

# How to make the most of Work Integrated Learning:

for Students

Work Placements and Internships

STUDENTS



**Murdoch**  
UNIVERSITY

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# Participation in Murdoch University's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Work Placement Program

**Congratulations on your participation in Murdoch University's Work Integrated Learning Work Placement Program. We hope you will find it a rewarding and positive experience.**

Work Integrated Learning should be a meaningful and relevant experience that forms part of a unit or course of study and is recognised through assessment and credit points. Your involvement in WIL provides you with the opportunity to put into practice the theory you learned in your discipline as well as developing non-academic workplace skills that will greatly enhance your employability.

This handbook is designed to help you make the most of the placement experience. It includes useful tips to prepare you for your placement to ensure that all goes smoothly.



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# Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Benefits for the Student

Today, more employers are looking for graduates with experience in the workplace, graduates who understand how to apply their theoretical knowledge within a work environment and can quickly contribute to their organisation.

The possible benefits to your career of participating in a work placement can be significant - experience really is the difference.

The WIL experience provides the opportunity to achieve the following:

- Improve your resume and distinguish yourself from other graduates in the job market;
- Bridge the gap between your academic present and your professional future;
- Put academic work and theoretical understandings into practice in a work environment;
- Learn more about a particular industry and the role of an organisation before entering the labour market;
- Integrate with professional people;
- Gain an understanding and experience of a professional organisation and its culture;
- Add value to an organisation by delivering project objectives;
- Develop personal and professional competencies:
  - Communication skills, oral and non-verbal;
  - Teamwork skills;
  - Self-confidence;
  - Customer relationship management;
  - Industry and business knowledge;
  - Self-sufficiency;
  - Personal organisation;
  - Professional networks;
  - Professional ethics.

# Responsibilities

## UNIVERSITY

- **Supervision:** An academic supervisor from within your discipline will provide you with academic input and support in relation to your WIL assessment, and will be available to mediate any problems should they arise.
- **Insurance:** As an enrolled student of Murdoch University you are covered by the University's insurance, providing you are undertaking an activity that forms part of your academic course of study. Policies extend to include students whilst they are undertaking an approved or recognised activity of the University, including placements, providing that:
  - The student is not employed or remunerated in any way by the host organisation for any of the work being done; and
  - The placement has been approved by Murdoch University.
- **Paperwork for placement:** A formal agreement governing the conditions of the placement is negotiated between the University and the host organisation. As a student you will be required to sign a 'Student Agreement' between yourself and your academic supervisor. This agreement outlines details of the placement, your assessment, and your responsibilities whilst on placement.

## STUDENT

- **Conduct:** As a student of the University you should conduct yourself in a professional manner in all your dealings with the staff and clients of the host organisation; and
  - Adhere to the terms and conditions of the Student Agreement as agreed prior to the commencement of the placement;
  - Undertake the duties agreed;
  - Dress appropriately for the workplace;
  - Arrive punctually for work and any meetings that require your attendance;
  - Report any absence from work as early as is reasonably possible;
  - Report accidents immediately to the workplace supervisor and also to your academic supervisor. A University Online Incident Report should also be completed and submitted.
- **Intellectual Property:** In most instances students personally own intellectual property that they generate in the course of their studies. In relation to work placements, you may be requested to assign or license your intellectual property to meet the University's legal obligations to the host organisation. Where this is required, Murdoch University recommends that you liaise directly with your host organisation in relation to your intellectual property.

## WORKPLACE

- **Supervision:** The host organisation will be required to provide a suitably qualified employee to act in the role of your workplace supervisor. This person will be your industry mentor and will provide you with all reasonable assistance to enable you to complete your placement. This person will also act as the main point of contact for your academic supervisor.
- **Induction:** Upon commencement of the placement, the host organisation will undertake an induction process with you to orient you to the workplace environment. This should include occupational safety and health (OSH), workplace policies, and information on internal confidentiality. In some disciplines OSH may have been undertaken as part of your course of study. However, it is still important to have an OSH induction that is specific to the workplace of the host organisation.
- **Academic/Technical Content:** Murdoch University will work with the host organisation to ensure that the scope of the placement has sufficient learning content and complexity in order to meet the academic learning requirements of your course of study.
- **Awareness of academic requirements:** As a student on placement you are fulfilling an academic component of your course or unit. Workplace supervisors should be aware of your assessment tasks up front and try to accommodate wherever possible.
- **Performance assessment of the student:** On completion of the placement period the workplace supervisor may be required to assess/evaluate your performance based on criteria agreed with the academic supervisor.

# Hints and tips for Students

## PRIOR TO YOUR PLACEMENT

### **Understanding your host organisation and the environment in which it operates**

Once you have selected or have been allocated a placement, it is a good idea to find out as much as you can about the organisation in which you will work. Knowing about the organisation should help you feel more at home when you first arrive, as well as speeding up your learning curve on the placement. Key aspects you should research include:

- Location and contact details;
- Industry; main services/products;
- History and ownership;
- Corporate structure;
- If relevant, the organisation's global context.

### **Questions you should ask**

Here is a list of questions that covers the kind of information you need to know prior to commencing your placement. Discuss these items with your workplace supervisor at your initial meeting.

- What are the starting and finishing dates of your placement?
- Will you be required to get any vaccinations, a Police Check or a Working with Children Check prior to commencement?
- With whom will you be working in the organisation? Will you be working with anyone outside the organisation?
- How will your progress be monitored? (Regular meetings, goal setting, milestone completion);
- What resources will be made available for you in the workplace? (Computer, desk, telephone, photocopier etc);
- What is the dress code?  
What will your work schedule be?
- Do you need to be aware of any particular security arrangements for buildings and what are the arrangements for parking?





