

A photograph of a wooden boardwalk winding through a field of tall, dry grass at sunset. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and has a low wooden railing on both sides. The path leads into the distance, where the sun is setting behind a line of trees, creating a warm, golden glow. The grass is tall and dry, and the trees in the background are bare.

BUILD YOUR PATH

WELCOME

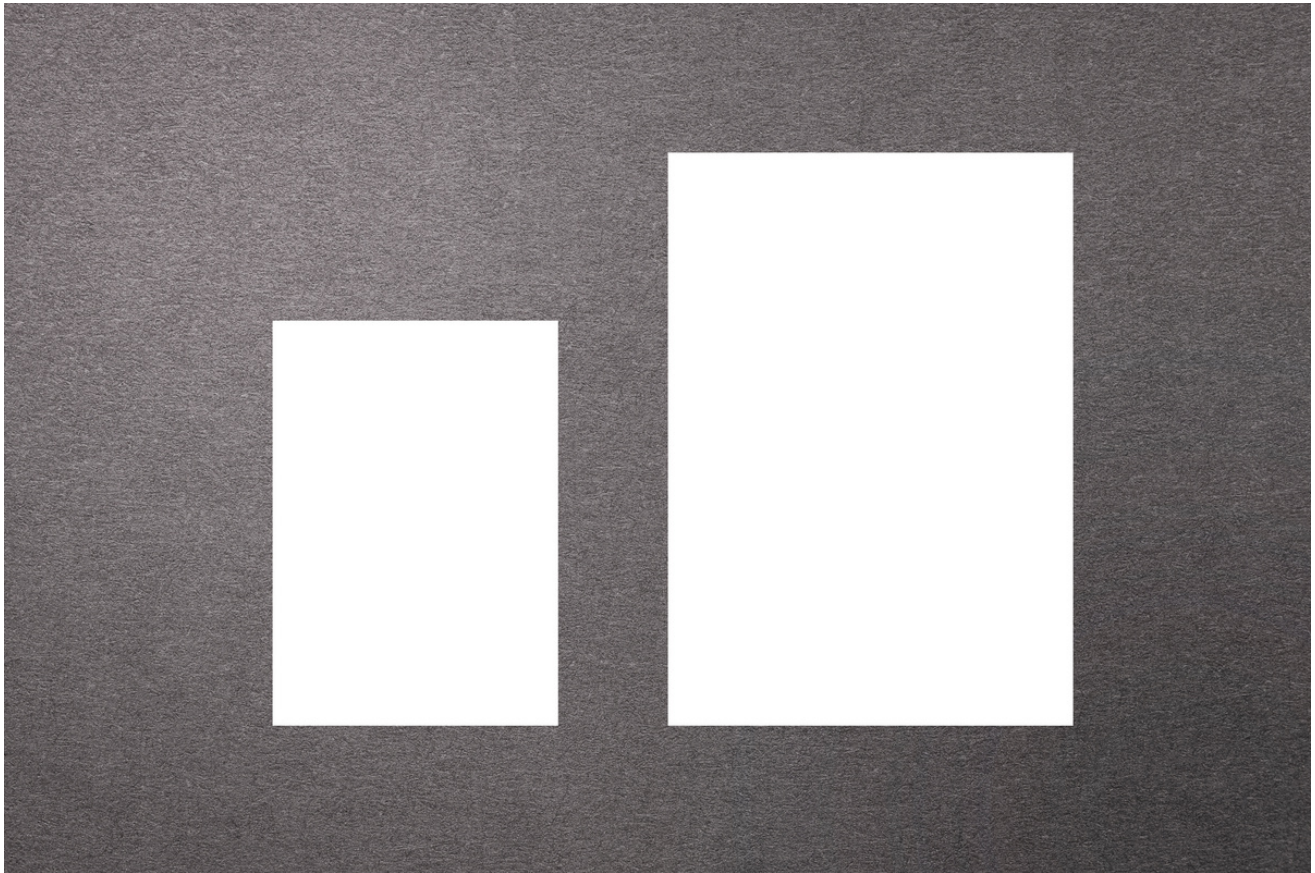
Today's exercise is not about answering the question "what do you want to be when you grow up," but rather about identifying the things you want to learn and know to prepare you for the future.

If you know what you want your future to hold, by all means, steer your path in that direction.

If you do not know what you want your future to hold, think about the experiences that will help you explore your options.

Now, let's get going charting your course to the future!

11X17 PAPER

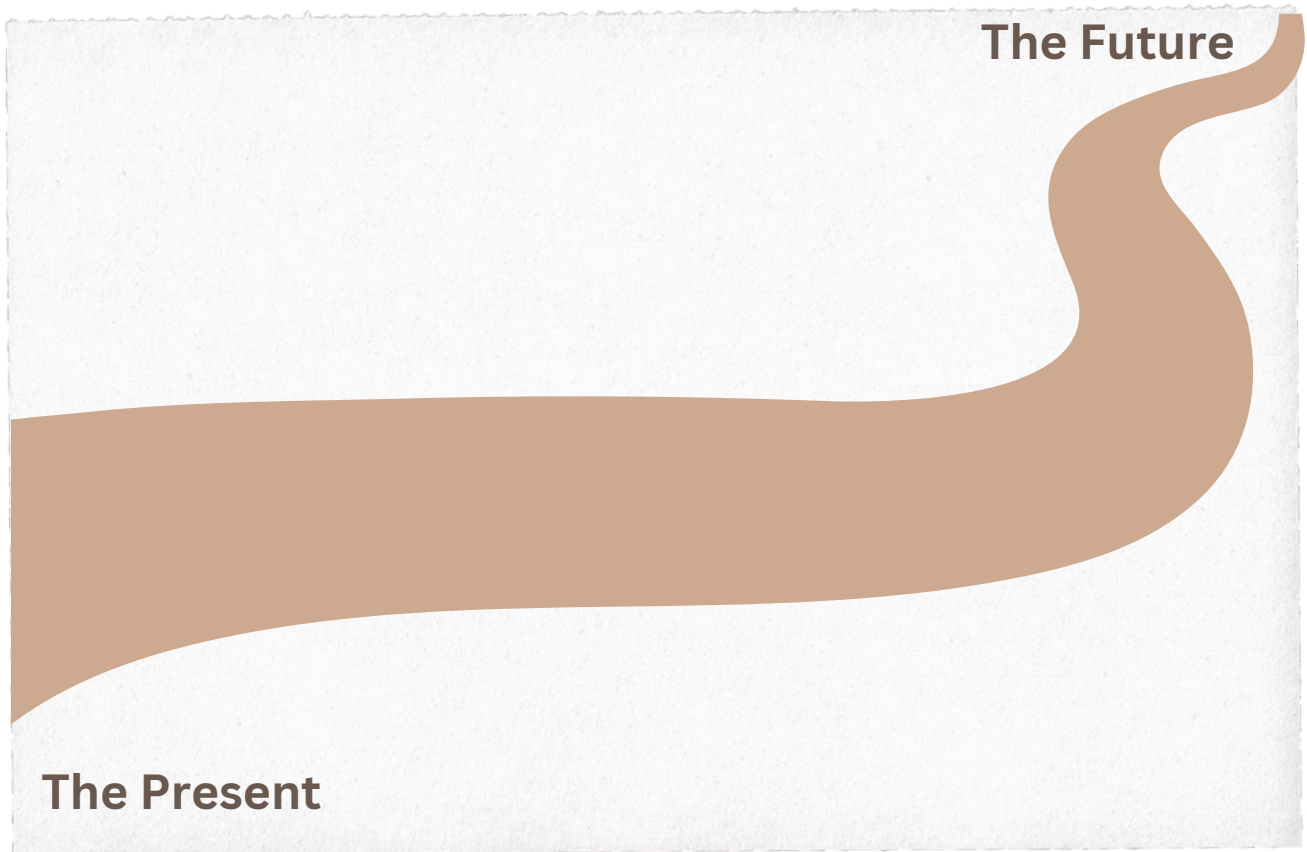


If you have it, **grab 11x17 paper.** Your ideas need space!

