

How Work Experience Can Help Your Future Career

The importance of undertaking a period of work experience if you are a student or looking to go into a new career is growing year-on-year. Employers want to recruit candidates who have some knowledge of the working world and this is something that applicants are becoming more aware of. A period of work experience can offer the following:

For applicants:

- Opportunity to put theory learning into practice.
- Opportunity to consider career options.
- Opportunity to find out what you like or do not like doing.
- Opportunity to get some practical experience or start to develop 'employability' skills.

For employers:

- Opportunity to see what applicants are capable of.
- Applicants on placements can be seen as an extended interview, thereby cutting down on recruitment costs.
- Applicants can come with a fresh pair of eyes to help solve problems.
- An extra pair of hands to develop ideas that may be on the back burner.

If you've chosen your career path already, work experience will demonstrate your commitment, and is particularly important for careers such as teaching, investment banking, medicine and law. If you haven't decided what you want to do, it's a good way to try out different industries and develop your transferable skills at the same time.

From structured summer internships to temporary work in an office, there are many valid forms of work experience:

- placements and internships - formal, structured programmes which often act as a 'foot in the door'
- casual work experience - informal, found by speculative applications or through contacts
- temporary work - a chance to earn money and gain experience at the same time
- voluntary work - another great way to boost your skills base, particularly if you're pursuing a related career
- work shadowing - unpaid but can be the only option in some of the more competitive career areas.

For some industries it may be necessary to make speculative applications for casual work experience. Make sure you target your covering letter to each organisation you apply to for a greater chance of success.

Throughout your work experience you should keep a record of everything you do and assess which skills you've developed. This will allow you to obtain that career you're looking for; and you'll find putting together a well-rounded, winning CV much easier.

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