



## Looking back on a future career

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This activity was developed for TILE Approach workshops conducted with engineering students at the University of Western Australia (Male & Bennett, 2015). The tool drew on the work of UWA graduate David Parkinson (2011), and it challenged students to look back on their future careers. I have since run variations of this with writing and theatre students as a personal reflection and also as a class discussion. It can take anything from ten minutes (as a discussion) to an hour (as a personal reflection followed by group work and class discussion).

This tool can be particularly pertinent for students needing to decide on their major field of study. Our second year engineers needed to choose their engineering discipline for specialist study from third year, and for some of them this was the first time they had positioned themselves as a particular type of engineer. Similarly, the final year writing students needed support to imagine themselves in a range of possible roles after graduation.

Having identified some characteristics of work within their field of study, students engaging in this TILE tool are challenged to consider what information they draw upon to form this picture or preview. They then consider perceived differences between this picture and themselves, often identifying areas of weakness or self-doubt. Moving to their personal role, students imagine what they would like to achieve. The question of how the learning in their unit or course might contribute to this future challenged students to consider what, other than credit points, they wanted to gain from their learning. We often assume that the relevance of each learning experience is clear to students, and in fact this is rarely the case.

When we ran this as a personal reflection, we followed by teasing out some of the responses and discussing them as a class. On one occasion we asked engineering students in each discipline group to collate their responses on A3 sheets and to report as a group. This enabled us to identify common themes and differences and to tease out any potentially harmful misconceptions. The template included here retains the engineering focus as its context. It can be easily adapted for other disciplines and we would love to hear about how it is used.

Male, S. A., & Bennett, D. (2015). Threshold concepts in undergraduate engineering: Exploring engineering roles and value of learning. *Australasian Journal of Engineering Education*, 20(1), 59-69.

Parkinson, D. (2011). *Investigation of Experiences of Threshold Concepts by Engineering Students* Unpublished Final Year Project Thesis, The University of Western Australia, Crawley.

## Role of an Engineer

1. Name 3 characteristics of a \_\_\_\_\_ engineer?

*(Insert your chosen engineering discipline in the space.)*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you know?

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3. What differences are there (if any) between the above characteristics and you as a person?

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4. What do you see as a role of a \_\_\_\_\_ engineer?

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5. Why are you considering choosing this engineering discipline?

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6. What will your personal role be?

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7. How will the learning in this unit contribute to your development as an engineer?

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8. Imagine yourself in 15 years' time.

i. What will you be doing?

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ii. In a sentence, describe what you dream you will have achieved as an engineer over this time.

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TILE tools form part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Fellowship. The tools are available to all members for use in teaching and mentoring. Contributions, feedback and new network members are always welcome, as are research collaborations. For more information, please contact Professor Dawn Bennett at [d.bennett@curtin.edu.au](mailto:d.bennett@curtin.edu.au)

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