

A grayscale photograph of two women sitting at a table, looking at a laptop screen. The woman in the foreground is on the left, and the woman in the background is on the right. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

**Implementing  
the Massachusetts**

**Work-Based  
Learning Plan**



Massachusetts Department of  
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION

# To Employers:

Each year, over ten thousand young adults statewide participate in work-based learning experiences structured by the **Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan**. Over 5,600 employers provide these work-based learning experiences because they want to participate in attracting and developing a strong workforce for their industry, help young people explore careers and gain skills in their field, and support the academic and career development of young people in their communities.

The Work-Based Learning Plan is designed to make these work experiences a success for both the employer and the participant. The Work-Based Learning Plan and the conversations it opens up will:

- **Clearly communicate job expectations;**
- **Help the participant to be productive and successful on the job;**
- **Help the participant to recognize opportunities to build skills – including foundation skills and more advanced workplace and career specific skills;**
- **Make it clear how the participant can use the job or internship as a learning opportunity;**
- **Provide information to assess employability skill gain.**

This instruction manual along with the online resources, provides examples of job descriptions, skills, tasks and goals that have been used in work experiences around the state.

The Work-Based Learning Plan provides structure to a wide range of work experiences. Some work experiences are semester-long or year-round internships or co-operative education placements designed to help a young adult to gain in-depth experience in a career field. Other work experiences are short-term experiences designed to give participants a flavor of working in a particular industry. Others are summer and after-school jobs focused on fairly routine day-to-day tasks in which young adults gain valuable work experience while building and strengthening foundation skills as well as career and workplace specific skills.

In each case, participants learn about the expectations of the job and obtain constructive feedback through the Work-Based Learning Plan.

This manual, along with the program coordinator who helps to set up the work experience, will help you to develop a successful work experience for a young adult that meets the needs of you and your company.



# To Participants:

## About the Work-Based Learning Plan

The **Work-Based Learning Plan** provides structure to a job, internship or co-operative education placement. It helps you and your employer open up conversations about what is expected of you and what skills you can gain through your work experience.

The Work-Based Learning Plan provides a job description and a list of the skills required in your position, covering both the basic *foundation skills* that are required in all jobs and some of the *career and workplace specific skills* required in your particular job.

At least twice during the work experience you will receive an evaluation. The first is considered a baseline evaluation. This first evaluation is done early in the work experience, and is intended as an early assessment of your skill level at the beginning of the work experience. Subsequent evaluations are done later on and will show what skills have improved as well as what skill areas have emerged as needing attention.

Being evaluated in a professional workplace setting is very different from being graded in most schools, colleges and other educational settings. In a workplace setting, employee evaluations tend to be ongoing and are designed to help employees set goals for continuous improvement. Rating scales are designed so that a good, or “competent,” performance falls in the middle of the rating scale, showing that there are opportunities for growth and improvement. These evaluations are not like “final grades” but are designed to open up conversation and provide constructive feedback that will help you improve your career skills.

## What You Can Do

### To make the most of the work experience and the Work-Based Learning Plan:

- Read and discuss the descriptions of the foundation skills, so that you understand the basic expectations of all work experiences. Ask questions, observe others, and read any written materials provided to you to find out about any specific expectations in your company. For example, you will want to find out about any health and safety guidelines, expected dress and appearance, attendance policies, and other specific aspects of your job.
- Read and discuss your job description and the list of workplace and career-specific skills required in your job. Make the most of the experiences provided to you by asking questions when necessary, showing motivation and initiative, accepting direction and constructive feedback, and, of most of all, working hard and showing enthusiasm for the work experience.

# To Program Coordinators:

The Work-Based Learning Plan is one of the ingredients in a successful work experience. Other ingredients include a thoughtful match between the participant and employer and the availability of support from you – the career specialist, educator, or program coordinator – who can communicate with the employer and participant both at the beginning of the experience and throughout the experience if any questions or needs arise.

Through this manual as well as through the online resources and other professional development opportunities you can see the wide range of roles that program staff play in facilitating work experiences. You will also see the wide range of work-based learning experiences – paid and unpaid, short-term and long-term – that are provided in communities across the state.

# Steps in Using the Work-Based Learning Plan

The Work-Based Learning Plan is available as a paper document or an electronic document in Microsoft Word. Program staff may also use screens from the Massachusetts School to Career Database to write, print and store Work-Based Learning Plans.

**FILL IN THE HEADING** with the participant’s name, job title, supervisor name, and other information. Leave blank any information that does not apply or is unknown.

**WRITE A BRIEF JOB DESCRIPTION.** The description of the job or internship may be as complex or simple as desired. Analysis of Work-Based Learning Plans from programs across Massachusetts show that many work experiences include both day-to-day responsibilities and longer-term projects. Through work-based learning experiences, young adults build skills through responsibilities like working with animals in a veterinarian’s office, answering telephone calls in a police station, working with customers in a retail store and running activities for residents of a nursing home. They also build skills through special projects like designing lesson plans for preschoolers, building websites, creating museum exhibits, painting murals, addressing city and town meetings and many other projects.