The great thing about 11x17 paper, also known as ledger paper, is that it has the nifty attribute of being a normal-sized page when folded in half, for easy storage of your big ideas. Grab a few sheets, and let your ideas run wild!

THE PATH

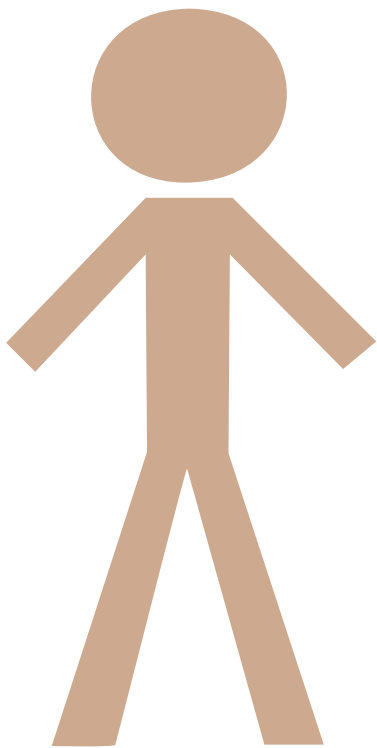
Start by drawing a path on your piece of paper. If you are using regular 8.5 x 11 printer paper, tape two pieces together to allow you a longer path. Remember, this is not art class, so make your path as simple or elaborate as you want with the time that you have. For example:



THE PRESENT

On the near side of the path, draw yourself as you are right now. Again, this is not art class, so do not worry if it is not the best representation of you.

Now, around you, we want to capture your current interests. **Think about what interests you, and write those things down all around you.** This is not English class, so don't worry about spelling or your handwriting. Just make sure to capture all of your interests.



Add things such as:

- Academics (subjects you like);
- Your favorite book or genre;
- Creative outlets (such as art);
- Sports you enjoy; and
- Topics you like to talk about.

THE FUTURE

At the far end of the path, capture your future. You can use words and / or pictures, and you only need to add as much detail as you want.

If you have no clue what you want your future to look like that is absolutely okay. You have plenty of time to figure it out . . . in the future!

Details to think about include:

- What is your profession (i.e., what is your job)?
- Where do you want to live?
- Do you want to have kids?

You can change these details at any point, because remember: you own your future. You can change it whenever and however you want.

THE PATH

Now it is time to take care of the space in between the present and your future! **Along your path, write or draw the knowledge, skills, and experiences that you think will be necessary to reach the future you imagine for yourself.** Think about:

- What will you need to know?
- How will you get that knowledge?
- What will you need to be able to *do* (i.e., skills)?
- How will you get experience and practice?

Get as specific as possible! If you want to be a scientist, for example, think about what fields of science you want to learn about, and how you will gain experience as a scientist to be ready for your future job.

Having trouble with this step? No problem. Read on!

COLLABORATE

Today, you will be divided into groups of two. Take turns describing your paths. Try to:

- Add one element to your path, because as you explain your path, you will likely think of things you missed in your first draft; and
- Ask your partner "have you considered . . ." and add one thing they could think about including. You are not required to include the suggestion, just think about it!

Switch partners as many times as time allows, and watch your path grow!

A Tool for your Toolbox

A term you will hear used for collaborative thinking is brainstorming, which is a process to bring more brains together to work on a topic.

MIND THE GAP

Chances are, your resulting path has a lot of ideas on it that you don't know how to accomplish exactly. That is okay! Circle those items, because you can repeat this process building mini paths to each of them.

It is also okay if not everything is connected, because your path should be what we call a **living document**. A living document is designed to be continually updated as new information comes available.

As such:

- **Put your path somewhere that you can see it regularly, such as your bathroom mirror;**
- **Decide on a time when you are going to review your path, or brainstorm again with others; and**
- **Never be afraid to modify your path, because your future should inspire and motivate you!**



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