



# DIY Work Experience

This article has been developed by the Careers and Cooperative Education team of the University of Western Sydney.

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This article and other articles in the series may be accessed from CareerHub by registered students and staff of UWS.

[www.uws.edu.au/careers](http://www.uws.edu.au/careers)

## DIY Work Experience

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### Benefits of work experience

Most importantly, you should undertake work experience before leaving university. Students who have had exposure to real workplace situations are highly regarded by prospective employers and positions are often won specifically because of previous work experience. Consider this type of experience as an essential element of your career planning where you can:

- Experience tasks, procedures and clients in the workplace
- Apply theory learnt in study in a real life situation
- Clarify and evaluate abilities and interests in relation to career choice
- Develop workplace skills
- Gain networks and job contacts
- Explore a range of occupations and industries

If you are unable to find work experience you may consider some of the following:

- Casual and part-time employment
- Industry placements
- Job shadowing
- Informational interviews
- Vacation schemes and internships
- Volunteer work
- Overseas employment

Decide what you want to learn, experience, absorb and explore. What you get from your work experience will depend on you and what you arrange. Don't rely on others to arrange this important experience for you. Have a clear idea of what you hope to gain from work experience in order to help you identify the most suitable placements.

Begin by listing the learning objectives – be specific about questions you want answered, skills, knowledge, processes, feelings that you wish to explore or develop. Once you have written your goals and objectives, identify the tasks you could possibly do to achieve these learning outcomes.

### Step 1 - Length of work experience

Your work experience should be for a short period, negotiated with your employer prior to starting. The length of this may vary depending on the employer and your study obligations. It can be good to start with a block of time to allow staff to get to know your abilities and give you some meaningful tasks.

### Step 2 - Identify the organisations that can provide these opportunities

The most effective work experience programs ensure appropriate supervision by an experienced professional and allow you to undertake or observe meaningful work within your professional area. You should attempt to meet with your employer prior to your commencement so that you can discuss learning opportunities and objectives, both theirs and yours.

Identify at least 20 organisations of interest to you. Research in a variety of places such as:

- Internet
- Professional associations
- Professional journals or newsletters
- Employment sections of the newspapers
- Friends or relatives with contacts
- UWS Careers & Cooperative Education website

Find and record information you can use later such as:

- Name of the organisation
- Location, telephone number, website and email addresses
- Main area of business/areas of specialisation
- Structure – number of employees and history
- Peak work periods
- Anticipate the type of work you could assist with – be realistic

### Step 3 - Contact organisations

Make it clear in your initial contact that you are researching a career path and **not** asking for a job. Telephone contact is often more successful than emailing when you initially contact an organisation. Using this approach you could speak to at least 5 organisations in an afternoon. To assist you with the challenges of telephone communication you should:

- Speak clearly and concisely
- Know what you want to say
- Be patient and friendly – do not demand
- Keep accurate records of the organisations and people with whom you speak
- Be prepared to call back in order to speak with the appropriate person

The following phrases may be useful when speaking with the receptionist (who can be a vital link):

“Hello, I am a university student interested in finding out if your organisation offers work

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experience to university students in the area of ... (mention your study area). Can you suggest the appropriate person to speak with?"

The following phrases may be useful when speaking with the appropriate person:

"Hello my name is ... I am a ... (2nd year Arts student)"

"I am keen to gain some work experience with your organisation"

"I am interested in working in this area because ..."

"I am looking for voluntary work experience to gain exposure to the ... (IT) industry"

"May I send my resume for you to consider? To whom should I address it?"

### **Step 4 - Send your resume and covering letter**

You should send both your resume and covering letter to each organisation after speaking with them. You should attend a UWS Careers & Cooperative Education resume workshop to assist you with preparation. See CareerHub for more information.

### **Step 5 - Complete the 'Request for Student Insurance Cover' Form**

Once you have finalised the details please complete and submit the online Request for Student Insurance Cover by going to [www.uws.edu.au/careers](http://www.uws.edu.au/careers). Please note that this type of insurance cover applies only to work experience with a demonstrable relationship to your field of study.

### **During work experience**

You may find that securing an unpaid placement can lead to a further placement or a paid position therefore, it is imperative that you treat this opportunity with as much dedication and commitment as you would demonstrate in a permanent, paid position.

- Create a professional image by dressing appropriately. Be clean and neat
- Speak clearly and audibly, eliminating as much slang as possible
- Adopt a "can do" attitude and perform each task to your best ability
- Join others at morning tea, lunch, drinks if invited – these are excellent times to network and build rapport with the team
- Be punctual and reliable, make sure you contact someone ASAP if detained
- Ask before using the phone and confine all personal calls to lunchtime and keep them brief. Avoid taking mobile calls during the day, unless urgent
- Ask for clarification if unsure of anything and seek help if you make a mistake
- Respect all staff

### **After work experience**

- Refer again to your objectives to evaluate and reflect upon your learning
- Write a formal letter of appreciation to the management of the organisation and to any individual staff with whom you worked
- Maintain contact where appropriate to build on your networks
- Follow up on any leads you became aware of during your placement
- Update your resume with the new skills and experiences you have gained