STUDENT WORK EXPERIENCE GUIDE:
HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE WHILE AT UNI

Work experience is an important component in preparing you for your career after university study. It provides you with an experiential learning environment in which to acquire, develop and apply graduate attributes such as Professional Readiness and Effective Communication. A work experience placement also gives you an opportunity to build a network of contacts in a particular industry that may be useful when seeking full-time employment.

In some FASS courses, for instance Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism), work experience is an essential part of the degree award. All Teacher Education students are required to complete a minimum number of hours on school-based practice for professional accreditation.

Even though you may not be required to undertake a work experience placement as part of your degree, you may voluntarily choose to do this to boost your skills and improve your CV. If you can demonstrate that a voluntary placement will enhance your graduate attributes FASS staff will support you in a number of ways – as outlined in the guidance which follows.

Your rights and obligations

As a student of FASS you may be required to undertake some form of Course Related Work Experience to gain an award. As part of FASS’s commitment to prepare students for their chosen careers, the university also supports Voluntary Work Placements, where these can be demonstrated to contribute towards a student’s achievement of their graduate attributes.

Fair Work Australia has issued guidance on the legitimacy of different types of unpaid work. The parts which are most relevant to students of FASS are summarised in this guide.

If you are likely to be working with children during your placement it is your responsibility to ensure that you have completed the Working With Children Check. Teacher Education students will be advised on the completion of this check as a matter of course.

Types of unpaid work experience

Unpaid work experience involves a short-term placement with an organisation other than FASS. The placement provides you with an opportunity to advance your learning goals in a field related to your course and intended career. The terms ‘internship’, ‘work experience’, ‘professional experience’, ‘professional practice’, ‘vocational placement’ and ‘work placement’ are interchangeable and fall under the first two types of unpaid work experience:

- **Course Related Work Experience**: Student work placement as part of a compulsory component of a course. The work experience may take the form of an organised placement or internship with an organisation, or a site visit at an off-campus location. Additionally, there are specific subjects within UTS:Communication and the Bachelor of Global Studies that have a compulsory work experience component.
• **Voluntary Work Placement**: A student work placement which is not a formal part of the course or subject of study but is deemed to contribute towards a student’s course intended learning outcomes.

• **Site Visit (supervised and unsupervised)**: Short project work which takes place off-campus as part of a compulsory component of a course or subject. For instance, a film shoot or media interview.

See the Glossary and Forms for a complete list of terms.

**Course Related Work Experience**

The Fair Work Act recognises Course Related Work Experience as being exempt from the provisions of the Act, so long as there is no expectation or requirement of productivity while the student is on his/her placement. The principle consequence of this classification is that the student is not entitled to the minimum wage and other entitlements provided in the National Employment Standards and modern awards.

It’s important to note that exclusion from coverage under the FW Act does not limit any obligations that may arise under other legislation, including workers compensation laws, OH&S, discrimination and other relevant laws.

**Voluntary Work Placement**

Voluntary Work Placements can be lawful in some instances. To be lawful, host organisations need to ensure that the participating student is not an employee working under a form of contract.

Determining whether an employment contract is in place is not as simple as whether or not a written signed agreement exists. Such a determination must instead be based on the circumstances of each particular case. As such, it is not possible to provide a simple or comprehensive analysis of the legal status of various forms of unpaid work.

When assessing whether the parties intended to form a legally binding employment relationship some key indicators would be:

• **Purpose of the arrangement**. Was it to provide work experience to the student or was it to get the person to do work to assist with the business outputs and productivity?

• **Length of time**. Generally, the longer the period of placement, the more likely the person is an employee.

• **The person’s obligations in the workplace**. Although the person may do some productive activities during a placement, they are less likely to be considered an employee if there is no expectation or requirement of productivity in the workplace.

• **Who benefits from the arrangement**? The main benefit of a genuine work placement or internship should flow to the person doing the placement. If a business is gaining a significant benefit as a result of engaging the person, this may indicate an employment relationship has been formed. Unpaid work experience programs are less likely to involve employment if they are primarily observational.

• **Was the placement entered into via an advertisement on the FASS or UTS noticeboard**? If so, then it is highly unlikely that an employment relationship exists.
STEPs TO SECURING AND SUCCEEDING IN YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENT

1. Research possible host organisations
   - A. Plan early
   - B. Research potential organisations
   - C. Carefully consider which organisations match your skills
   - D. Explore a particular field of interest
   - E. Speak to UTS staff

2. Build your proposal
   - A. Create your own proposal
   - B. Prepare a cover letter
   - C. Match your intended learning outcomes to the placement
   - D. Build a strong resume
   - E. Do not overcommit
   - F. Keep your options open
   - G. Be flexible

