



## WORK PLACE PRE-VISITS AND FIRST DAY

The following notes are intended to help you through the inevitable nerves around starting at your work placement. A visit prior to your first day can really help, if it is possible.

### WORK PLACEMENT PRE-VISIT

**Locating your placement:** When setting off to find your placement for your pre-visit make sure that you have a map or a good idea of where you are going. Finding your way in a new city is always tough for the first few days. Be prepared for the fact that occasionally placements may not be well sign-posted or labelled. Often there are no street numbers on high street shops and offices and if your work place is not on the ground floor, the signs to it may well be inside an entrance hall or at a building reception.

**Be sure to take the sheet of paper giving you the name and address of your work place and the name of who will be looking after you.**

**"I can't find my placement! It doesn't exist":** Your placement certainly does exist but finding it can be hard. For nearly every group trip there will be one or two students who can't find their placement on their first attempt and they worry.

If you have genuinely tried to find your placement and you can't, speak to your host family/accommodation centre or contact the Blue Stamp office. We are all here to help and expect some students to encounter problems when finding their placement. We will help you find your placement (e.g. by telephoning your work-place for better directions). Sometimes the names of work placements are not marked very clearly or perhaps there is no building, street or house number. These are all common problems. None of them are insurmountable.

**"My work place looks grotty. It's in a really dodgy area of town!":** We sometimes hear this kind of report on the day before students start work when they visit their placement. Remember that any town that is closed on a Sunday or Bank Holiday with few people about (and maybe on a grey day with rain or no sunshine) will always look a bit dreary. Wait until the shops and offices open up on a weekday - there is usually plenty of life in the streets and all will take on an entirely new appearance. **Don't be too quick to judge!** Many areas of Europe have extensive graffiti on the walls and lots of shops have shutters. This is not uncommon and not usually anything to worry about.

**"My work place is a really long way away":** Most placements will be reasonably close to your accommodation and many students will be able to walk to work or take a short tram, metro or bus ride. A few students will need to travel 20-40 minutes or, in special circumstances, even more, to work. We are here to help you find the best way to get to work, and information on public transport will normally be provided on your placement confirmation sheet. Some of the placements that are further afield are ones that we believe are well worth travelling to judging from feedback from students who have visited the placements in the past.

Often the best way to see a city that you are staying visiting is to walk. Take a scenic route to work.

Google Maps often over-estimates the times it takes to walk somewhere (it takes an average speed not a healthy, fit teenager purposefully walking to work!) If you have estimated your journey on Google Maps take the timings with a pinch of salt.

## YOUR FIRST DAY AT YOUR WORK PLACEMENT

You are embarking on a tried and tested programme. We expect that it will be relatively straight forwards but some students have experienced issues. Below is some advice to help you avoid some common pit-falls and make the most of your trip.

**Getting to your placement:** If you've been unable to do a pre-visit for any reason, leave plenty of time to get there. Most students find their work placement without any trouble.

If you need to use transport, ask passengers, the bus or tram driver which stops are best to use. Listen to announcements and those around you.

If you get off at the wrong place, take a wrong bus, tram, turn or you get lost - don't panic! Ask for directions and try to get back on track.

If all else fails, telephone your work placement. (1 student in 50 gets lost on their first day. It happens - don't worry unduly about it.)

If you are genuinely lost, then don't panic, ring the emergency number or Blue Stamp offices. (We may ask you to use WhatsApp share my location feature if you have this app on your phone.)

**"They speak too fast at my placement - I can't understand them!":** Often students find the people that they work with speak very fast or have a difficult accent. This is quite normal and it does sometimes take a few days to get used to accents and the speed of speaking. Don't give up. You will soon get the hang of the language if you stick at it. Many students have commented in the past how much their listening and speaking skills improve after just a few days.

**"Nobody speaks to me.":** Establishing relationships and getting on with people in a foreign country and in a foreign language can sometimes take a little time. Don't be too quick to judge. Use the student booklet provided with example questions that you can ask your fellow workers or supervisor to help you initiate conversation and demonstrate your level of language ability and understanding. If you take the trouble to initiate some conversations, they will soon realise your ability in the language and will speak to you more easily.

**"I don't like my work placement":** Occasionally we hear students worrying about different working conditions, hours and practices. Try to remember that working abroad will be different, customs, practices and working hours will vary. It will also sometimes take time to get to know people. **Don't judge too early! Give things a chance.** Not everyone will be working in the Ritz, although some may be!

