Relevant work experience is no longer an optional extra for students. Employers want career ready graduates. This means you need to develop your industry knowledge and employability skills (e.g. communication, problem solving and team skills), whilst still at university. In some cases, relevant industry experience is an additional graduation requirement (e.g. Engineering). Furthermore, organisations often recruit graduates from the pool of students who have previously gained experience through them (the “try before you buy” principle). In cases where practical placements are not a compulsory part of your degree program, you have to take a proactive approach to finding your own work experience. This requires a bit of effort, but it definitely pays off. The key to gaining relevant industry experience is early planning.

Finding experience - don’t wait until your final year!

Paid vacation employment / internships, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and relevant voluntary work are some of the best ways to develop your career readiness and gain that all important industry experience.

1) Paid Vacation Work / Internships / Clerkships offer you the opportunity to:

- Gain an understanding of what it’s like to work in a particular industry and develop your awareness of the culture of the organisation.
- Widen your horizon and expose you to areas of work you may not have thought about previously.
- Help your resume stand out from the crowd with the addition of practical industry experience: improving your job prospects.
- Develop your skill development and professionalism in the workplace.
- Earn money.

Who is eligible for paid Vacation Work / Internships / Clerkships?

Students in their penultimate (2nd last) year of study are most competitive for paid student opportunities (however some can be lucky in securing these opportunities earlier). Many organisations require students to participate in some kind of project work which exposes them to the key elements of the business. Employers are looking to see how you perform and integrate into the culture of the organisation (i.e. your performance and how well you “fit in”). This enables the employer to make a clear judgment about your suitability for employment on graduation.

Where do you find paid Vacation Work / Internship / Clerkship opportunities?

The Murdoch Careers and Employment Centre Jobs, Events and Resources portal

T: (08) 9360 3596
You can search for current, paid Vacation Employment and Work Experience opportunities. A more advanced search allows you to include “expired” opportunities which can help you identify a wider range of potential employers and find out what they offer and when. Other avenues include:

- External jobs boards such as; GraduateOpportunities.com, GradConnection.com.au, Seek.com, StudentInternships.com.au, EthicalJobs.com.au etc.
- Employer websites
- Attending Careers Fairs (e.g. “The Big Meet” and “Access Experience Fair”).
- Asking Murdoch staff / friends/ family.
- Researching on LinkedIn (linkedin.com).
- Attending industry networking events.

2) Work Integrated Learning (WIL) through Murdoch University

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) refers to activities (within your degree) that integrate academic learning with its practical application in the workplace. WIL offers similar benefits to students as paid Vacation Work/Internships, however the opportunity is incorporated into your degree and therefore unpaid. There are a number of WIL opportunities available at Murdoch University. These include:

- placements/practicum units (core components of your degree);
- internship units (elective units offering exposure to industry);
- industry project units (you work independently or in teams on a real project for industry or community partner);
- work simulation units (you experience a learning environment at university that simulates a real-work situation).

To find out about these options in your degree program, contact one of the Student Advisors in your School or the Academic Chair for your degree major. You can also head to the Murdoch Work Integrated Learning student page (www.murdoch.edu.au/Work-Integrated-Learning) where you can access further information on WIL and submit an expression of interest form.

3) Consider Volunteer Work

Being a strategic volunteer and seeking meaningful voluntary work can help your career readiness too. Unpaid work can equally impress future employers, if the skills you develop through volunteering are communicated effectively on the resume.

Where can you look for relevant volunteer work?
If you are interested in volunteering check out the Guild Volunteering Hub. The Volunteering Hub is a useful resource for voluntary positions in the not-for-profit/community sector as well as within the university. The Volunteering Hub is detailed on the Murdoch Guild website and can also be reached by phone on (08) 9360 6307, email: volunteering@the-guild.com.au or by dropping by their office on the South Street Campus. You can also graduate with a “Community and Career Development Transcript” on graduation through volunteering – just ask at the Volunteering Hub!

An Important Note on “Work Experience” - Volunteering for a commercial or “for-profit” organisation is
often in breach of the Fair Work Act. If a "for-profit" organisation offers you un-paid experience in which you perform meaningful work, particularly of an extended period of time, often you should be paid for this "work". Therefore think carefully about accepting or negotiating any unpaid experience of this kind. Allowable unpaid experience involves shadowing someone in a "for-profit" organisation to observe the work in practice or completing a project which is not of practical benefit to the proposed host organisation. For details of the Fair Work Act and how it is applied, refer to the Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman website (www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/default).

**Making the most of your Industry Experience**

**Professionalism in the Workplace (Preparation)**

Professionalism: the right image, good judgment and polite behavior (communication and conduct) that is expected in the workplace. It is important to aware of how you present and conduct yourself on-the-job and be observant of others during any form of experience. Some key tips:

- Dress smartly in conservative colours or well ironed uniform/supplied volunteer clothing.
- Take the initiative to introduce yourself to others – shake hands confidently and smile!
- Keep topics of conversation professional – avoid too much personal information.
- Contact your supervisor immediately by phone (preferably) if you are delayed.
- Watch for non-verbal cues about what is expected – observe body language.
- Watch your own use of words – keep it formal and clean.
- Keep your emails formal, brief and don’t copy in the whole office!
- Get back to people promptly, even to say you just need a little more time to deliver.
- Don’t take long breaks or use others’ belongings (e.g. bring your OWN keep-cup).

**Reflection (Post experience)**

Regardless of the type of industry based experience you undertake, it is important to reflect on the insights gained and skills or professional attributes enhanced following the experience, as it is very much a learning opportunity. Documenting your experience using the following five steps may help you with this reflection process.

1) **Record / Recall**
   What happened – incidents / events?
2) Your **Response**
   What was your reaction to challenges / feedback? How did you handle mistakes?
3) **Relate** it to prior knowledge / theory / skill level.
   Did you integrate areas of learning? Did you notice any skill gaps to address?
4) **Reasoning / Recognise**
   What new knowledge do you have about yourself and/or the profession? How effective were you on-the-job? What additional skills did you learn?
5) **Reconstruct**
   How can you apply this new knowledge / skill or change your own approach to improve your effectiveness and professionalism on the job in the future?