

A Quick Guide to Gaining Work Experience



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About Work Experience

Work Experience offers the opportunity of gaining the experience of working with an employer and put you in a strong position for your next steps, whether you decide to go onto 6th Form, College, vocational training or progress onto University. Some people think of "work experience" as just a one or two week placement offered in school, however any form of work experience that you can gain before you start your career will count.

All Experience in the Workplace is Beneficial

Paper rounds, shelf stacking on the weekend or photocopying in an office – all of these experiences help you to develop essential life skills whether it is talking with customers, working as part of a team, multi-tasking or simply learning the skills required to get yourself to work on time.

Work experience can be an invaluable element to your CV that sets you apart from the next candidate when applying for jobs or further education.

What makes a great work experience placement?

The best placements are often those in a sector about which you feel passionately, and/or one in which you have opportunities to do 'hands-on' tasks and activities.

There is still a great deal that you can learn from a work experience opportunity which may not align directly to your future career aspirations. This includes positive outcomes relating to the generic experience of work and the recognition and development of employability skills and a better understanding of their career aspirations.

Having the ability to secure any form of work, demonstrates motivation, maturity, responsibility and that you are serious about progressing into the world of work.

Employability Skills

Just to name a few:

- Communication Skills
- Analytical Skills
- Customer Service Skills
- Team Working
- Multi-tasking
- Responsibility
- An ability to follow instructions
- Conflict resolution
- Problem solving
- Self Motivation
- Money Management
- Experience of a working environment

Objectives of work experience

In order to maximise the outcomes of work experience, it is important that you are clear of your learning outcomes. These fall into two main categories:

1. Generic skills: experiencing work, including following working routines, working with adults, undertaking new tasks, developing confidence.
2. Understanding and developing employability skills (As listed about)

What types of work experience should I be looking for?

In an ideal world, work experience should be in an area that you are hoping to progress into. If you are looking to work with animals, try an animal shelter or local pet shop. For progression into business and administration, look for a local office where you can help with call answering and filing. The ideal may not however always be possible; the key thing to remember is that all experience counts. In the beginning you may be making cups of tea or simply filing documents, but if you work hard and show that you are willing to learn, then the only way is up!

What should I think about when looking for work experience?

- Think about what you hope to achieve, what sort of role you are looking for – you may have to compromise when you are getting started, but once you have a foot in the door you can start looking for alternatives.
- How am I going to get to my placement? – Do you drive or do you parents/family friend work close by? What are your local bus routes? Think about areas that are easily accessible to you.
- What hours can I commit to? In addition to the Work Experience week (April 23rd to April 27th 2018), what other work experience can you find. Can you work weekends? What hours can you offer around your other educational commitments?

Next steps, what to do now...

- See the section on 'Searching for a Placement'
- Search for businesses that are local to you or that you can get to easily
- Update your CV
- Organise a covering letter that explains what you are looking for and how you will benefit the employer's business. You will need to tailor this for each employer, but a general template of what you want to say will help to speed up each application.
- Send out prospective letters or give them a phone call

Searching for a Placement

When looking for a placement, there are a few factors to consider:

- **What sector are you looking to work in / what sort of work would you like to do?** Some sectors will be easier to find relevant placements than others e.g. childcare or customer services. You may need to think creatively about other sectors such as those involving ICT, law or animals.
- **How will you get to your placement?**
Do you drive or do you parents/family friend work close by? If not, you will most likely need to look at businesses either close to home or within easy access of your local bus routes. Think about local shopping districts or busy business areas that you may be able to travel to.

Take advantage of contacts

Do you know anyone who might offer you a placement – perhaps a family friend or local business person?

Do some research

Find a copy of your local yellow pages, or have a look online at Yell.com – you can search by business name / keyword and then narrow your search by town or postcode.

Alternatively use a search engine to search for work experience in your area using a specific sector, e.g. Work Experience in Las in Plymouth

Make a list of the employers you want to contact, wherever possible, collecting a contact name, address, email address and telephone number – keep this list for later. Why not use the table at the back of this booklet to collect and record your data.

Sending your requests

Once you have your speculative letter and CV ready, you can begin contacting employers. Keep a list of who you contacted and how (whether email or post) and the date that the contact was made.

