

Starting a Placement

Objectives

To give you the resources to prepare and nail your first day

Relevance

This would be most relevant to those about to start a placement

Specific Outcomes

A checklist for the first day of placement for you to complete

*“For me, networking is about so much more than just being friendly. It is a core component of what we should do as practitioners. That is we should develop and cultivate rapport and mutual relationships with those around us”
PhD Student*

Having an intern enter a new workplace is, for most organisations, something that they aren't used to. Their normal induction systems often don't apply. With a little bit of planning and effort on our part though, we can use the first part of a placement as an opportunity to set ourselves up for success. This worksheet is designed to give you a set of early integration goals and a checklist to aid in starting your placement well.

Make friends

Networking and integrating yourself into an organisation mostly comes down to building relationships with your co-workers. Try for the first couple of weeks to talk to as many people as you can, try to learn people's names and attend any team lunches. Quickly developing professional relationships is a key skill in our profession. Many placement projects require you to rely on your co-workers, so building relationships is something that might be necessary to successfully meet your obligations to the organisation. We really suggest you consider spending the first couple of weeks at the organisation getting to know everyone and integrating yourself into the team.

The role of a student is not to be just a student

Many students take on the role of the 'student' in the back of the room. For those that just want to check off the hours, that might work for you. However this is one of your only opportunities to explore the profession (in a safe environment) and develop your confidence and competence as a professional. Entering a workplace as a team member and fellow (albeit junior) professional is what most supervisors expect of us. Try to take on this professional persona, and if you don't feel it, then our best advice is to fake it until you become it. Please remember though that faking an air of professionalism does not mean pretending you can do things you can't.

Checklist for the first day

There are often so many very important things to consider on the first day of placement that those often lofty goals of developing great relationships can fall by the wayside. To help you remember some of the key things you need to address before you start, you might like to use the following checklist.

*“In hindsight, I really wish I had made a list of everything I had to do and consider leading up to the first day of placement. I was so nervous and excited on my first day that I didn’t check obvious things such as where I would park and that amplified a lot of the less helpful emotions.”
Masters Student*

- Do you have WIL insurance?
- Are you dressed professionally?
- Have you got lunch (or know where you are getting lunch)?
- Do you have all the materials and equipment you need, e.g. books, stationery?
- Do you know how you will be managing your paperwork for this placement?
- Do you when (date and time) you are to start and finish?
- Do you know the address of the organisation?
- Do you know how to get there? Do you know the route or public transport options?
- If public transport, have you got money on your go card?
- If driving, have you considered traffic and parking at that time of day?
- Have you accounted for building sign in procedures in your estimations of time?
- Have you got a hard copy of the specific office, floor or building, or campus maps?
- Do you have your supervisor/line manager’s number?
- Do you know a little bit about the organisation?
- If applicable, have you conducted all pre-entry orientations (e.g. fire safety, OH&S)
- Have you reviewed your placement contract?
- Do they definitely know you are coming?

Professional Competence

Believing in yourself and that you can be a valuable asset to an organisation is something that is really important for us in our careers. Yet developing this sense of professional competence is hard. Some people develop it towards the end of the first year, others after they graduate, and yet others practice for decades and still don't feel it. Developing your sense of professional competence will require you to reflect on and try to understand what you are or aren't capable of and recognising your value to organisations. We are all usually very good at identifying our weaknesses, and most of us are great at taking on criticisms. Something much harder for us all is to deal with the discomfort of honestly and genuinely learning and acknowledging our strengths. Being transparent, accurate and honest about these to others is harder still. We've decided to include this in this worksheet because the amount of effort it takes is for some massive, and placements and the mentoring relationships that you might have with some of your supervisors are a perfect forum in which to start this process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this worksheet has been to help you figure out what you need to do and the role you need to adopt to make the most of your placement. Act like a professional and a team member. Be social, and develop the genuine relationships that you will need to make this placement as successful as possible. Don't forget there are lots of little things you can do to make the your start a success, so use the checklist provided or develop your own. But above all, use the placement to learn about your capabilities, strengths and interests.

*Portraying yourself in a professional manner is multidimensional. To me, it involves than how you physically present yourself, but acting according to the professional identity I've worked to build and what it means to me to be a (future) organisational psychologist. I recognise that professional competence is never achieved and that we'll all have to continue to work hard to develop it.
Masters Student*