**Who Writes the Job Description:** The job description may be written by the supervisor, program coordinator or participant. In many placements, a job description may already exist. For companies that provide similar internships every year, the program coordinators might keep a “bank” of job descriptions that can be re-used and adapted as needed. Sample job descriptions are online at [www.doe.mass.edu/connect](http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect) or [www.skillslibrary.com](http://www.skillslibrary.com)

**Length of the Job Description:** In studies of sample Work-Based Learning Plans, it was found that the longer the job description and list of skills and tasks, the more skill gain participants showed during their job or internship. This finding doesn't suggest that job descriptions necessarily have to be long to be useful, but that the more attention you pay to writing a Work-Based Learning Plan that communicates job goals and expectations to the participant, the more the participant will benefit.

## 1

**LOOK OVER SECTION 1: FOUNDATION SKILLS.** The first section of the Work-Based Learning Plan presents Foundation Skills that are universal to all jobs. *These skills include:*

### **Work Ethic and Professionalism:**

- Attendance and Punctuality
- Workplace Appearance
- Accepting Direction and Constructive Criticism
- Motivation and Taking Initiative
- Understanding Workplace Culture, Policy and Safety

### **Communication and Interpersonal Skills:**

- Speaking
- Listening
- Interacting with Co-Workers

The plan includes descriptions of each of the foundation skills. This section does not require that anything be written. Look over this section. When you meet with the participant, share information about how these Foundation Skills are relevant to the workplace. For example, you may share information about proper dress and appearance for the workplace, specific health and safety guidelines and training available, or other expectations specific to the workplace. You can also review expectations regarding attendance, including when it is appropriate to call in sick or ask for a day off. You can also review procedures for requesting time off or for calling in sick. This section of the Work-Based Learning Plan provides an opportunity to open up valuable discussion about job expectations that otherwise might not be made clear.

## 2

**COMPLETE SECTION 2: SPECIFIC WORKPLACE AND CAREER SKILLS.** The second section provides an opportunity to identify specific skills related to your workplace or career area or to the participant’s own goals and projects. The plan lists some suggested skills, or you may add your own.

*Suggestions include:*

- Collecting and Organizing Information
- Computer Technology
- Critical Thinking
- Interacting with Customers or Clients
- Leadership
- Mathematics and Numeric Analysis
- Problem Solving
- Project Management
- Reading
- Research and Analysis
- Teaching and Instructing
- Time Management
- Understanding All Aspects of an Industry
- Writing
- OR IDENTIFY YOUR OWN SPECIFIC WORKPLACE SKILLS

There are spaces for up to seven skills on this page. There is no minimum – you may focus on just one or two skills or list up to seven. For each skill identified, briefly describe related job tasks or expectations. Some examples are shown in this manual. Additional examples can be found in the online resources.

## 3

**USE SECTION 3: EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS** to conduct reviews at least twice during the work experience. In Section 3 of the plan, provide ratings, along with any written goals, for each of the foundation skills and the specific workplace and career skills. Notice the rating scale, shown below. Ratings are based on a 5-point scale, with the expectation that a rating of “3” is a basic competent rating. *The scale is:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) Performance Improvement Plan Needed | Is not yet demonstrating the foundation skills required for the position and needs to have a formal plan for improving skills and performance   |
| (2) Needs Development                   | Beginning to demonstrate and develop the foundation skills required for the position  |
| (3) Competent                           | Demonstrates foundation skills required for the position  |
| (4) Proficient                          | Consistently demonstrates foundation skills required for the position and shows initiative in improving own skills  |
| (5) Advanced                            | Consistently demonstrates the foundation skills required for the position and shows initiative in improving own skills and using these skills to support the work of the organization |

## SECTION 3: EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS (CONTINUED)

**There should be at least two reviews during the work experience.**

**First Review:** The first review should be held early in the internship. This is considered a “diagnostic” review, providing a baseline rating that indicates where the participant started. In addition to the numeric ratings, the plan provides space for writing goals specific to any of the skill areas and for overall comments. Goals may be brief statements about skills that the participant should focus on or brief descriptions of new projects that will help the participant gain additional skills. For participants who are struggling in the work experience and who have ratings of “1 - Performance Improvement Plan Needed” there should be a formal set of goals for improvement, which can be written on the Work-Based Learning Plan or on separate paper. For all participants, goals and comments are a very important part of the Work-Based Learning Plan. Studies of sample Work-Based Learning Plans show that participants who had explicit written goals in their Work-Based Learning Plans showed more skill gain during their work experience.