Top Tip:

Why not think about sending emails – they are faster and cheaper than letters. Copy and paste your covering letter into the body of the email and attach your CV. Make sure you have the right contact so that you know it is getting to the right person.

Following up

Follow up each employer up after about a week by telephone – why not make a note in your diary to remind yourself to make that call.

When making contact, you will need to:

- Introduce yourself personally to the employer
- Ensure that your application has been received
- Confirm whether they are able to offer you a placement

Keeping yourself in the forefront

Many employers that you contact may already be fully staffed, or unable to support you with a placement at this time. If this is the case, simply thank them for their time and request that they contact you at a later date if anything should arise.

Creating a Successful CV

Your CV is a great chance to evidence your skills and strengths to an employer. It should be used to promote yourself – showing that you understand the requirements of your chosen sector, or a particular job. This is then reinforced by providing good examples of when, where and how you demonstrated these skills in school, extracurricular activities or other jobs you may have had. For example, you could prove your teamwork skills by describing a specific activity at school and outlining how you:

- Listened to colleagues
- Encouraged others
- Held a position of responsibility

You should use positive words and sub headings within your CV to promote your specific skills and experiences - here are some of the headings you should consider:

Personal details

This is usually the first heading on a CV and you should keep it short.

- Print your name at the top in a large font.
- Add your home address.
- A professional email address, incorporating your name.
- As a rule, do not include information relating to your age, sex, nationality, marital status or health.
- You could also include a contact number.

Personal Statement

This is where you should sell yourself. However, it needs to be short and snappy and grab the employer's attention. Think about:

- What skills have you got that the employer can't do without?
- What do you want to do with those skills?

Start by listing some keywords that describe you and think about how you can use them in this section. If you can try to refer back to them in your work experience section.

Education

Provide details of your education including GCSEs, A Levels or any vocational or short training that you may have completed.

- Include your school / college name and the city that it is in e.g. Plympton Academy, Plymouth.
- The dates that you attended (from start to finish) e.g. Sept 12 – Present
- your qualifications and grades (especially if they are good)

Experience/work experience

All work experience counts, whether paid, voluntary or shadowing (working alongside someone for a short time to see what their job is like). Outline your responsibilities in brief detail or bullet points. Tell them what you did well in the job / work experience? Were you given any awards / achievements?

For example:

Pets at Home, 1 day a week work experience

This was a customer service role including checkout work, shelf stacking and dealing with customer enquiries. Whilst at Pets at Home, I developed my awareness of customer service settings and improved my teamwork skills. I completed health and safety training and was awarded employee of the month for my excellent customer service skills.

Positions of responsibility/achievements/interests

Choose one of these headings to outline extracurricular accomplishments that demonstrate your initiative and personal interests outside of school. Briefly describe what you have done, how you have succeeded and the relevant skills you have gained.

For example:

Scouts

As a Scout Leader, I organised regular meetings to discuss possible events and successfully worked with a wide range of people including parents and other Scout Groups.

Referees

If you wish to include references at this stage of your application, you should provide the contact details of two referees such as a teacher or previous employer.

Common Mistakes

Try and avoid the following mistakes:

- Poor spelling and / or grammar – do not rely on spell checkers. Print off your CV and ask someone else to check the content if you are not sure.
- Long sentences with little or no punctuation
- Missing capital letters for names, places and when using 'I'
- Repetition
- 'Buzz words' or catch phrases such as 'good team player' – many employers dislike use of these common terms. Use them sparingly and only where you are able to offer examples to back up your comments.
- Making your CV too long. Employers won't want to read long CV. Try to restrict it to 2 sides of A4.

To make an appointment for CV advice and support please contact your tutor or if they are unavailable for specific advice, contact:

Maria Arkell

Sixth Form Manager

Tel: 01752 338373 Ext 131

Email: arkellm@plympton.academy

About Covering Letters

What is a covering letter?

A cover letter should always be sent out to accompany your CV – it should be directed at the person responsible for the recruitment within the business and offers the opportunity for you to introduce yourself, giving specific details about what you are looking for and why.

Should I write my covering letter by hand?

