

Generalist vs. Specialist

Point of This Assignment: To recognize and understand the difference between ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ careers and educational programs.

As you consider your career options, it is wise to consider whether you would be better suited to a “generalist” position or a “specialist” position. Both types of positions have their advantages and disadvantages. The career goal for which you are aiming will determine which education program will best suit your needs.

Characteristics:

<u>Generalist</u>	<u>Specialist</u>
Knows a little bit about a lot of things.	Knows a lot about one or two things.
Has a basic, but overall understanding of their jobs and tasks that need to be done.	Has more in-depth knowledge into one or just a few tasks
Serves a wide range of customers, clients, or patients. A general practitioner doctor will see all types of patients (<i>babies to seniors, healthy to dying.</i>)	Likely serves only particular types of customers, clients or patients. (<i>Ex. Oncologist only works with cancer patients.</i>)
This person does tasks in more than one area of expertise.	Focuses on a specific activity, task or area of expertise.
Gives referrals when facing unusual or challenging situations.	Receives referrals from generalists when the need is beyond the scope of their training.

Examples of Positions:

<u>Generalist</u>	<u>Specialist</u>
Doctor: Family Practice, General Practitioner	<u>Examples:</u> Anesthesiologist, Pediatrician, Obstetrician, Oncologist (cancer), Dentist, Cardiologist
Nurse	ER Nurse, Pediatric Nurse, Cardiac Nurse, OB Nurse
Police Officer	Detective, special weapons team, community liaison officer, training officer, supervisory roles (sergeant, lieutenant, captain, etc.), federal law enforcement agencies (FBI, Homeland Security, Border Patrol, ATF, etc.)
Counselor	Psychologist, Marriage Family Therapist, Guidance/School Counselor, Career Counselor, Music Therapist, Social Worker, Pastoral Counselor
Radiologic Technology	X-Ray Technology, Diagnostic Medical Sonographers, Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists, Cardiovascular technologists,

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	Radiation Therapists
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Examples of Education Options (i.e. majors):

Business Administration	Human Resources, Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Real Estate, Law, Operations, Logistics, Management, Small Business, Computer Information Systems, International Business, Training & Development, Research & Development
Communication Studies	Public Relations, Journalism, Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communications, Intercultural Communications, pre-law
Engineering	Aerospace, Automotive, Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Computer, Engineering Technology, Industrial, Manufacturing, Mechanical,

<u>Advantages</u>	
Usually means more opportunities are available, which means more job opportunities are more likely to be found.	Opportunities for outside consulting. When you have developed a reputation for being an expert, people outside your organization may seek your advice.
For beginners, being a generalist may also provide an opportunity to test your options before investing in a particular specialization.	You are the expert in your field. People seek you out for complex situations.
Generalization encourages transferable skills, which make a person more versatile.	Can handle the most difficult, challenging or unusual situations encountered.
Can handle a large volume of routine cases that they encounter. Therefore they are likely to be perceived as “more productive” (produce more results).	An individual who has needed, specialized skills to take on more complicated situation will likely produce fewer results because their jobs require more care and attention.
Generalization, transferable skills, and a broader perspective on organizational operations are needed for higher leadership positions.	
<u>Disadvantages</u>	
Usually does not pay as much.	Specialists are usually less likely to advance into higher positions within an organization because of their narrow focus and perspective on issues.
Greater competition for positions.	Usually requires more education and experience.
Harder to stand out from the competition if the generalist has not developed any specializations.	Easier to find your expertise by spending time working as a generalist to discover areas of interest.
Will not have the tools or skills to deal with	Will likely lack a broad perspective because

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complicated or challenging situations. Will need to refer such cases to a specialist to handle.	they are so focused on situations that fall within their area of expertise, that they may not recognize needs, challenges or problems outside of their area of expertise.
During tight economic times, or when labor market trends demand that an organization change its focus, many generalists without some specialized skills may be the first to get laid off during a “reduction in force.” Employers will want to keep people who have specific skill sets to meet specific demands.	Greater reliance on the idea of “supply and demand”. If there is no demand for your expertise, there will be no work. Skills are more likely to become obsolete and thus unmarketable when labor market trends move away from your area of expertise.
	Often requires time and experience, and to build a good reputation to be seen as an expert.
	Often can’t plan to be a specialist. Must simply allow opportunities to direct the path.
	Fewer job opportunities due to less demand for skills, knowledge and expertise.
	Much more likely to become ‘pigeon-holed’ – stuck in a particular role, department, type of work, etc. due to lack of opportunities to expand, or others’ perception of your limited capabilities.

Learn More:

Go to the last page of this document and find at least one article of interest to read. Identify 2 – 5 key points of interest this article offers:

Which article? _____

Key or interesting points:

Personal Application:

Identify at least four people you personally know who work in these positions (two each):

Generalist

Name & Position

Specialist

Name & Position

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Identify at least three **advantages** from the lists above that sound appealing to you. Identify whether they are for a generalist or a specialist.

Identify at least three **disadvantages** from the lists above that sound unappealing to you. Identify whether they are for a generalist or a specialist.

Identify two to three different educational opportunities you are considering pursuing. Are those opportunities for a generalist or specialist position? Why are you interested in these areas of study?

Reflect back on your answers to the questions in this section. Identify whether you see yourself more attracted to generalist types of roles or specialist roles? Why? (Explain your response.)

With this in mind, what does this information reveal to you about how you should be preparing for your future career goals? Identify some goals you should set for yourself. Why? (Explain your response.)

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: *(Write down your response after completing this assignment.)*

- **Best Career Path: Generalist vs. Specialist**
<http://managementhelp.org/blogs/career-management/2011/01/14/best-career-path-generalist-vs-specialist/>
- **The Secret Power Of The Generalist -- And How They'll Rule The Future**
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2012/07/10/the-secret-power-of-the-generalist-and-how-theyll-rule-the-future/>
- **How To Brand Yourself As A Specialist**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R98RA5loK-c&index=1&list=PLhrBmkjLNq1Wp-ju5tLtEM6mowlCqI5hP>
- **UK workers specialist skills are under threat**
<http://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/strategy-news/uk-workers-specialist-skills-are-under-threat/49215>
- **Specialists or generalists: what do employers really want?**
<http://careers.theguardian.com/careers-blog/specialist-generalist-what-do-employers-want>
- **Best Career Path: Specialist or Generalist?**
<http://www.selenarezvani.com/blog/134/Best-Career-Path-Specialist-or-Generalist/>
- **How To Make The Leap From Expert To Executive**
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/susantardanico/2014/03/26/how-to-make-the-leap-from-expert-to-executive/>
- **Welcome to the Modularization of Professional Services**
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/welcome-modularization-professional-services-tim-williams?trk=tod-home-art-list-large_0