

Work Placements: Student Worksheet

During TY, and sometimes in your pre-Leaving Cert year, students around Ireland take time out from their studies to undergo work placements. These valuable opportunities are a chance to see what it might be like to work in an area you are interested in when you finish your education, and may be highly influential in your future career choices: whether because you really liked the work and want to continue with it, or because you didn't like it and decide to change direction.

Work placements involve working alongside professionals as they go about their daily business, and are an excellent opportunity to observe what skills are being used to get the job done successfully, as well as developing some of those skills yourself. Behaving maturely and taking up the responsibility necessary to operate in the workplace are also important steps in your personal development.



This worksheet aims to get you prepared for your work placements, so that you can benefit from them as much as possible. For a successful placement, you should be:

- Familiar with the process of applying for work placements
- Actively researching placements which might interest you
- Preparing your approach towards prospective employers
- Setting targets and objectives that you would like to achieve during the work experience

Finding a placement

Your work placement is supposed to be an introduction to the world of work, and does not have to be a career path that you are planning to continue with. Aim for an area of work which you'd like to learn more about, or one which you find interesting. Below are some tips on finding a suitable work placement:

- Ask your family and relatives if they know anyone who works in an industry in which you are interested, and see if they can get you a placement.
- Your school may have some links with local companies who are willing to offer work placements, so consult your guidance counsellor about any availabilities.
- Start asking **early!** Having a placement booked well in advance will save you from ending up in a placement you didn't want and won't enjoy.

Fill in some sectors and companies that interest you below, to get you started:

Target Sectors

Target Companies

Setting realistic expectations

Due to placements being relatively short, the tasks you are assigned may be simple and repetitive. However, take the opportunity while undertaking tasks to observe as many processes as possible, and to interact with staff and customers. This will give you the chance to develop key personal and employability skills, as well as observe what's really going on in the workplace.



Making an application for work experience:

Whether you are making application by phone call or letter, or phone call followed up with a letter, make sure to include the points below in every communication. It is useful to phone initially to find out to whom a letter of application should be addressed, so that it reaches the right person and you know who to follow up with at a later date. Also, some large companies have application forms and closing dates for accepting applications which you can find out about with a phone call.

- ✓ Your name
- ✓ Your school
- ✓ Your school year
- ✓ The reason you are making contact, i.e. enquiring about work experience opportunities
- ✓ The dates you are seeking a placement
- ✓ Your contact details
- ✓ A copy of your CV



What employers want?

Employers want you to gain as much as possible from your time working with them. They are investing time and resources in supporting you, so it is important that you recognise what they are looking for from you. Remember, if you impress your employers now, you may gain paid part-time/full-time work in the future! The following requirements are reported as being most important by employers, so it would be best not to ignore them!

- ✓ Show **good time management** – don't be late arriving, but also make sure you check when the correct times for breaks are. If you are delayed for any reason, it is important that you let someone at work know as soon as possible.
- ✓ Maintain a good personal appearance – **dress appropriately** for the organisation (check with your mentor if you are not sure what to wear) and ensure your clothes are in good condition.
- ✓ Make sure you are always **neat and tidy**.
- ✓ Stay **respectful** to your colleagues and your clients at all times.
- ✓ Respect any issues of **confidentiality**; companies take this very seriously.
- ✓ Be **friendly** and smile, even when you're nervous. Good eye contact is important.
- ✓ Be keen and prepared to learn, use your **initiative**
- ✓ If you're not sure of something, ask!
- ✓ Don't chew gum!
- ✓ Make sure your mobile phone is **switched off** while at work



Identify Key Skills

A work placement offers you the opportunity to get a real 'feel' for working life in a way that school does not. Just about everything will be new to you – so it is hard to be prepared. What your employer will be looking for is not knowledge, but your personality and ability to 'fit in' with the rest of the employees. Employers and workers tend to evaluate you on the basis of how well developed your core 'employability skills' are. The following skills are at the top of the list of what they are looking for:

PEOPLE SKILLS

- Sensitivity to others
- Insight into others
- Openness to others
- Respect
- Speaking / Presenting
- Active listening
- Conversation
- Persuasion
- Team membership
- Team participation
- Leadership

TASK SKILLS

- Planning / Organising
- Time management
- Practical skills
- Computer skills
- Problem solving
- Business awareness
- Customer focus

PERSONAL SKILLS

- Learning skills
- Adaptability
- Goal setting
- Initiative
- Independence
- Motivation
- Dependability
- Professionalism

For further information on these Career Skills, go to www.careersportal.ie/careerskills

Getting the most out of your work placement

As with many experiences in life, the best way to get the most out of a planned experience is to set yourself some personal targets and goals. In the table below, list ten personal objectives you would like to achieve during your work placement. Examples might include developing some of the skills listed above (e.g. Dependability – being on time every day), learning more about occupations in your chosen sector (any occupations in particular?), or investigating an occupation for future consideration (the pros and cons of the job, the education requirements etc).

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During your work experience

Keep a short daily diary/logbook of your experiences during each day including the tasks you undertook and the skills you had an opportunity to practice. On returning to school after your work placement, you are likely to be asked to complete a report on your experience and having a daily diary will make this very easy, as well as being a valuable keepsake for making future career decisions.

Works Placement evaluation forms are available at www.careersportal.ie



What if I have problems at work?

What happens if you are ill on a day you are supposed to be attending work experience?

Telephone the employer early in the morning to let them know – don't send a text or leave a voicemail. If possible, let them know when to expect you back. You also need to contact your school Guidance Councillor to let them know what has happened.

What do I do if I need to leave the workplace early due to illness or unforeseen circumstances?

You **must** let your supervisor at work know before you leave. Explain the circumstances, and ask for their permission. Most employers will be asked to notify the schools if a student is not able to attend for the full allotted time for any reason.

What happens if I have an accident at work?

All workplaces are required to have accident reporting procedures in place. Check with a relevant manager on how to report the accident, and if you are required to fill in a form. Report the accident on the day it happens – not the following day. Again, you should contact your school Guidance Counsellor if you are involved in an accident or incident during the work placement.

What happens if I have a problem at work?

If you are finding the work you are doing difficult, or you don't understand what is expected of you, or don't understand the jargon, talk to your supervisor. Think carefully about what you want to say, and try to explain your feelings clearly. Your employer has offered to have you there, and will want to help you succeed, so don't be afraid to ask. If you feel the work you are being asked to do is not what was agreed in your job description, you need to ask why; talk to your supervisor, or contact your school guidance counsellor who can arrange to visit you.

Work experience is an opportunity to work with lots of different people from different backgrounds, ages and possibly ethnic backgrounds. You may not like everyone, and they may not like you, but you will all be expected to be able to work together.

Sometimes, though rarely, you may have problems which are more serious in nature. If someone is constantly making your life miserable, this is bullying, and you need to talk to your supervisor about it. Bullying need not be physical; it can involve being made the butt of jokes, rude or hateful comments, racism, or sexual harrassment. If you feel you cannot talk to your workplace supervisor, contact your Guidance Counsellor and they will help you deal with this appropriately.