Covering letters should be typed with black ink unless the employer has specified that they want it written by hand. In which case a good quality pen should be used and you should take care not to make mistakes and crossings out.

What should my cover letter look like?

Try not exceed one side of A4 – employers are busy and do not have time to read an essay. Make sure your letter is spread out nicely to fill a page and isn't squashed into the top corner. It is important to remember how a standard letter should be laid out (see below):

	<Your Name> <1 st Line of your address> <2 nd Line of your address> <3 rd Line of your address> <Postcode>
	<Your Telephone No> <Your Email Address>
<Contact Name> <Company Name> <Company Address 1> <Company Address 2> <Company Address 3> <Company Postcode>	
<Date>	
<Greeting>	
Re: Application for Work Experience	
<Your Letter Content>	
<Closing Formalities e.g. Yours sincerely / Yours faithfully>	
<Your Full Name>	

Who do I address the letter to?

If you have the name of the employer, then address the letter to them personally. If not, try to find a name on the company's webpage or by telephoning the main office and asking who the head of recruitment is. If you cannot obtain a name, then address your letter to The Recruitment Officer, followed by the greeting Dear Sir/Madam or To Whom It May Concern.

How should I close the letter?

A covering letter is a formal business letter and as such should be closed with 'Yours faithfully', if have addressed your application an unknown person, or 'Yours sincerely' where you have named a specific contact.

What are the main points I need to include in my letter?

- ✓ State what position you are applying for or that you are looking for a work experience placement. Tell them what makes you the best candidate for that job.
- ✓ Show that you have researched a little bit about the company, tell them why you have chosen them as a prospective employer.
- ✓ Give details of what you can contribute to the company, about your skills and how your qualifications make you particularly suitable.
- ✓ Write about your career aims, linking them to the company's field of expertise and to the role you that you hope they can offer / are offering.
- ✓ State that you will contact them shortly to discuss your application.
- ✓ Make sure that you have included all of your correct contact information.

Can I send out the same letter for each application?

It is advisable to amend a covering letter for each employer / sector that you apply for. It is easier for an employer to dismiss a standard letter – by making each application unique you are showing initiative and enthusiasm towards the post you are applying for.

What do I do after I have sent the application?

Keep a record of when you posted the letter / sent your email and follow up with a telephone call after about a week. While you are waiting to hear back from the company continue to apply to other organisations – you will be in a much better position if you end up with more than one employer to choose from.

Should I use different fonts and what paper should I use?

This is a formal letter so do not use fancy fonts; stick with Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial. It should be black ink on white paper, do not use personal stationery. Print the letter on the same paper you used for your CV so that they match in colour and texture.

Try and avoid the following common mistakes:

- Don't repeat information in your CV
- Don't waffle in your explanations – you can always elaborate on details in an interview
- Don't solely rely on templates as they will have been seen before– write your covering letter yourself, make it original so that it stands out from everyone else.
- Spelling mistakes – do not rely on spell checkers. Print out your letter and ask someone else to check it for you if you are not sure.

Example of a Poor Cover Letter

The letter below is an example speculative letter with comments explaining the areas that require improvement (in blue). This letter is not very detailed or attention grabbing. If you do not address letters to a specific person, it may not get to anyone at all.

Nicola Simpson
61 Key Drive
Newcastle
NE23 4FG
Telephone: 0191 345 6789
E-mail address: nicolesimpson24@ms.com

23rd October 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find enclosed my CV. I am applying for any vacancies you may have within your school. You can see from looking at my CV that I have the skills and experience relevant for the job.

I would be grateful if you would consider my application either now or in the future.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Simpson

Nicola doesn't include any contact details so there are no guarantees that it will end up on the desk of the person who is responsible for recruitment. This is even more important if she's applying to a large organisation.

Nicola's just said that she's applying for vacancies. It isn't specific enough to tell the employer what type of roles she's looking for. She needs to mention job roles or types of work so the reader is clear about her aims.

Nicola's covering letter is just saying 'here is my CV' when it should add to the information in her CV.

Nicola's CV will show what her skills and experience are; her covering letter should explain how these skills can help this employer, and show how keen she is to work for them. Together, her CV and covering letter should convince the reader she is the ideal person for the job.

