

My Career Plan

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My career plan has a three-pronged approach. It focuses on **health, language skill, and upgrading skills** because being a healthy, adaptable, clear communicator is vital to my career success. In this paper I will explain why these things are important and how I will implement each facet of my overall strategy.

When I was growing up in rural PEI, I could only dream about becoming a game developer. Such a thing was quite unheard-of in the early 1990s. I remember reading in the pages of *Nintendo Power* about a video game design school (then) in Vancouver called DigiPen. For some time, that was the place I wanted to go. They moved to Redmond, Washington in 1998 – for me, that city too was a Mecca in the pre-Internet days: not only was it the home of Nintendo of America, but living there would mean the Nintendo game counselors would only be a local phone call away! I also wanted to become a game counselor, but living in the Greater Seattle area was a requirement, as was “excellent game play skill” – I let that dream go, not knowing about things like searchable databases that would provide the answers to questions concerning games and parts of games that I hadn’t personally mastered (which was, even then, a long list).

These days, there are independent game studios all over the developed world. It's as necessary to go to DigiPen to become a game developer as it is to go to MIT to become an engineer. Today DigiPen sets itself apart by offering undergraduate degrees in a slate of specialties¹, meaning that one can complete a degree and get career-focused training in one stop. The institution even has its own physics and humanities departments.

I don’t have a time machine or the ability to transport myself to Seattle. In any case, it falls upon me to become comparably competitive with graduates of this sort of highly-specialized institution. I will have a three-way approach:

1. Health
2. Language skill
3. Skill upgrades

First and foremost, I need to get **healthy**. I’m composing this document with a mix of left-hand-plus-right-index-finger typing and dictation software. This will do for personal purposes, but it won’t be enough for the fast-paced development workplace. If I can’t get at least my upper limbs back to near-full functionality, my utility will be severely limited. The saying “If you can’t do, teach” wouldn’t apply even if it were generally true!

Secondly, I need to improve my **language skills**. I live in an officially bilingual country. Official bilingualism shouldn’t be confused with personal bilingualism. (Putting every student in French Immersion probably isn’t the answer: the typical level of French in French Immersion programs leaves so much to be desired that it can’t be a panacea. It should be more properly seen as a foundation.²) However, while it is not necessary to demand personal bilingualism everywhere (we have “For service in English, press 1.”), it is still a tremendous asset.

¹ - [DigiPen: Degree Programs](#)

² - Problems with immersion and the teaching of French as a second language are detailed in journalist Graham Fraser’s book *Sorry, I Don't Speak French: Confronting the Canadian Crisis That Won't Go Away*. Fraser, a former journalist, currently serves as Canada's sixth Commissioner of Official Languages.

One reason why it is so valuable is that learning one language trains the learner to learn other languages. A path that leads to Japanese through intermediary “stops” of French and C++ would work because the learner had learned how to learn, not because the languages themselves have very much to do with each other. I definitely need the C++, Java, et al. to become an employable programmer. I might need the Japanese if I want to work with a game development company with ties to Japan. I almost certainly need the French if I want to participate in the political life of this country or work in the upper echelons of its civil service.

Learning a non-programming language is something that’s difficult to do in isolation if you care anything about pronunciation or a language’s cultural basis (which informs usage). There’s no substitute for hearing from and conversing with native speakers³. Moreover, a structured academic environment provides discipline through deliverables by deadline. For these reasons, over the next few years I will be striving to achieve bilingual certification from the Francophone university Université Sainte-Anne. I’m almost halfway through their levels of competency. (Getting an Explore bursary⁴ pays tuition and board to do one level in the summer months. Recipients can apply again in future years, as long as they maintain student status.) At the end of it, one can be “certified bilingual,” and while that doesn’t mean one’s French will be as sound as national affairs commentator Chantal Hébert’s English, it is enough to become eligible to be accepted to degree programs at Francophone universities. I could also work at a French-language game studio and translate their games into English!

On the third front, I must be ready to confront the possibility of needing to **upgrade** my math and physics skills (especially in light of the DigiPen degree requirements!). I have university-level calculus and physics, but I did not complete multivariable calculus or linear algebra. It is conceivable, though, that I might be faced with a situation where course credit in one or the other is demanded. In such a case, I have the option of taking a course online through accredited institutions like Athabasca University. If I have the luxury of choosing the bricks-and-mortar experience, universities like Dalhousie have appropriate courses starting virtually year-round and the availability of a resource centre staffed by graduate students. (In my experience, office hours are overrated by comparison – it’s much easier to ask someone for help when they’re not my professor!) In a case where course credit is not specifically required, I can work⁵ through books geared to independent studiers – if such things can be found, as many such series stop at “Calculus”!

³ - One of the problems with French Immersion is that most of the teachers are Anglophones. Students in French Immersion tend to learn Immersion French. Still (in my experience) a second-language perspective is very useful when it comes to helping fellow second-language approaches learn the building blocks, and some students find learning in their first-language medium more accessible and helpful. An ideal program would have both native and non-native speakers teach.

⁴ - [Explore](#) - Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

⁵ - That’s the key word: it’s more than reading!

Above all, I need to remain adaptable and willing to learn as needed. When confronted with a thorny problem, the resourceful, self-reliant individual does not merely throw up his hands and exclaim “I can’t do this!” There might not always be a perfect solution (and easy ones are in preciously short supply) but in the process of learning, the learner will increase his self-reliance index, making future learning more efficient and perhaps even pleasurable. This is important, as keeping a portfolio of sharp, up-to-date skills is a never-ending, perpetually incomplete task.

In this paper, I have laid out the three primary domains of my career strategy and explained the whys and hows of implementation. I will close by emphasizing the recursivity of adaptability: “Being adaptable” as a strategy includes being adaptable about the strategy itself! While having some structure helps me to visualize my strategy and think about the methods necessary to achieve success, adhering to the structure in a devoted, slavish fashion could very well be counter-productive. It’s hard to say anything more accurate than “Use it as you need to, and do what ya gotta do.”