

PREMIUM COVER PAGE

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U M P R I N T A B L E S

CTE RESOURCE

GRADES 7-10

5-WEEK PROGRAM

Career Exploration Unit

Complete Curriculum

MEGA BUNDLE EDITION

129 PAGES

- 25 Detailed Lesson Plans** across 5 weeks
- 3 Research-Based Inventories** (RIASEC, Values, Skills)
- 16 Career Cluster Cards** with pathways & occupations
- Interview Guide, Portfolio, Rubrics & More**
- 8 Bonus Sections** including Glossary & Certificate
- 5 Premium Sections** Quick-Start, BLS, Exemplars, Assessments, Parent Guide
- IEP/504 Accommodations** included for special education

STANDARDS ALIGNED

NCDG

Competencies

CCTC

Standards

ASCA

Mindsets

CCSS

ELA-Literacy

ISTE

Standards

ALIGNED WITH ADVANCE CTE | RESEARCH-BASED | CLASSROOM-READY | PREMIUM EDITION

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Unit Overview & Standards

Program introduction, learning objectives, standards alignment, and pacing guide.

Program Introduction

The CTE Career Exploration Unit is a comprehensive 5-week program designed for students in grades 7–10. This unit provides a structured, engaging framework for students to discover their career interests, explore all 16 nationally recognized CTE career clusters, research real labor market data, conduct informational interviews, and build a professional career portfolio.

Throughout this unit, students will engage in self-reflection, hands-on research, collaborative activities, and project-based learning. Each week builds upon the previous one, guiding students from self-discovery through to a polished career portfolio that showcases their exploration and planning. The unit is aligned with national CTE standards and supports college- and career-readiness goals for middle and high school students.

What's Included

This resource includes 25 detailed lesson plans, 3 career interest inventories, 16 career cluster overview cards, an informational interview planning guide, a labor market research worksheet, a career portfolio template, and a weekly reflection journal — everything you need for a complete CTE career exploration experience. The Mega Bundle Edition also includes assessment rubrics, parent permission forms, a vocabulary glossary, extension activities, a digital portfolio guide, a certificate of completion, and a bonus resume writing mini-lesson.

The unit is designed for 45–55 minute class periods but can be adapted for block schedules. Extension activities are included for advanced students or longer periods. All handouts and worksheets are reproducible for single-classroom

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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use.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this 5-week unit, students will be able to:

1. Identify personal career interests, values, and skills using multiple assessment tools and self-reflection strategies.
2. Describe the 16 CTE career clusters and articulate the range of occupations within each cluster.
3. Conduct labor market research using credible sources such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and O*NET.
4. Plan, conduct, and reflect on an informational interview with a professional in a field of interest.
5. Create a comprehensive career portfolio that documents exploration, research, and personal planning.
6. Analyze how personal strengths, interests, and values align with potential career pathways.
7. Evaluate labor market trends and their implications for career decision-making and future planning.
8. Develop a career pathway plan with specific short-term and long-term educational and career goals.
9. Communicate career exploration findings effectively through written and visual presentations.
10. Reflect on personal growth and learning throughout the career exploration process using a structured journal.

Standards Alignment

This unit is aligned with the following national standards and frameworks. Specific lesson correlations identify where each standard is most directly addressed, though many standards are reinforced throughout the unit.

Standard	Key Codes & Alignment	Lessons
National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG)	PS:R1 – Develop career awareness; PS:R2 – Explore careers; PS:R3 – Career planning; ED:R1 – Relationships as career resources	All
Common Career Technical Core (CCTC)	CRP1 – Communicate effectively; CRP2 – Critical thinking; CRP4 – Work ethically; CRP8 – Leadership	All
ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors	M1:B-LS 7 – Long/short-term goals; M2:B-SS 5 – Ethical decisions; M3:B-LS 10 – Career participation; M6:B-SS 4 – Postsecondary options	1–5, 21–25
CCSS.ELA-Literacy (WHST)	WHST.6-8.7 – Short research; WHST.6-8.8 – Gather sources; WHST.6-8.9 – Draw evidence; SL.7.1 – Collaborative discussions	6–10, 16–20
ISTE Standards for Students	1.3d – Knowledge constructor; 1.6b – Creative communicator; 1.5b – Computational thinker; 1.7a – Global collaborator	11–15, 21–25

