

MAKING CAREER DECISIONS: THE DECISION MATRIX

Most decisions students make are not complicated. They assess their options, gather some information, ask for advice, and either go with the flow or go with their gut—taking them in a definite direction. On the other hand, some decisions students make in college are far more complicated with enduring results. Using a decision matrix can help students transform the vague jumble of information and feelings into a more organized and objective way to make choices.

Also known as a Pugh matrix, decision grid, or selection matrix, the judgment and decision making tool was originally described by Stuart Pugh in the 1980's in *Creating Innovative Products Using Total Design*. It is often used by management teams (largely in engineering) in dealing with complex problem solving.

Instructions:

1. Define the decision to be made, and create a decision matrix template. Brainstorm a list of options from which you could choose. Write these in the first column of your decision table.
2. Consider the selection criteria, or factors that play into your decision—make them specific. List these in the first row of your table.
3. Now create a 1-10 grading scale for each criterion detailing what constitutes the most negative situation for each criterion (defines the lowest end of the scale) and what constitutes the most positive situation for each criterion (defines the highest end of the scale). Write these in the last row of the table.
4. Using the 1-10 grading scale, evaluate your options (one at a time) based on each of the criterion.
5. Add the scores for each option and record in the “total” column. The option with the highest total score is your decision!

See the following examples.

Decision Matrix 1: Choosing a Major

	Interest	Class difficulty /skills	Values	Related experience	Job search	TOTAL
Psychology	9	8	6	10	2	35
Business	2	5	1	3	6	17
Communications	7	2	5	4	2	20
	1—couldn't be more boring 10—love it	1—I might not pass these classes 10—so easy for me	1—what's the point? won't feel good about myself 10—fits well, fulfilling	1—worst job/time ever, couldn't work long in this field 10—so much fun! I could see myself in this field	1—I will have to work really hard to sell myself 10—so many jobs, I can pick anything	

Variation: Think about which of the criterion is most important to you in making a decision. Then assign a numbered weight, on a scale from 1-10, to each criterion (this is a weight, not a rank order, so some criteria may be assigned the same number). Multiply each score by the weight assigned and record. Add the weighted scores and record in the “total” column.

Decision Matrix 2: Choosing a Graduate School Program (Weighted scores in parenthesis)

	Funding (8)	Research Program of Interest (5)	Practicum Facilities (10)	Potential Advisor (3)	Proximity to Home (7)	City (6)	TOTAL
Tennessee	8 (64)	7 (35)	10 (100)	8 (24)	8 (56)	7 (42)	48 (321)
Georgia	6 (48)	9 (40)	5 (50)	4 (12)	7 (49)	5 (30)	36 (229)
Auburn	2 (16)	7 (35)	3 (30)	9 (27)	4 (28)	1 (6)	26 (142)
	1—No pay or tuition waivers at all 10—Guaranteed full funding (pay & tuition waiver)	1—Not really interested in any of their research 10—One of three main areas I'm interested in	1—Have to find them myself and not many options 10—Great facilities set up and good supervision	1—Didn't really like this person, they cant help me much, not supportive 10—Person who I really clicked with, is smart and supportive	1—Have to fly home, 10+ hours driving 10—Close but not too close, 2-3 hours driving	1—Nothing but the college and undergrad life 10—Fun city, lots of stuff to do outside of school	