This letter looks like a standard letter that is being sent to lots of employers with no tailoring for each application. This won't impress a potential employer – they want to see that Nicola's done some research on what they do and which skills they're looking for. Employers receive lots of applications and Nicola's needs to stand out to get an interview.

Source: National Careers Service, Directgov

Example of a Good Cover Letter – 2st Draft with adjustment following feedback

The updated letter below is much more appropriate, having demonstrated why the candidate is applying for the position and includes a bit about their experiences and skills - this is a much more professional approach and will help you stand out from your competition.

Nicola Simpson
61 Key Drive
Newcastle
NE23 4FG
Telephone: 0191 3456789
E-mail address: nicolasimpson24@ms.com

23rd October 2009

Mrs Jennie Jones
Headteacher
Slate Lane School
34 Slate Lane
North Shields
Newcastle
NE54 6HG

Dear Miss Jones

Do you currently have any teaching assistant opportunities within your school, particularly supporting children with complex learning and behaviour needs?

Slate Lane School has an excellent reputation with local parents for supporting children with learning difficulties. Your recent Ofsted Report suggests your designated unit for pupils with severe autistic spectrum disorders has a strong pool of teaching assistants who provide support. I believe I can make a valuable contribution to this team and continue to develop my own skills and knowledge.

During my two years on maternity leave I have undertaken voluntary work in my local Surestart Centre, working with children up to the age of five. The most rewarding aspect of this role was working on a one to one basis with children with challenging behaviour. I recently completed an introduction to teaching assistant course, which has provided me with a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a teaching assistant.

I have enclosed my CV and would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss my skills and experiences with you and to learn more about your school. I will call next week to see if we can arrange a convenient meeting.

Yours sincerely
Nicola Simpson

Callout 1: Nicola's done the right thing by contacting the employer and getting the name of the person who's responsible for hiring staff. This will ensure it arrives on the right person's desk.

Callout 2: Addressing the letter to a named person also shows the employer that Nicola hasn't sent the same letter to many different employers.

Callout 3: This paragraph shows Nicola has researched the company she's applying to and thought about why she'd like to work for them.

Callout 4: Nicola's been very specific about the type of opportunities she's looking for.

Callout 5: Nicola highlights her relevant skills, qualifications, experience, achievements and personal qualities well here.

Callout 6: This final paragraph tells the reader what's going to happen next. It's assertive and confident without being pushy.

Source: National Careers Service, Directgov

Where to go for more tips and advice

In the appendix you will find various examples of CV and speculative letter templates – these are to give you some ideas when creating your own. Do not be tempted to copy them word for word!!

If you would like the Post 16 team to provide any advice or support with either your cover letter or CV, please make an appointment to come in and see us.

Other useful sources of information about careers and applying for jobs include:

- ✓ Direct Gov Young People's Services <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/index.htm>
- ✓ Connexions <http://www.connexionslive.com/>
- ✓ Careers South West <http://www.careerssw.org/>
- ✓ Apprenticeships <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>
- ✓ Job Centre Plus <http://jobseekers.direct.gov.uk/> (try looking for vacancies, employers may consider a work experience person instead)
- ✓ Not Going to Uni <http://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk/>
- ✓ National Careers Service <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

Example Layouts for CV's

Your Name

email@address.co.uk

07712 345678

99 Example Street, Example Town, EX4 3PL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your personal statement is perhaps the single most important part of you CV. Get it wrong and your chances of being invited to interview are drastically reduced.

Its aim is to highlight your professional attributes and goals, summarising why someone should consider your application.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Title

Company Name - www.examplelink.co.uk

Location

Dates of Employment

You should give your reader a brief introduction to what the company does and explain a bit about the responsibilities your role covered.

Key Achievements:

- Provide a list of the key achievements you have made in your job
- Try to show evidence such as percentage increases or financial figures
- Provide enough information to entice your potential employers to call you
- Always keep examples relevant to the role you are applying for

Job Title

Company Name - www.examplelink.co.uk

Location

Dates of Employment

For older jobs you should keep the details slightly shorter, only offering information that will help you reach the next stage in your career.