## Induction

You will inevitably be a little nervous on the first day of your placement, but good preparation will ensure that your adjustment to the workplace is as smooth as possible.

Your host organisation should provide you with a thorough induction. This should ensure you know the following:

- You know the working hours and when your lunch breaks are;
- You have been introduced to staff and their roles have been explained;
- You know where your work space is;
- The organisation's structure has been explained to you;

- Car parking or public transport arrangements have been explained;
- You know what to do in an emergency;
- You are aware of first-aid arrangements and accident reporting procedures;
- You are aware of fire procedures;
- You know the relevant Occupational Safety and Health regulations;

### *Where required*

- Safe handling procedures have been demonstrated to you;
- Protective clothing arrangements have been explained;
- You have received instruction on equipment use.

## DURING YOUR PLACEMENT

### • **Communication Skills**

Communication includes speaking, e.g. one-to-one discussion, meetings, group forums, via telephone, writing (emails, letters, reports) as well as listening, understanding and engaging.

- Learn how to talk to different people and realise that people need to be communicated with in different ways;
- Think of all written communication as a formal document, including emails, letters and reports;
- Seek opportunities to engage others in conversation, speak publicly or make formal presentations whenever possible;
- Know the name and role of the person you are talking to;
- If you are required to make a formal presentation, plan a practice run beforehand;
- Allow time to proof-read your documents to check your spelling, grammar and format.

### • **Self-confidence**

In an academic environment you are used to your performance being quantitative, based on grades. In the workplace your performance is subjective, based on the perception of others. Relax and enjoy the experience rather than becoming overawed.

- At the start of your placement, work with your workplace supervisor to establish what is expected of you and the goals you are aiming to achieve;

- Be patient and realistic, it is impossible to know everything about the organisation from the outset;
- Understand that asking questions is not a weakness because asking for help actually shows a willingness to learn;
- Focus on what you do know and how much you are improving every day rather than what you don't know;
- Request feedback and be prepared to take on constructive criticism without being defensive;
- Reflect positively on your mistakes because nobody is perfect and throughout life we improve by reflecting on better ways of doing things.

### • **Personal Organisation**

- Create an action plan for each of your goals by breaking down big tasks into smaller tasks;
- Schedule a recurring meeting with your workplace supervisor to discuss your performance against the goals you have set in your action plan;
- Alert your workplace supervisor if you feel you have a problem that you cannot resolve;
- Alert your workplace supervisor if you feel overwhelmed and ask them to help you prioritise your tasks;
- Diarise meetings and important deadlines;
- Don't punish yourself with perfectionism.

- **Customer Relationship Management**

Success for all organisations is about pleasing the customer - either by the provision of an efficient service or an excellent product. As a student in the workplace you must understand the importance of interacting with each stakeholder group appropriately.

- Ask your workplace supervisor to brief you on the customers of their organisation;
- Remember, the better you know your customers, the more informed you will be to do your job;
- Attend as many events as possible to interact with your customers;
- Respect all customers and realise that your role only exists because you have them.

- **Professional Networks**

Relationship building is important in most industries and there are clear advantages to being well known for the right reasons. Building a network of contacts is the best way to maximise your job opportunities in any career.

- Introduce yourself to as many people as possible;
- Identify like-minded people that you might want to work with in the future;
- Keep a list of contacts and their profile, e.g. role and organisation;
- Research as much information as possible about new contacts so that you are able to use this association effectively in the future;

- Sell your capabilities at every possible opportunity. However, take care not to oversell yourself as this can increase expectations which you may not be able to fulfill.

- **Professional Ethics**

- Be loyal to the organisation;
- Be professional by treating your work placement as if you were in a permanent job;
- Be respectful of others because people always remember the way you made them feel;
- Use professional language because colloquial language may offend some people;
- Enquire about the values, codes of conduct and regulations at your organisation;
- Respect confidentiality and use discretion in comments to third parties;
- Observe the conduct of other members of staff for guidance;
- Be reliable, i.e. say what you are going to do and do what you say;
- Take responsibility for your actions and be honest about your mistakes;
- Be punctual to the daily routines of the organisation;
- Dress appropriately.

# REFLECTING ON YOUR WIL PLACEMENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE



Reflection should be an explicit objective of your WIL learning experience. The objective of reflection is to learn from your experience. The following sequential steps should assist with your reflection.

- **Work Description:** Describe your experience in detail, including what you were doing; what other people were doing; the context of the event; what happened, and the overall outcome.
- **Feelings and Thoughts:** Reflect on your self-awareness by recalling what was going on inside your head, including how you were feeling and what you were thinking when the placement started. How did the people you were working with make you feel? Then consider how you felt at the end of the placement. In hindsight what did you think about your experience?
- **Evaluation:** Consider what was good and bad about your experience.
- **Analysis:** Break down your placement experience into component parts to be explored separately in detail, including what went well, what you and others did well, what went wrong, and what you and others did that could be improved.
- **Conclusion:** Make some concluding judgments based on the information you explored during the 'analysis' stage.
- **Action Plan:** Think forward in anticipation of encountering a similar experience and reflect on what you would do the same and what you would do differently.



**References:**

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University of South Australia, Careers Services; *Work Placement Scheme; Student Information Kit* (2010).

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