3. Approach possible host organisations
   - A. Your first contact with a potential host organisation should be by email
   - B. Be ready to state your proposal in as succinct a manner as possible
   - C. Create a checklist of points and questions to make during your call
   - D. Practice the call
   - E. Ask questions
   - F. Write a thank you letter
   - G. Follow up by phone

4. Making your pitch at interviews
   - A. Be prepared
   - B. Expect tricky questions
   - C. Practice the interview
   - D. Attend an ‘Interview Success’ workshop
   - E. Market yourself
   - F. Seek feedback

5. Getting your paperwork approved
   - A. Get approved
   - B. Familiarise yourself with your obligations
   - C. Introduce yourself
   - D. Stay in touch
   - E. Create a ‘to-do’ list
   - F. Keep yourself safe
   - G. Promptly report absences and other issues

6. Getting the most out of your work experience
1. Research possible host organisations

To find the right placement you may either apply to an advertised position on the Careers Service vacancies board or approach a possible host organisation directly. Whichever way you choose, you will need to research the organisation thoroughly to ensure the experience to be gained matches your Course Intended Learning Outcomes and career goals.

A. It is important that you plan early for your work experience. You may need a few weeks to identify the right organisations to approach, while many potential host organisations will work to fill internship positions to a timetable of up to six months from the date of application.

Initially, you should explore the website of all organisations you are particularly interested in working for to see if they provide information on vacation work or internship opportunities. Check Job Vacancies advertised online by the Careers Service at: http://scmapp.itd.uts.edu.au/scm/jobw.

B. There are many ways to research potential organisations but you can learn a lot about an organisation from its website. As you browse a site, make notes on the mission statement, new products or services and the type of work culture it espouses. Search Google News for articles on the organisation and its products or services to broaden your understanding.

C. In your planning, carefully consider which organisations match your skills. You will have strengths to utilise in a work environment and there will be skills you will want to develop to become a better candidate in the future. It is helpful to look at position descriptions for jobs you may want in the future to analyse what selection criteria you meet now, and how you will meet them all in the future.

D. You should explore a particular field of interest. Placements also afford you the opportunity to experience working in an industry or sector in which you have a passion. You may have a keen interest in a sport or community program which would benefit from your skills, while also developing your professional readiness in that field. An important benefit from your work experience will be in developing your understanding of your core values and how they motivate you in the workplace.

E. Speak to UTS staff from the Careers Service, your Work Experience Coordinator and subject coordinators for advice on what type of placement may be best for you.

Top tips:
A. Plan early
B. Research potential organisations
C. Carefully consider which organisations match your skills
D. Explore a particular field of interest
E. Speak to UTS staff
2. Building your proposal

An advertised work experience position is likely to have pre-determined goals set by the host organisation, though there may be some flexibility in adapting these to suit a student’s own desired outcomes. Details on how to approach the organisation will be included in the advertisement.

A. If you approach an organisation directly, you will be expected to create your own proposal for the possible placement, in the form of a cover letter. An organisation that does not routinely host work placements will be more receptive to your approach if you produce a clear proposal outlining how you can contribute to their mission. Even if the position is an advertised role, you are encouraged to discuss with your Internships Coordinator and host organisation how your areas of intended development will be enhanced by the placement.

B. Prepare a cover letter that clearly expresses your interest in a work placement particular to the organisation to which you are applying. Some advice on writing cover letters can be found on the Student Services website at [http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/applications/resumes.html](http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/applications/resumes.html). Your resume and cover letter together form your ‘proposal pack’.

C. The most important element of your proposal is to match your intended learning outcomes to the placement. This should therefore provide the overarching structure to your cover letter. Your course will have Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) or Course Aims, which can be found in the Handbook. Against two or three CILOs be clear about what duties you wish to undertake and how the work will contribute to their development and to the host organisation.

D. Build a strong resume to attach to your proposal. Your resume should be tailored to each organisation you apply to in order for it to be relevant to what they’re looking for in an intern. Check out the advice pages from the Student Services Unit at [http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/applications/resumes.html](http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/careers/applications/resumes.html). Successful in applying to more than one position, you will be able to reanalyse your options and be sure you are getting the best work experience.

E. You will need to outline the time period for the placement. In doing so, be careful that you do not overcommit in terms of both time and what you will be able to contribute to the organisation during that timeframe. You may find it helpful to break down what you can achieve into chunks of time, for instance on a week to week basis.

F. Be prepared to apply for more than one position as it’s highly unlikely your first approach will be successful. You should therefore keep your options open by building three or four (or more!) proposals which, in the event that you are successful in applying to more than one position, you will be able to reanalyse your options and be sure you are getting the best work experience.

G. If your first choice organisation suggests changes to your proposal then prepare to be flexible about your role. The host representative will naturally know more about the work environment of the organisation and their input should be taken on board as far as possible.

