

Understanding Yourself: Interests

Decisions about your future specialty, residency program, and practice environment are all based on your personal view of the world. Before you can make sound decisions about your future, it's important to have a clear understanding of that personal view. A self-assessment is answering the question "Who am I?" It involves a thorough assessment of your interests, values, personality, and skills in order to have a baseline of information about yourself before you begin to explore specialty areas and residency programs. You may have a pretty clear idea of who you are, and which practice area/specialty you want to pursue. However, you will be faced with many choices and a great deal of information over the next few years, and your current notions may be challenged. A thorough self-assessment will assist you in having some basic information about yourself to determine your fit in a specialty as you get more experience and move toward your specialty decision.

The results of the assessments completed in this step will be used during the "Choosing a Specialty" phase, as you compare your personal characteristics with those in the specialties you are considering. Keep in mind that the closer the match between your interests, values, personality, and aspirations to those people in the specialties in question, the more satisfied, productive, and effective you will likely be.

Assessing Interests

Interests are things you enjoy doing. Being particularly good at them doesn't matter; what does matter is that you like to spend time engaged in these activities. It is generally accepted that in order to be happy and successful in a career, the work must be of interest to you. Nothing would be more of a disservice to you and your patients than choosing a specialty that doesn't appeal to you.

The Party Game exercise is based on the work of Dr. John L. Holland, professor emeritus at The Johns Hopkins University. His theory of career choice states that people and work environments can be loosely classified into six different groups: **Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional.**

While you may have some interests that apply to all six groups, you may be attracted primarily to two or three areas. Your Holland code is a type of shorthand for describing the interest types you resemble the most. The first letter of each of the areas represents your Holland Code, which can then be used to compare with medical specialties or work settings. For example, if your interests lie primarily in the **Investigative, Realistic, and Social** areas, then your Holland Code is **IRS**. The first letter of your code shows the type you resemble most, the next letter the type you resemble somewhat less, and the third letter the type you resemble even less.

Visit the Careers in Medicine Web site for further links and information about Dr. Holland's theory. You may also want to read *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environment*, 3rd edition (1997) by Dr. Holland.

The Party Game

This exercise will help to identify general areas of interest, which can then be compared with careers, or specialties. It will also help you begin to think about how your personality will fit in with specific work environments. The exercise, employs Dr. Holland's theory, and is adapted from Richard Bolles' book *What Color is Your Parachute?* (Ten Speed Press, 2000).

Directions

Imagine walking into a room in which a party is taking place. At this party, people with the same or similar interests have all gathered in the same corners of the room as described below.



1. Which corner of the room would you be instinctively drawn to, as the group of people you would most enjoy being with for the longest time? (Leave aside any question of shyness.) Write the letter for that corner in this box:

2. After 15 minutes, everyone in the corner you have chosen leaves for another party across town, except you. Of the groups that still remain, which corner or group would you be drawn to the most, as the people you would most enjoy being with for the longest time? Write the letter for that corner in this box:

3. After 15 minutes, this group also leaves for another party, except you. Now which one would you choose? Write the letter for that corner in this box: