

10 Top Tips to Finding Meaningful Work Experience

Many schools provide students with an opportunity to do either one or two weeks' work experience during Year 10 or 11. This is a really exciting opportunity for your son or daughter and obviously needs planning if they are to get the most from this experience.

1. The first thing your son or daughter needs to consider is **what they want to gain from their work experience**. Do they want to use this as an opportunity to:
 - gain insight into a particular career that they already have an interest in? Such as physiotherapy, journalism, speech and language therapy.
 - give them a better understanding of a particular sector/career to help them decide if they would be suited to this area?
 - help them get a foot in the door for a future Saturday/Sunday job?
2. Having established what they want to get from their work experience, the next step is to **research where they might be able to do this work experience**. It is probably easiest to start by using the internet to find the name of local organisations or companies. Don't forget to think of any contacts you may already have in these areas - it will obviously be easier if you know someone who works there. **Make sure you start early!** John Lewis, for example, recruits work experience students in October to start the following June/July.
3. Do bear in mind that a **DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) background check is required** for someone going on work experience if they are aged 16 or over and if their placement will involve regular contact with children or vulnerable adults.
4. Start by making a quick phone call to **establish if the company or organisation offers work experience to pupils**. The last thing you want to do is invest time and effort into a company that does not take work experience students.
5. If they do offer work experience, ask them to **outline what your son or daughter needs to do next**. They will probably want to see a copy of their CV and after that if they are interested will arrange a meeting or interview to meet your son or daughter.
6. If they don't offer work experience or seem unsure, your son or daughter should take this as an opportunity to **sell the concept and benefits to them**. Remember for the company it is:
 - **Two weeks unpaid help** in a variety of the unskilled/semi-skilled roles. If your son or daughter has got some specific skills that they can offer even better. IT, artistic, creative and organisational skills for example might be very useful to a small company.
 - **Excellent PR**. I have seen a letter of thanks from a work experience student displayed at my local garage. I was very impressed that they supported my local community.

Although you might think initially that work experience will be easy to arrange you might be surprised. Not everywhere will take work experience students. Some companies that will may already have agreed to have a student with them and are unable to commit to

any more. That's why it is essential to start early. Remember you may be competing with pupils from other local schools as well.

7. **Health and safety is important** and work experience students should be covered by the employers' existing workplace risk assessments. Do let your son or daughter's school know of your arrangements so that they can undertake any further health and safety checks if necessary.
8. **Agree the working arrangements before you begin.** You don't want to find that your son or daughter has been assigned to do the washing up for two weeks! This is particularly important if this is the first time the company has taken on a work experience student. It might be useful to get in touch with the company again about two weeks before the agreed start date to confirm dates and times. This will also act as a reminder to them.
9. **Make sure your son or daughter keeps a diary or at least some notes about the key things they learn.** This is particularly important if they are doing this experience to help decide if they want to go into that area of work. They might also find these notes useful to refer to if and when they apply for university or another opportunity.
10. **Be sure that your son or daughter formally thanks the employer** at the end of the work experience period. If appropriate they could let them know what they enjoyed and learnt from the work experience. This might help the company when taking on other work experience students in the future and may be useful for your son or daughter if they need a reference in the future.

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