

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my workplace because

---

The type of workplace I want has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Peers**

---

A friend once said to me

---

My friends think that

---

My future friendships

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my peers because

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Close friends have very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Family**

---

There was a time when my family

---

My family says that

---

I expect that my family

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my family because

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Family has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Community and Social Life**

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For fun, I used to

---

My social life is

---

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In the future, work and social life should

---

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my community and social life because

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---

Having fun and enjoying my life has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Media**

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---

I once read a story

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I sometimes daydream about a TV program and think that I could

---

---

When I imagine the new

---

---

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to the media because

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What I have seen in the media has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Location**

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I came from

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My home is

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The ideal location for my work would be

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my location because

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Location has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Industry Trends**

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Past economic conditions

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Current trends in the economy control

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The industry in which I want to work

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to industry trends

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Industry preference has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Finances**

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Money was

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My current financial status allows me to

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In the future, money

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my financial state because

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Money has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### **Job Market**

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The job market was

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The job market is

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Future job prospects

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my job prospects because

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Knowing about the job market has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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## Step 5: Proof Reading to Yourself and Back Again

There is nothing like proof reading to really understand a story and there is no better way to proof read than to do it out loud to an editor. You are about to do the final proof reading of your autobiography, but the process is a bit different. You are going to read it to yourself out loud as if you are the editor of your life story, but you are not going to read it to the you, as editor, who is here reading in the here and now. You are going to read it to yourself as you were five years ago; that is, reading it to the you, as editor, from the past. It sounds a bit strange and is a bit like a back to future experience, but it is an amazing learning process that will allow you to listen to yourself across time and build a magnificent story.

This is what you have to do:

1. Take a few moments to recall some details about yourself five years ago. Where were you living? Try to recall the sound of your voice, your hair, your face, and the sort of clothes you use to wear. It may be helpful if you find a photograph of yourself and sit it in front of you while you recollect your memories. Close your eyes for a few moments and recall yourself all those years ago.
2. Now go back to the beginning of the manuscript of your autobiography read it out loud and at the same time imagine that you are reading it to the five-years-ago-you. Do it now.
3. Now that you have read the manuscript, it is time to get some feedback from the editor—you from five years ago. Imagine yourself and your voice five years younger. What would younger you say to you now? Write your editorial comments in the spaces below while imaging it is the younger you doing so, as if the younger you is writing back to the older you after hearing your manuscript.

### Editor's Comments:

## Step 6: The Conclusion

An editor never has the final say on a manuscript. The author always gets in with the last word. Here is your chance to talk (write) back to the editor. What would you—here and now—say to the younger you who listened to your story and gave editorial comments?

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### Strengths

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My career achievements in the past

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My current career strengths are

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I will really shine when

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my strengths because

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My strengths have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### Obstacles

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I was held back by

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The main obstacles to my career success are

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I am confident that I can overcome

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my obstacles state because

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Obstacles have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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### The Future

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A few years ago, the future seemed

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My career goals at this stage are

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I want the next chapter of my career story to begin with

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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my future because

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The next few years have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

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## Step 7: Final Reading to a Confidante

Congratulations; you have now finished this first edition of your autobiography, My Career Chapter. Keep this copy in a safe place. Now you should find a trusted confidante: someone with whom you can rely upon to listen to you and maybe give you some words of encouragement and, if necessary, advice. Arrange to meet with your confidante for about one hour. Tell your confidant that you want to read a brief career-related autobiography to him/her and that you want him/her to listen and discuss it with you. When you do meet, you should read aloud your manuscript beginning with the first entry "In the past, my career ....." and carry on until you have completed the whole manuscript up to this point now. You and your confidante should work through your story carefully and discuss important themes and plots in your career story so that the next chapter is even more interesting and rewarding. Before and after you have meet with your confidante you may experience spontaneous recollections, thoughts, feelings, or maybe develop a different view on your career and life. These experiences are important and may want to record them in this section.

### My reflections:

[illegible]

