



Career Pathways

Understanding Related and Alternative Careers

Many immigrants and refugees encounter barriers in rejoining their careers in the United States. Job titles, licensing or certification requirements, and credential recognition can limit access to some careers in the U.S. In some cases, you may prefer to pursue related or alternative career options that still use your training, education, and experience.

What Are Related and Alternative Careers?

Related careers are jobs in your field that are different from your original role but are connected to it. These career options are connected to your previous career.



Example of a Related Career:

Previous Career: Registered nurse (RN)

Related Career: Health care interpreter

In this example, considering a related career allows you to use your language skills and understanding of medical procedure and terminology to help speakers of languages other than English understand their medical providers.

Alternative careers are roles in a field of employment that is different from your original career field. These employment options make use of your existing technical and non-technical skills.



Example of an Alternative Career:

Previous Career: Registered nurse (RN)

Alternative career: Health insurance claims specialist

In this example, applying your attention to detail and ability to evaluate complex information as you did as an RN allows you to consider and explore other roles in a completely new field, such as insurance.

What Are Technical and Non-technical Skills?

To explore related and alternative careers, it is important to identify your skills. Professional skills can be divided into non-technical, transferable “soft skills,” and technical “hard skills.”

Soft skills relate to how you work and interact with others. Soft skills that most employers value include communication, problem solving, and teamwork.

Employers value soft skills. Your ability to communicate, lead others, organize projects, and work effectively on a team—skills you probably already use daily—make you an attractive potential employee.



Example of a Transferable Soft Skill:

Delegation: Assigning tasks to others, to distribute work among team members and get it done efficiently and by the person best suited to each job.

As a lawyer, Racquel was accustomed to delegating tasks to her very capable team of legal secretaries and paralegals, so she could concentrate on the tasks that required her own attention. This leadership skill helped Racquel transition into an alternative career in business management, where she is now an Office Manager responsible for a team of colleagues who trust and respect her judgment.

Hard skills relate to how you accomplish the tasks of your job. These skills are generally obtained through the training or education that is required to complete a job, such as technical writing, programming languages, measuring vitals, or using a particular kind of computer software.



Example of a Technical Hard Skill:

Ability to Analyze Data: Refers to the ability to collect and analyze information, problem-solve, and make decisions.

As an accountant, Alexander possessed a strong ability to analyze data. Since accounting is a regulated career and prospective accountants must complete several steps before being licensed, Alexander decided to pursue some other career options. Unlike Accounting, Finance does not require licensure, so he decided to consider applying his technical skill into a new career in finance as a Budget Analyst.



Understanding specialized vocabulary is an important technical skill to note in a related or alternative career search.

Specialized vocabulary includes any words or phrases that are specific to your profession, rather than those that are used in everyday conversation. Examples from the nursing field might include catheter, hypertension, oxygen saturation, or toxicology.

Tips for Exploring Related and Alternative Careers

Transitioning to a related or alternative career may appear challenging at first, but there are several ways to make the process simple and effective.

As you look for different jobs, consider the following tips:

- Include your hard skills and soft skills on your résumé and in your cover letters when you apply for jobs. If you want to transition to a new career, consider using a functional, hybrid, or combination style résumé. These types of résumés highlight skills before job experience. You should also expect to be asked about your soft skills during job interviews, so practice and be prepared.
- Describing your soft skills depends in large part on your comfort and fluency communicating in English. For your soft skills to benefit you in a U.S. job search, practice both your written and spoken English and become familiar with English terminology that is specific to your field. You may want to consider taking a course that will teach you the vocabulary specific to your industry.
- Keep working on your hard skills, such as your computer proficiency, technical capabilities, presentation skills, and analytical skills—many career fields will require you to have some level of experience with these types of skills.