

# From Aspiration to Licensure— A Geoscientist's Journey

Earning the P.Geo. designation is more than a regulatory milestone—it's a journey marked by curiosity, professional development, and a deepening sense of responsibility. In this Q and A feature, we follow the path of Joanna West who earned her P.Geo. designation in 2022, sharing—in her own words—the experiences, challenges, and insights that shaped her journey from Geoscientist-in-Training (GIT) to licensed professional.

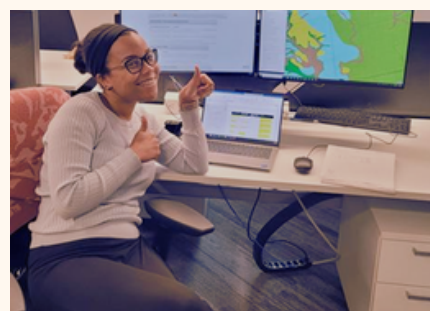
Through candid reflections, she highlights the importance of mentorship, the value of staying curious, and the evolving nature of geoscience practice in a rapidly changing world.

Her story offers practical advice for aspiring licensees while reminding us of the broader purpose behind the designation: to protect the public and advance the profession with integrity.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO  
PURSUE YOUR P.GEO.  
DESIGNATION, AND HOW DID  
THE PROCESS UNFOLD FOR  
YOU?

I was first made aware of the designation when I was in undergrad from one of the PGO sessions at UofT. It laid out pretty clearly the path to professional licensing after graduation, and I made sure to set up my steps from then to work towards the designation. The process was quite smooth, especially as I did not hesitate to ask questions - the minute I was unsure about something, I contacted PGO, or P.Geo.s that I knew at the time for answers. A genuine inspiration to pursue the designation was my P.Geo. mentor (David Leng) when I was a GIT. He was my first professional mentor and played such a key role in helping me understand the obligations of a P.Geo. and the many opportunities that it could open up, especially as someone who was already passionate about geoscience.



LOOKING BACK, HOW DID  
BEING A GIT PREPARE YOU  
FOR THE RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND OPPORTUNITIES OF  
BEING A LICENSED  
PROFESSIONAL?

My work experience as a GIT gave me the opportunity to both observe and participate in the activities and decisions that a licensed professional would be accountable for. Working closely with both Professional Geoscientists and Engineers on various types of geoscience projects, for me, fostered a mindset of understanding the critical role in applying accurate technical knowledge and techniques, and the importance of upholding certain standards and ethics, ultimately for the protection of the public and colleagues. The workplace training, networking and mentoring were (and still continue to be) an invaluable part of my geoscience journey.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, OR LEARNING MOMENTS YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING YOUR GIT PHASE?

The mentoring experience is definitely up there on my list, and I'd encourage GITs to participate in the program when it rolls around again. A challenge during the GIT phase, for me, was admittedly still deciding exactly what I was going to do with my geoscience career. I liked soft rock geology – was I going to stick to that? Delve more into hydrogeology after my masters? I only entered the contamination world later in my GIT days.

That's when it hit me that this isn't set in stone, and I didn't have to stick to just one area of geoscience for the rest of my life. You can explore other career areas within the geosciences and gain so much more experience and knowledge. One ongoing challenge in working in fields like mining and consulting is that the work load can fluctuate a lot, with projects and opportunities coming in waves. I learnt that practicing patience and commitment is essential in many geoscience roles in these arenas.



NOW THAT YOU ARE A P.GEO., WHAT HAS CHANGED—EITHER IN YOUR ROLE, CONFIDENCE, OR THE WAY OTHERS ENGAGE WITH YOUR WORK?

It feels like my name carries more weight with it (in a good way!). But admittedly, I've always made it a mission to work on my professional self from a holistic perspective – the P.Geo. designation was a major milestone in that journey. I do feel quite confident now that I am a P.Geo., but it is also because I've worked hard from the academic days through my professional career. A part of being a P.Geo. means carrying out your work to a high technical standard, holding yourself responsible for and trusting in your project decisions. I love championing outreach and proudly declaring that geoscience is the best science!

CAN YOU SHARE A PROJECT OR EXPERIENCE THAT FELT LIKE A TURNING POINT IN YOUR CAREER?

I'm not sure I can pinpoint a single experience, but working on large, multidisciplinary projects did help me refine what further career paths I want to take in geoscience. Our careers are always evolving, so experiences that show us what we like and what really catches our interest are so valuable. A notable mention would be working on site characterization for the deep geologic repository site near Ignace, Ontario, that also brought the responsibility of a site supervisor role in addition to geochemistry and drilling supervision. Completing that successfully, I felt so much more confident in myself, and I looked forward to taking on bigger roles in complex projects.





## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO CURRENT GITs WORKING TOWARD LICENSURE?

Quite literally, pay attention. Pay attention to the course requirements – what you've already completed and especially what is outstanding. Pay attention to deadlines, exam dates, and document your work experience. Staying ahead of the game is much easier and logical than trying to back track.

Talk to other GITs and P.Geo.s about their experience in terms of completing the requirements, especially in times when you need a little motivation. And yes, you get a nice designation and certificate, but it is not the end point. Continue to carry passion for geo or environmental science that got you on this path in the first place.



## HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR ROLE EVOLVING IN THE YEARS AHEAD, AND WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE FUTURE OF GEOSCIENCE?

What excites me the most about the future of geoscience is considering how we can potentially conquer so many immense challenges with upcoming advances in technology. I can't wait to see what frontiers will be explored and what problems can be solved, especially in the environmental geoscience category, from site characterization to remediation methods. Imagine what mine closure will look like 50 years from now as opposed to 50 years ago? Imagine the understanding the geoscience community will have then of contaminants that are currently baffling our minds and under the microscope. I personally love the challenge in trying to understand the subsurface characteristics, the movement of water and contaminants, the possible solutions – that excitement will only grow with advanced investigation methods and shared knowledge of new findings. That leads me to say that our roles are constantly evolving to keep up with these new technologies while still applying our science fundamentals. On my current path, I also see my future roles involving a lot more project management and mentoring of young geoscientists. Looking forward to all of it.

What Joanna shared offers a grounded look at one individual's journey from GIT to P.Geo.—a path shaped by curiosity, mentorship, and thoughtful reflection. Her experience highlights that the transition to professional licensure is not only about meeting formal requirements, but about building a meaningful practice through learning, engagement, and ethical awareness.

Becoming a P.Geo. is more than fulfilling technical requirements. It means taking pride in the profession, embracing the responsibilities of licensure, and recognizing that competence and ethics go hand in hand. Ethics is central to what it means to be a professional and to maintaining the public's trust.

For those working toward licensure, Joanna's reflections offer one perspective to consider along the way. For those already licensed, her story serves as a reminder of the influence that professional conduct and mentorship can have on those still navigating their own path. The profession is shaped not only by the work geoscientists do, but by how they contribute to a culture of support and shared responsibility.

To learn more about the pathways to P.Geo. designation, visit [www.pgo.ca](http://www.pgo.ca).

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## ABOUT JOANNA WEST, P.GEO.

Joanna West currently works as an Environmental Geoscientist and Project Manager with GHD Ltd. in Toronto. She is fully immersed in the consulting world of environmental site assessments, excess soils, remediation projects, environmental investigations, data analysis, and client communication. Her work focuses heavily on the investigation and characterization of contaminated sites, for example, the Port Hope Low-level Radioactive Waste cleanup and a tailings investigation at a closed mine site in Sudbury. Joanna is originally from Trinidad and Tobago and completed her geology undergrad and master's degrees at the University of Toronto, with part of her graduate studies at the University of Waterloo.