16 CTE CAREER CLUSTERS

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The 16 CTE Career Clusters

This unit covers all 16 nationally recognized career clusters as defined by Advance CTE (formerly the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, NASDCTEc). Each cluster represents a grouping of occupations and industries based on common knowledge and skills:

Cluster	Cluster
1. Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources	2. Architecture & Construction
3. Arts, A/V Technology & Communications	4. Business Management & Administration
5. Education & Training	6. Finance
7. Government & Public Administration	8. Health Science
9. Hospitality & Tourism	10. Human Services
11. Information Technology	12. Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security
13. Manufacturing	14. Marketing
15. Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics	16. Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

Materials & Assessment Overview

Required Materials

- Printed student handouts (inventories, worksheets, journal pages, portfolio template)
- Internet access for labor market research (BLS.gov, O*NET Online, CareerOneStop)
- Notebook or binder for career portfolio compilation
- Writing utensils, highlighters, and colored pencils or markers
- Access to presentation tools (optional: Google Slides, PowerPoint, poster board)
- Guest speaker or community volunteer contacts for informational interviews
- Classroom display area for career cluster cards and student work

Technology Note

If internet access is limited, print relevant pages from BLS.gov and O*NET in advance for student use. Many career exploration activities can be completed with printed reference materials as an alternative to online research.

Assessment Overview

- Use visual portfolios (infographics, posters) as alternatives to written reports.

For Students with IEPs or 504 Plans

- Provide extended time on all written assignments, reflections, and assessments as specified in the student’s plan.
- Allow dictation-to-text tools or scribes for journal entries and interview reflections.
- Offer reduced-length alternatives (e.g., 3 career clusters instead of 5; 5 interview questions instead of 10).
- Provide preferential seating and check-ins during group activities and gallery walks.
- Break multi-step research tasks into smaller, sequential steps with individual check-in deadlines.
- Allow alternative demonstration of mastery (oral presentation, visual poster, or video instead of written portfolio).
- Consult the student’s case manager before scheduling informational interviews to ensure accommodations are in place.

Legal Reminder

Under IDEA and Section 504, all accommodations listed in a student’s IEP or 504 Plan must be implemented. This unit’s activities should be reviewed against each student’s plan before instruction begins. Collaborate with your special education team to adapt materials as needed. Failure to provide required accommodations may result in a denial of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

Key Vocabulary

The following vocabulary terms are used throughout this unit. A complete A–Z glossary is provided in Section 14 of this Mega Bundle Edition for student reference.

Term	Definition
Career Cluster	A grouping of occupations and industries based on common knowledge and skills.
Career Pathway	A coherent sequence of courses and experiences that prepare a student for a specific career field.
RIASEC	Holland’s typology of six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional.
Labor Market	The supply and demand for workers in specific occupations and industries within a geographic area.
Informational Interview	A structured conversation with a professional to learn about a career, industry, or organization.
Career Portfolio	A curated collection of documents and artifacts that showcase career exploration, skills, and planning.

SECTION 2

Career Interest Inventories

Three research-based self-assessments to help students identify interests, values, and skills.

Career exploration begins with self-discovery. The following three inventories will help students identify their interests, work values, and current skills. Together, these inventories create a comprehensive self-profile that students will use to explore matching career clusters and pathways.

Teacher Tip

Administer these inventories during Week 1 (Lessons 1–4). Encourage students to answer honestly based on what they truly enjoy and value, not what they think is the “right” answer. There are no wrong answers in self-assessment. Remind students that interests and skills develop over time, and their results may change as they grow.

Inventory 1: Holland Code (RIASEC) Interest Inventory

Directions: Read each statement below. Rate how well it describes you using the scale below. Circle or mark the number that best matches your feelings. Be honest — there are no right or wrong answers!

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

REALISTIC (The Doers)

I enjoy working with my hands or tools.	1	2	3	4	5
I like building, fixing, or making things.	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer working outdoors rather than at a desk.	1	2	3	4	5
I am interested in how machines and mechanical systems work.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy physical activities, sports, or hands-on projects.	1	2	3	4	5

INVESTIGATIVE (The Thinkers)

I enjoy science classes and learning how the natural world works.	1	2	3	4	5
I like solving complex problems and puzzles.	1	2	3	4	5
I am curious and enjoy researching topics in depth.	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer analyzing data and information before making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy doing experiments or testing out theories.	1	2	3	4	5

ARTISTIC (The Creators)

I enjoy drawing, painting, designing, or creating visual art.	1	2	3	4	5
I like creative writing, storytelling, or making up stories.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy playing music, acting, or performing in front of others.	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer creative freedom over following strict rules and procedures.	1	2	3	4	5
I like expressing my ideas and feelings through creative projects.	1	2	3	4	5

SOCIAL (The Helpers)

I enjoy helping people with their problems or challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
I like teaching, tutoring, or explaining things to others.	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer working in a group or team rather than working alone.	1	2	3	4	5

Understanding Your Scores

Each RIASEC type has 5 items rated 1–5, so scores range from 5 to 25. Most people score between 12–18 on their top type. If two or more types have the same total score (a tie), consider which one you feel most drawn to — re-read the descriptions in the Reference Guide above and choose the type that resonates most with your true interests. Ties are normal and simply mean you have equally strong interests in those areas. You may also ask yourself: “If I could only do one type of work every day, which would I choose?”

SECTION 3

CTE Career Cluster Overview Cards

Detailed reference cards for all 16 nationally recognized career clusters.

The 16 Career Clusters provide a way for students to organize career exploration by grouping occupations that share common knowledge, skills, and interests. The following overview cards introduce each cluster, connecting them to the Holland RIASEC codes from Inventory 1, outlining career pathways, and highlighting key occupations, skills, and related school subjects.

Implementation Idea

Use these cards for the Week 2 gallery walk and cluster matching activities. Students can refer back to these cards when completing their Career Cluster Research Profiles in their portfolio. Each card is designed as a standalone reference page that can be printed, displayed, or inserted into student binders.

About the Pathways & Occupations Shown

Each cluster card lists selected pathways and occupations to illustrate the variety within that cluster. The official Advance CTE definitions include additional pathways not shown here. For the complete list of all pathways and occupations within each cluster, visit careertech.org or onetonline.org.

CLUSTER 1: AGRICULTURE, FOOD & NATURAL RESOURCES

Overview: The production, processing, marketing, distribution, financing, and development of agricultural commodities and resources. These include food, fiber, wood products, natural resources, horticulture, and other plant and animal products.

Related Holland Code (RIASEC): R, I

Career Pathways

- Food Products & Processing
- Plant Systems
- Animal Systems
- Power, Structural & Technical Systems

Sample Occupations

- Farmer/Rancher
- Veterinarian
- Agronomist
- Conservation Scientist

Related School Subjects

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Environmental Science

Key Skills Needed

- Observation
- Problem-Solving
- Physical Stamina
- Data Analysis

Did You Know?

By 2050, global food production must increase by 70% to feed the growing population, making agricultural innovation one of the most critical challenges of the century.

How does this cluster connect to your RIASEC code and career values? Keep notes on the back or in your portfolio!

SECTION 4

Lesson Plans (25 Lessons)

Day-by-day teaching guide for the 5-week CTE Career Exploration Unit.

The following 25 lesson plans provide a day-by-day guide for the 5-week CTE Career Exploration Unit. Each lesson is designed for a 45–55 minute class period and includes objectives, materials, a step-by-step procedure, differentiation strategies, and an exit ticket. Adjust pacing as needed for your students and schedule.

Preparation Reminder

Lesson plans reference the student handouts included in Sections 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and the Mega Bundle bonus sections (9–16). Print handouts in advance and set up your classroom display of the 16 Career Cluster Cards before Week 2 begins.

WEEK 4: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS & NETWORKING

Informational Interviews & Networking

Essential Question: How can talking with professionals help me understand careers and build my network?