Key Achievements:

- Try to avoid cliché phrases that don't differentiate you as a candidate
- Always tailor your CV for each job application to match the requirements
- If something isn't relevant, don't be scared to leave it out

Job Title

Company Name - www.examplelink.co.uk

Location

Dates of Employment

If you don't currently have much work experience, consider the alternative ways of displaying your employment history.

Key Achievements:

- Avoid abbreviations that may not be known to your potential employers
- Always remember to get your CV checked by at least two people

Your Name

email@address.co.uk | 07712 345678 | 99 Example Street, Example Town, EX4 3PL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your personal statement is perhaps the single most important part of your CV. Get it wrong and your chances of being invited to interview are drastically reduced.

Its aim is to highlight your professional attributes and goals, emphasising why they should continue reading the rest of your CV.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Title | Company Name | www.examplelink.co.uk
Location | Dates of Employment

You should give your reader a brief introduction to what the company does and explain a bit about the responsibilities your role covered.

Key Achievements:

- Provide a list of the key achievements you have made in your job
- Try to show evidence such as percentage increases or financial figures
- Provide enough information to entice your potential employers to call you
- Always keep examples relevant to the role you are applying for

Job Title | Company Name | www.examplelink.co.uk
Location | Dates of Employment

For older jobs you should keep the details slightly shorter, only offering information that will help you reach the next stage in your career.

Key Achievements:

- Try to avoid cliché phrases that don't differentiate you as a job candidate
- Always tailor your CV for each job application so it matches the requirements
- If something isn't relevant, don't be scared to leave it out
- Sometimes, less is more

Job Title | Company Name | www.examplelink.co.uk
Location | Dates of Employment

If you don't currently have much work experience, consider the alternative ways of displaying your employment history.

Key Achievements:

- Avoid abbreviations that may not be known to your potential employers
- Always remember to get your CV checked by at least two people

Your Name

email@address.co.uk - 07712 345678
99 Example Street, Example Town, EX4 3PL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Here you should take a few lines, not a few paragraphs (save that for the cover letter) to quickly outline your interest in the role and why you'd be a good fit. Do not list out your skills here as they will be more relevant to employers searching for your CV within a job role listed under "**WORK EXPERIENCE**".

The aim is to highlight your professional attributes and goals, summarising why someone should consider your application.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Job Title - Dates of Employment (The date format should be Month YYYY e.g. November 2011 - May 2012)

Company Name - www.examplelink.co.uk

Location

It is very important to include your **dates of employment** regardless of whether you are still in the job you have listed. This is because Monster's CV Search will use these dates as well as the skills obtained/utilised in this time period to determine if you're what an employer is looking for.

Responsibilities:

- Provide key achievements within a role and try to highlight the skills used to obtain your goal
- Try to avoid soft terms like "high energy" and aim for skills used within the role
- Provide enough information to entice your potential employers to call you
- Always keep examples relevant to the role you are applying for

Job Title - Dates of Employment

Company Name

Location

For older jobs you should keep the details slightly shorter, remembering to include your dates of employment and key skills obtained/applied to achieve your goals.

Responsibilities:

- Try to avoid cliché phrases that don't differentiate you as a candidate
- Always tailor your CV for each job application to match the requirements
- Try not to waffle if you feel like you don't have much to write in this area. Succinct to the point CVs will be preferred as they are quick to read and won't be generic.

EDUCATION

If you are looking for your first job and do not have much or any work experience at this point - do not fret. Expand on your education responsibilities and apply them to real life scenarios so an employer has an understanding of what you have achieved and the means used to get these achievements.

Professional Body - Dates

Location

Course Title, Grade

Professional Body - Dates

Location

Course Title, Grade

Professional Body - Dates

Location

Course Title, Grade

PERSONAL INTERESTS

Feel free to list these out in bullets or in a table. If you lack experience for a role that you are deeply passionate about, you may want to mention how you use your spare time to pursue this passion. Be it in reading around the subject matter or expanding your technical skills.

REFERENCES

References are available on request

Employer Contact Tracking Sheet

Company Name	Company Address	Email Address	Contact Name	Date Email/ Letter Sent	Date for Follow Up Call	Outcome / Notes / Reminders