Small places are often more friendly and can offer better, more intimate and friendlier experiences. Some of the best work experience placements we have are in small bars, bakeries, restaurants, hotels, newspaper shops and the likes. It usually doesn't take too long to learn the skills and the vocabulary required and you will soon start to feel a sense of achievement. In small businesses though, even the bosses and owners undertake some menial tasks at some point through the week. Muck in and be positive. A mix of tasks is quite common with more involved or tricky tasks coming later in the week when you are more familiar with the business and the language involved.

**"There was nothing to do":** This can actually be an advantage. It may give you a chance to find your way around and learn who is who, where things are kept or some new skills you'll need. It

may give staff or your supervisor a chance to talk to you and explain things to you, rather than having to try to start work at full speed without having the time to settle in. It sometimes takes time to learn the routine and vocabulary of where you are going to be working. If you are working in a cafe or shop for example, there may be very few customers in the early hours of work. Business have busy and quiet times – it is quite normal.

Be positive and make allowances on the first day if your boss or supervisor is busy and takes a bit of time to get around to you. You'll benefit more from any work experience by having a positive, helpful and understanding attitude. Just like in the UK, all the employers who participate in our work experience programme do so unpaid. Things can sometimes seem a bit slow to start with but don't give up - stick with it. Things will get easier and better.

***The more you put in, the more you will get out!*** : Sometimes students expect their employers to make all the moves. If you can see tasks that need doing and take some initiative yourself by offering to do things, you will probably get on better than the student who sits around waiting for someone to speak to them or tell them what to do.

Many students have been offered summer jobs and paid employment following their work experience trip thanks to their helpful positive attitude and willingness "to get involved and do whatever was asked of them - including smiling at customers!" If you want a good reference/report, or even future work abroad try to make a good impression.

***"Smiling at people, body language - "Non-Verbal Communication":*** Sometimes open, approachable and friendly body language can help students to establish good relationships and make contact with other staff and customers. Be prepared to smile and look keen to work. Try to be positive about doing routine tasks and be helpful and thorough in what you do.

## **PROBLEMS AT YOUR WORK PLACEMENT**

***Genuinely serious problems at work:*** We are used to dealing with almost every eventuality and we know that sometimes there can be very genuine problems that need to be addressed or solved. For example, the student who chose to work with animals but who found she was allergic to fur! Within minutes of arriving at the pet-shop where they had been placed, they were sneezing and their eyes were red and itchy. Obviously, this student couldn't stay working in an environment to which they were allergic.

For these very rare and unusual eventualities we have arrangements with a few employers who will take an extra student at short notice. Remember these situations are rare and obviously unavoidable. We cannot change a student's work place without a very good, genuine, reason.

***You are there to WORK:*** Work experience is what you're about. The employers are not paid to have you and are having to do their normal work whilst looking after you at the same time. You will be asked to do some quite ordinary and boring tasks. Please do them willingly - it will show that you have understood, are willing to do the tasks set and will create a good impression and no doubt lead to other more interesting things! Work experience abroad should be fun but it is not really a 'holiday' in the same sense as other trips that you may have been on.

## **MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES**

***How much can you expect to learn?:*** It would be a tall order to expect you to become totally fluent in a week! Most students, however, find the experience very rewarding and find that their confidence is boosted enormously through having had to speak, listen and work in the target language environment. Many students mention how much better they feel they will perform in

orals or listening exams and how much easier they find it is to speak and understand after just one week. You'll probably speak more in a week than in a terms' worth of lessons at school.

Don't forget that as well as the language skills that you will develop, you will have the opportunity to learn workplace skills too; independence, confidence, cooperation with others and skills specific to your workplace. Maybe you will learn how to make the perfect coffee, how to brush a rhino's teeth or how to produce the perfect radio jingle!

***Whatever your experiences, you will have lots to talk about when you get back home:*** Your experiences abroad will be an invaluable source of stories and topics that you can use in oral or written exams and essays and your oral examiner will be interested to hear about your unique experiences with foreign food, transportation, men/women and the world of work (even if sometimes you were asked to do repetitive or simple tasks! At least you know how to do it the French / Spanish / German / Italian way!)

***Attending Work:*** You can run, you can hide, you can fake it, but there is no excuse for not going to work. If you don't want to work you are on the wrong trip! A work experience trip needs to be a combination of work and fun. We have heard every excuse for not working that exists.

If you are genuinely ill or miserable please contact us and we will do what we can, but don't just give up because you can't be bothered! It's only five days after all....and remember you should try and attend all work sessions. Make the most of the opportunity! Failure to attend work will mean no certificate.