WEEK 4 - LESSON 16

Introduction to Informational Interviews

Duration: 45–55 minutes

Objective: Students will define an informational interview, distinguish it from a job interview, and understand its purpose and benefits in career exploration.

Materials: Informational Interview Planning Guide (Section 5), Parent/Guardian Permission Form (Section 11), whiteboard

Opening/Hook (5 min)

Ask: “If you wanted to know what it’s really like to be a marine biologist, would you rather read a book about it or talk to someone who does it every day?” Explain that today they learn how to do the latter.

Direct Instruction (15 min)

Define “Informational Interview”: a structured conversation to learn about a career, not to ask for a job. Review the benefits: getting insider information, building a network, practicing professional communication, and gaining confidence. Outline the class expectations for professionalism, safety (only interview pre-approved adults), and respectful communication. Distribute and review the Parent/Guardian Permission Form.

Guided Practice (20 min)

Read the “What Is an Informational Interview?” and “Preparing for Your Interview” sections of the Planning Guide together. Discuss the timeline: identifying a contact, sending an email, preparing questions, conducting the interview, and sending a thank-you note.

Closure & Exit Ticket (10 min)

Students brainstorm 2–3 adults they could interview (family friends, teachers, community members) and write the names on their exit ticket for teacher approval.

Safety Note

Emphasize that all interview contacts must be approved by the teacher and parent/guardian. Interviews with strangers met online are strictly prohibited. Provide a curated list of community volunteers if students cannot find a safe, appropriate contact.

SECTION 6 — LABOR MARKET RESEARCH

5. What is one action you can take right now based on the advice you received?

Thank-You Note Template

Always send a thank-you note within 24 hours of your interview! It shows appreciation and leaves a positive, professional impression. Use the template below to draft your note.

[Date]

Dear [Professional's Name],

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me on [date] about your career as a [job title]. I truly appreciate you sharing your experiences and insights.

The most interesting thing I learned from our conversation was _____ . This helped me understand that _____ .

Your advice about _____ was very helpful. My next step will be to _____ .

Thank you again for your time and generosity. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from you.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

Digital Interviews

If you conducted the interview via email or a messaging platform, you can send your thank-you message through that same medium. Keep it professional and brief!

SECTION 10

Assessment Rubrics & Answer Keys

BONUS Mega Bundle: Detailed rubrics and an answer key to streamline grading.

This section provides comprehensive assessment tools to support consistent, transparent grading across the 5-week unit. Each rubric is designed to evaluate both content mastery and the transferable skills (communication, organization, critical thinking) that the unit develops. Share these rubrics with students at the start of the unit so they understand exactly how their work will be evaluated.

Career Portfolio Assessment Rubric

Used in: Lesson 25 (final portfolio grading). Weight: 25% of total unit grade.

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Completeness of Required Sections	All 8 sections complete with thorough detail	7 sections complete; minor gaps in detail	5–6 sections complete; several gaps	Fewer than 5 sections complete
Quality of Self-Discovery (Inventories & Reflection)	Deep, honest reflection; clear connections between inventories and career ideas	Solid reflection; most connections clear	Surface-level reflection; few connections made	Minimal reflection; inventory results not used
Depth of Career Cluster Research	Multiple occupations explored with detailed data and analysis	2+ occupations explored with adequate data	Limited research; data incomplete	Little to no research evidence
Labor Market Data Analysis	Comprehensive data collection with insightful trend analysis	Complete data with basic analysis	Partial data; minimal analysis	Missing or inaccurate data
Informational Interview Documentation	Interview completed; thoughtful reflection and thank-you note included	Interview completed; reflection and note present	Interview partially completed or reflection thin	Interview not completed or missing documentation
Career Pathway Plan & SMART Goals	Detailed, realistic pathway with 3 fully SMART goals	Clear pathway with 3 goals that are mostly SMART	Pathway vague; goals lack 2+ SMART elements	Pathway missing or goals not SMART
Organization & Visual Presentation	Neat, well-organized, visually polished, error-free	Organized and mostly neat; few errors	Somewhat disorganized; several errors	Disorganized; many errors

SECTION 15 — CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION ★ BONUS

SECTION 15

Certificate of Completion

BONUS Mega Bundle: A printable certificate to celebrate students’ completion of the unit.

