FOR STUDENTS

Information Technology for Liberal Arts Majors:

Job Descriptions

TIP SHEET

Have you ever looked at a list of job titles and descriptions and said to yourself, "Yeah, but what does that *mean*? Should I apply or not? What do people in this job do every day?" Here's some information about jobs in Information Technology that can help you sort through the lingo and the inside knowledge and, instead, start to picture what life on the job might be like.

Job Title	What does that job do?
Business Analyst	Working on a project team, under the guidance of a project manager, a Business Analyst meets with people working in a business operation, interviews them, observes their work, then documents what they do—in detail and unambiguously. The business analyst gets them to tell him (or her) what's important and what's not and then makes notations in the material accordingly.
Data Analyst	What **information** is required in order to support delivery truck drivers, equipment repair guys, hotel reception desk clerks? Ask a Data Analyst! They examine jobs and business functions with an eye toward what information is needed (first name, last name, employee ID, # accidents on the job, severity of accident, insurance claim amount). They also map data between systems (Is "FNAME" the same as "FIRST NAME"?) so, as systems are retired, their "old" data can be transferred to new systems.
Data Administration	Ever heard of a "data dictionary"? Data Administrators are the keepers of data in the dictionary: terms, definitions and dimensions (how long, how short, whether letters and/or numbers comprise the data element (that's what it's called instead of a "word"). Good job for people who like to organize and maintain qualitative information.
Quality Assurance	Every business software application has an ongoing need for testing, whether it's because changes and improvements are made to an existing product or because an entire new product is being installed. What's required: Knowing how a product should work, whether it works as promised, then working with technical staff to effect repairs and re-test.
Process Analyst	Like a Business Analyst, a Process Analyst observes, understands and documents what people in the business operations are doing but does so as a step-by-step process. From beginning to end, he writes down what's done and by whom, the relative timing of each task and any dependencies ("The building must be empty before the guard locks the door"). Process Analysts are often looking for ways to streamline, cut steps. ("Does the building really need to be empty before the door is locked?")

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Trainer	Learn how to use software products, then teach others, customers or internal staff. That's all there is to this job—that and developing the order in which you'll teach the material, the handouts and cheat sheets you'll hand out, and maybe even the evaluation forms you'll ask your "students" to complete so you know how to improve.
System Administrator	Many software systems that support business operations have lots of flexibility. Should "middle initial" be required? Must "phone number" be numeric? A System Administrator sets those parameters in a system (and remembers them). Sometimes a challenging job (what if the company is conflicted about whether phone number should be numeric?), it gives liberal arts students a chance to try out some conflict negotiation skills, which calls on having an understanding of human behavior and motivation (or, dare we say, "character"?)
Customer Support	On the phone, talking to customers of your company's technology, "What problem can I help you with?" is the net of your existence in this job. Once you learn the "top ten" customer support problems, you'll have most of them handled. For problems outside your experience so far, you'll either consult an expert system (a knowledge repository) or an expert human being.
Tech Writer	From how-to documentation for users, procedural documents for technical support staff, or detailed descriptions of your organization's bureaucratic processes, a technical writer produces the finished product, often an online "book."

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