**Second Review:** For short-term work experiences, the second review should be held near the end of the work experience. This review provides an opportunity to identify skill gains and make suggestions for future learning and growth. For longer-term work experiences, there may be additional reviews at regular intervals.

The plan has a section for comments and signatures for both the first and second review. Guidelines for obtaining signatures are flexible. The signature section is provided in order to ensure that the participant and supervisor have met to discuss the plan and that the completed plan is shared with the career specialist, educator, or other relevant program staff. In some cases, if the plan is sent to program staff electronically, an email or other communication is an acceptable substitute for signatures.

## Using a Database of Work-Based Learning Plans

Many program staff maintain a database of work-based learning plans, using screens in the Massachusetts School to Career Database. Having a database of plans allows you to re-use and adapt job descriptions, skills and tasks from other experiences. The database also helps staff to look at and analyze the skills used by participants in your programs and analyze patterns of skill gain. Instructions for maintaining a database of work-based learning plans are available at [www.doe.mass.edu/connect](http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect) or [www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm](http://www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm).

## Resources

Additional examples and resources are available online at [www.doe.mass.edu/connect](http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect) or [skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm](http://skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm).

*Resources include:*

- Downloadable copies of the Work-Based Learning Plan;
- A PowerPoint presentation about using the Work-Based Learning Plan;
- Additional examples of job descriptions, skills and tasks;
- Instructions on maintaining a database of plans in the Massachusetts STC Database;
- Results from a study of a sample of Work-Based Learning Plans, showing skills used, skill gains and other findings.

# EXAMPLES

The following examples have been selected to show the variety of work experiences and Work-Based Learning Plans provided in communities across the state. These, and additional examples available online, can provide ideas for developing your Work-Based Learning Plans.

## Sample job descriptions

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Job Description</i>
Animal Care Intern	Assist the professional keeper staff with the general animal husbandry duties in a zoo facility owned and managed by the city and serving the region, named “one of the best small zoos in the United States” by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
Auto Body On-Site Intern	Intern will perform a variety of tasks in the vocational school auto body shop servicing vehicles for city departments and the general public. Intern will inspect damage and discuss repairs to be made with vehicle owner or shop supervisor. Responsibilities include but are not limited to: repair dents; removed ruined sections and replace with new parts; glass work; painting; and frame alignment. Take apart and reassemble mechanical systems, such as suspension, steering, electrical, brakes, air conditioning, engine cooling and drive train. In all instances, intern is expected to adhere to established safety standards when using tools, operating equipment and in dealing with others.
Produce Clerk	As a produce clerk in a large supermarket chain store, student will weigh, wrap and price, display and rotate produce to ensure fresh quality products are available for customers. Student will also assist front-end as bagger as needed.

## Sample “Specific Career and Workplace Skills” from Section 2

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Skill/Task Description</i>
Animal Care Intern	Animal Care	Assist keepers with feeding animals including using appropriate grains, and measuring and preparing food. Clean animal exhibits, observing appropriate health and safety protocol, and using handling techniques appropriate to species. Become familiar with behaviors of social and solitary animals as well as techniques used to care for animals.
Classroom Teaching Assistant	Collecting and Organizing Information	Create, organize, update, and maintain bulletin board display pertaining to current lessons every eight weeks.
Horticulture Assistant	Computer Technology	Engrave plant labels with botanical names, common names and family names from computer database.

Sample “Specific Career and Workplace Skills” from Section 2 (Continued)

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Skill/Task Description</i>
Human Services Assistant	Interacting with Customers or Clients	Provide clients with companionship and emotional support and accompany them for short walks and assist in preparing and facilitating an educational discussion session, take part in day-to-day problem solving of mental health issues.
Produce Clerk	Interacting with Customers or Clients	Student will assist customers with produce selections and assist customers at front-end by properly bagging groceries.
Auto Body On-Site Intern	Mathematics and Numeric Analysis	Successful use of steel rulers, tape measure, ruler, combination square. Identify and use inside/outside caliper; feeler gauge; hole gauge; telescoping snap gauge; vernier caliper; outside/inside micrometer; depth indicator gauge; and dial indicator.
Bank Teller Intern	Mathematics and Numeric Analysis	Analyze debits and credits to prove cash drawer. Use addition and subtraction for transactions. Prove cash daily. Prepare balancing sheets.
Auto Body On-Site Intern	Reading	Ability to read vehicle manuals, equipment manuals, manufacturer’s specifications, and safety manuals as needed to repair vehicle safely and correctly.
Daycare Assistant	Reading	To participate in storytime with the children, engaging them in reading-related activities.
Daycare Assistant	Time Management	Learn the daily schedule within the daycare and understand that a routine is very important with children.
Produce Clerk	Weighing and Pricing	Student will set tare weight amount for container and deduct from actual produce weight to ensure accurate pricing of produce.