Present this certificate to each student at the end of Lesson 25 as a formal recognition of their completion of the 5-week CTE Career Exploration Unit. Print on cardstock or certificate paper for a polished, keepsake-quality award.

SECTION 17

Quick-Start Teacher Orientation

PREMIUM: Your 60-second roadmap to launching this unit with confidence.

New to this resource? Start here. This page gives you the essential setup steps and a week-by-week overview so you can begin teaching with minimal prep time. Each step below corresponds to a section in this bundle.

Before Day 1 (Preparation Checklist)

- **Print the RIASEC Inventory** (Section 2, pp. 5–6) — one copy per student.
- **Print Career Values Assessment** (Section 2) — one copy per student.
- **Print Skills Self-Assessment** (Section 2) — one copy per student.
- **Print Cluster Cards** (Section 3) — one set per station (6–8 stations for Gallery Walk).
- **Send parent permission form home** (Section 11) for informational interviews — do this in Week 1 so forms are back by Week 3.
- **Pre-book computer lab or Chromebook cart** for Weeks 3–4 (BLS.gov and O*NET research).
- **Identify 3–5 pre-approved interview contacts** for students who cannot find their own.
- **Review IEP/504 plans** for enrolled students and note accommodations (see Differentiation section, Section 1).
- **Optional:** Print BLS Quick-Reference Data Table (Section 18) for classrooms with limited tech access.

Week-by-Week At-a-Glance

Week	Theme	Lessons	Key Activities	Materials to Print
1	Discovering Interests	1–5	3 Inventories, RIASEC scoring, cluster overview	Inventories (Sec 2), Cluster Cards (Sec 3)
2	Exploring Clusters	6–10	Gallery Walk, deep-dive research, cluster presentations	Exploration Notes (Sec 9), Deep-Dive (Sec 9)
3	Labor Market	11–15	BLS/O*NET research, salary analysis, job outlook	Labor Market WS (Sec 6), BLS Ref (Sec 18)
4	Interviews	16–20	Interview prep, conduct interviews, reflections	Interview Guide (Sec 5), Permission (Sec 11)
5	Career Portfolio	21–25	Portfolio assembly, pathway plan, goal setting, presentations	Portfolio (Sec 7), Rubric (Sec 10)

WHAT'S INSIDE

CTE CAREER EXPLORATION UNIT | MEGA BUNDLE EDITION | 129 PAGES

SECTION 1 Unit Overview & Standards	SECTION 11 ★ Parent/Guardian Permission Form
SECTION 2 Career Interest Inventories (RIASEC, Values, Skills)	SECTION 12 ★ Extension Activities & Enrichment
SECTION 3 CTE Career Cluster Cards (All 16 Clusters)	SECTION 13 ★ Career Vocabulary Glossary (80+ Terms)
SECTION 4 Lesson Plans (25 Lessons across 5 Weeks)	SECTION 14 ★ Career Cluster Assessment (Pre/Post)
SECTION 5 Informational Interview Planning Guide	SECTION 15 ★ Completion Certificate (Editable)
SECTION 6 Labor Market Research Worksheet	SECTION 16 ★ IEP & 504 Accommodations
SECTION 7 Career Portfolio Template	SECTION 17 ★ Quick-Start Teacher Orientation
SECTION 8 Weekly Reflection Journal	SECTION 18 ★ BLS Occupation Reference (40 Occupations)
SECTION 9 ★ Differentiated Instruction Strategies	SECTION 19 ★ Sample Student Exemplars (Maria & Jaylen)
SECTION 10 ★ Technology Integration Guide	SECTION 20 ★ Formative Assessment Checkpoints
	SECTION 21 ★ Parent & Family Career Conversation Guide

129 Pages	25 Lessons	16 Clusters	3 Inventories	5 Premium	8 Bonus	5 Standards
	NCDG	CCTC	ASCA	CCSS	ISTE	