Top tips:

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<th>Create your own proposal</th>
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3. Approaching possible host organisations

A. When applying for unadvertised placements your first contact with a potential host organisation should be by email. First impressions count so be especially vigilant over the spelling, grammar and presentation of your proposal pack. If in doubt, ask your Internships Coordinator to check it over before you hit ‘Send’.

B. If you have not received a reply from your email within one week then you should follow-up by calling. The aim of the call is to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the prospective placement host. You may be either cold (contacting someone unannounced) or warm (contacting someone who may be expecting your approach) calling but, in each, case be ready to state your proposal in as succinct a manner as possible. Do not assume that the contact has read your proposal beforehand (or retained the salient information if they have done so). In your original letter, let the contact know that you will be phoning them regarding your interest within a week or so.

In particular, be prepared to:
• Explain why you are phoning and ask if they have time to discuss your interest in working for their organisation (don’t be offended if they don’t have the time when you call – ask when would be more convenient);
• State the date and time that you sent a copy of your proposal and resume;
• Answer questions about what you have to offer the organisation and why you’re seeking employment with them;
• Use a professional telephone manner;
• Demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in the organisation, and;
• If all goes well, arrange a time and place to meet face-to-face to further discuss your proposal.

C. Create a checklist of points and questions to make during your call. Do not make notes to read from as your speech will appear stilted and you will be tempted to use this information as a crutch. However, leave space next to your checklist to make notes during the call.

D. Once you have identified the person to speak to and have your checklist, you’re almost ready to make the call! But before you do so, practice the call to familiarise yourself with proposal and what you can contribute to the team. The best way to do this is to find someone to play the part of the organisation contact, with a brief to act disinterested and unresponsive (just in case!).

E. During the call remember to sound positive and informed but it’s OK that you don’t know everything about the organisation. It’s a good idea to ask questions too, for instance “I saw on your website that your company has recently produced a new range of widgets, was the marketing strategy designed by an in-house team or by external consultants?”

F. Immediately after the call, while the experience is still fresh, write a thank you letter to the person you spoke to. Include a brief summary of your conversation and, if appropriate, resend your cover letter and resume.

G. If you haven’t heard back regarding a face-to-face meeting by the scheduled time, it is perfectly acceptable to follow up by phone. Politely state that you are calling to check on the status of your application and whether any further information is required. Once again, the goal of the conversation is to secure a firm commitment on a face-to-face meeting or formal interview.

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Top tips:
A. Your first contact with a potential host organisation should be by email
B. Be ready to state your proposal in as succinct a manner as possible
C. Create a checklist of points and questions to make during your call
D. Practice the call
E. Ask questions
F. Write a thank you letter
G. Follow up by phone
4. Making your pitch at interviews

A. In order to be prepared for your interview, you should refer back to your prior research on the organisation and the notes you have made in your conversations with the organisation host. Preparing involves you thinking and writing about specific examples of how you have previously demonstrated particular behaviours (skills, attributes) that the organisation is looking for. These will include the selection criteria found in an advertisement (if applicable), and any other skills and experience that you think would be useful in a particular role or position of interest.

Many employers will use a mix of traditional and behaviourally-based questions when interviewing job applicants.

Use these sample questions to help you prepare.

B. Though an interviewer rarely tries to flummox a candidate, they may ask some awkward questions. To counter this, expect tricky questions, such as “what do you hope to be doing in 3-5 years?” and “what is your greatest weakness?” which are often designed to give you the opportunity to talk about your characteristics as an individual and how these influence your practices in the workplace.

For examples of good responses to questions such as these, have a look at the Careers Service’s awkward questions page.

C. Practice is part and parcel of good interview preparation. The more you practice the interview with a friend (who can use a sample of questions from the list in section A), the better you will be able to remember and communicate the examples you have prepared. With more practice comes more confidence, and the more confident you are the more likely you will be to enjoy the interview experience!

D. In addition to your own practice, make sure to attend an ‘Interview Success’ workshop run by the Careers Service. Upcoming workshops are found at http://scmapp.itd.uts.edu.au/scm/wksweb, last for one hour and provide you with expert advice on your technique.

E. On the day itself, remember that, though the interviewer/s will have your resume, they know very little about you and this is your chance to tell them. There are many ways to market yourself during the interview; simple ways include being on time and dressing professionally. Other ways include looking relaxed (even if you don’t feel it!) and asking questions when invited to.

F. In the event that you are not offered a work experience placement, be sure to seek feedback from the lead interviewer on how your interview could have gone better. In fact, even if you are successful, it is a good idea to speak to someone on the panel to receive advice that can be used to improve your interview technique in the future.

Top tips:

A. Be prepared
B. Expect tricky questions
C. Practice the interview
D. Attend an ‘Interview Success’ workshop
E. Market yourself
F. Seek feedback
5. Getting your paperwork approved

A. To get agreement for the placement the student, organisation and UTS must all sign the appropriate forms at least 3 days prior to the commencement of the placement.

The Agreement is not an employment contract and the student is neither an employee of UTS or the organisation in relation to the placement.

Procedures for completing all forms can be found on the FASS Work Experience Placements webpage.

B. If your work experience is unpaid you are required to get insured and must apply for University indemnification. If you receive any form of gratuity or reward for work undertaken, then the University insurance program will not extend to you. In a paid employment situation, as an employee of a receiving organisation, you should be covered by the organisation’s workers’ compensation and public liability insurance.

Except where they are in paid employment, students undertaking Course Related Work Experience placements are covered by the University’s insurance policy as follows:

• Professional indemnity — for a breach of professional duty and/or the execution of professional activities by reason of act, error or omission
• Public liability — for negligence by the student resulting in injury and/or property damage
• Personal accident — for students who have an accident while on placement, which prevents them from earning their usual form of income. Limited hospital and medical expenses and permanent disablement and accidental death benefits also apply
  • Medical malpractice where applicable
  • Corporate travel — for students on approved travel.

If the organisation is deemed to have acted negligently and contributed towards an incident then the organisation will be liable.

UTS provides public liability and personal accident “Indemnity Certificates” to students as a matter of course and these should then be passed to host organisations. The indemnity forms do not limit the obligations/liabilities of the receiving organisation, nor does it increase our liabilities/obligations.

The Indemnity Certificates may be authorised by the Internships Coordinators, provided the following information is provided:

• Name and number of the student;
• Name and address of the receiving organisation;
• Site address;
• Approximate or actual date/s of the site visit/s or work experience or similar activity, and;
• Where appropriate, the names of all voluntary workers participating in the student’s project.

Top tips:

A. Get agreement
B. Get insured
6. Getting the most out of your work experience

A. Before your first day, it’s a good idea to get in contact with the host organisation. This will demonstrate your enthusiasm for the role and gives you the chance to clarify any arrangements you are not sure about. For instance, don’t be afraid to check what you need to bring on the day for HR purposes, the hours of work, where you will be based, workplace attire and who should ask for upon arriving.

B. You are bound by the rules, policies and procedures of UTS whilst on placement. **Familiarise yourself with your obligations** as a UTS student and take them seriously. By conducting yourself in the appropriate manner you will create a better impression on the host organisation.

C. Your first day is the time to make some good impressions! Even though you may be at the organisation for only a short time, take care to **introduce yourself** to as many people as you can. Don’t worry too much about remembering everyone’s names and don’t be afraid to ask them again later if you’ve forgotten. A good technique to help with this is to repeat their names back, “nice to meet you, Sally,” “Hello, Tony, I’m Angie. I’m a student from UTS working with the Communications team for three weeks.” When you return to your desk sketch out the layout of the office and write the names of as many people as you can remember for future reference.

D. In planning to undertake your workplace tasks, you may find it helpful to **create a to-do list**. This list would be formed of the high-level tasks in your job description, as well as day-to-day activities that will help you achieve your overall goals. The list can also be used to keep track of your achievements and progress towards the educational outcomes you have set in developing your graduate attributes – it thus becomes a ‘done’ list.

E. **Stay in touch** with your Work Experience or Subject Coordinator while on your placement in order to benefit from academic mentoring, feedback and ongoing review of progress. Your time on placement will seem extremely short but it is important to make time to take stock with your UTS support network as much as possible. This will give you the best chance of maximising your experience and developing your attributes.

The advice to stay in touch extends to contacts you make in the workplace after your placement. Even if the host organisation is unable to offer you a full-time position in the future, the network of referees and industry insiders you gather can be invaluable in assisting you in meeting your career goals.

F. Your ultimate priority while on placement is to **keep yourself safe**. You must comply with any reasonable safety instructions, rules or procedures of the host organisation, such as wearing safety gear. You must complete a **Health and Safety Checklist** prior to commencing your placement.

In the event of an accident, injury or safety incident whilst on placement, students must notify their Work Experience Coordinator and/or Subject Coordinator, as well as the host organisation as soon as practicable. You must also complete a **Personal Accident Claim Form** if medical assistance was required.

G. In dealing with absences, conflict or other difficulties during your placement your primary point of contact is with your workplace supervisor, followed by your Work Placement and/or Subject Coordinator. Be sure to **promptly report absences and other issues**.

**Top tips:**
A. Clarify any arrangements you are not sure about
B. Familiarise yourself with your obligations
C. Introduce yourself
D. Create a to-do list
E. Stay in touch
F. Keep yourself safe
G. Promptly report absences and other issues