

“How to Design a WBL Experience” For Educators

A practical guide for educators and partners to design high-quality, competency-based work-based learning experiences.

Getting Started

This workbook is designed for educators and their employer and/or intermediary partners to plan a work-based learning (WBL) experience that connects students to meaningful, hands-on learning.

Whether it is a short-term project or a semester-long internship, this guide walks you through each step. By the end you will have:

- A clear plan for what students will do, learn, and practice
- Defined competencies that connect directly to workplace and industry expectations
- A structure for supervision, feedback, and reflection

The educator or intermediary will work together with the employer to complete the workbook in three parts:


1. [Decide the WBL Structure](#): choose the format, timing, and level of engagement that fits your class or program
2. [Choose the Competencies & Describe the Tasks](#): select the skills students will build and align them with real-world work experiences
3. [Plan the Logistics of Your Participation](#): determine how supervision, communication, and materials will be coordinated to support student success
4. [Select the Type of WBL Experience](#): choose the model (from the state’s 11 WBL types) that best fits the structure, competencies, and student tasks you have identified
5. [Align with Diploma Seal Requirements](#): review the experience to confirm it meets the criteria for the relevant diploma seal(s) and adjust hours, supervision, or documentation if needed

Before You Begin

WBL should be meaningful for students and manageable for employers. Before you begin, have you identified:

- specific projects, tasks, or problems that students will work on?
- how students will directly interact with one or more employers or industry professionals?
- who will supervise or mentor the student(s)?
- a process for providing students with regular, structured feedback?

If you answered “yes” to all these questions, you are ready to begin.



STEP 1: DEFINE THE WBL STRUCTURE

Before choosing the competencies and tasks, it is important to think about what the experience will look like. This step helps you understand how much time students will have to build and practice new skills, and what role and level of involvement you and your team will have in supporting them.

Example: A local accounting firm hosts students for two weeks to assist with data entry and report review. Students shadow a staff accountant, then complete a mock report and present their findings to the team.

When and where will it take place?

- Will this happen during the school day, after school, or in the summer?
- Will students be on-site at a workplace, participating remotely, or based in a classroom?

How long will it last?

- How many days, weeks, or total hours will students participate?
- How will student schedules be managed to accommodate the experience?

What will your role be as an educator?

- How will you collaborate with the employer or intermediary partner to support students during their WBL experience?



Who will participate, and how does this experience connect to their learning?

- How will students be selected?
- Will students receive industry credentials or dual-credit?
- What course or credits does this experience align with?

STEP 2: CHOOSE COMPETENCIES & DESCRIBE TASKS

Competencies describe what “good” performance looks like in the workplace. They connect the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that lead to success on the job. Selecting the **right mix of technical and employability competencies** ensures that students gain experience that is both valuable to them and directly relevant to your work.

A competency is more than just a single skill. It brings together:

- **Knowledge:** what someone understands,
- **Skills:** what someone can do, and
- **Behaviors:** how someone applies what they know and can do in real situations.

When you select competencies for a student, they should reflect the tasks, expectations, and behaviors that matter most in your company and/or industry. Some competencies will be technical (specific to your field, tools, or processes), while others will be employability-focused (such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving). Both are equally important to success in the workplace.

Example:

A **technical competency** might be “managing data accurately and responsibly to support business operations.”

An **employability competency** might be “communicating clearly and professionally with team members and clients.”

Mapping Competencies & Proficiency Levels

1. Review competency sets. Look through a competency set (for example, the Business Generalist Competency Set on the Ascend Indiana website) or meet with an employer partner to learn more about the real skills they need for their industry.
 - **Aim for 3-5 technical and 3-5 employability competencies that connect to real work in your organization.**
2. List the tasks or activities. For each competency, write down examples of what students will do to build or demonstrate that competency. Work with an employer as needed to ensure these tasks are realistic and aligned to industry standards.
 - **These might include projects, daily responsibilities, or small team assignments.**

3. Identify the proficiency level. Decide what level of performance you expect by the end of the experience. This helps you understand what success looks like and how student learning should be evaluated.
 - **Novice:** Requires regular guidance and support to complete tasks
 - **Developing:** Able to complete tasks with some guidance or coaching
 - **Proficient:** Completes tasks independently and demonstrates consistent skill

By identifying competencies, related tasks, and expected proficiency levels, you're creating a clear roadmap that connects classroom learning to meaningful, real-world performance.

| Technical Competency | Tasks/Activities for Students | Proficiency Level (Novice, Developing, Proficient) |
|--|---|---|
| Example: Managing data accurately and responsibly to support business operations | Example: 1. Keep digital or paper files organized by following the company's folder structure and naming rules 2. Update trackers (such as sales, attendance, inventory, or project progress) on a regular schedule. | Example: 1. Proficient - Consistently follows the company's folder structure and naming rules. 2. Proficient - Updates the tracker consistently, on time, and with accurate information. |
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| Employability Competency | Tasks/Activities for Students | Proficiency Level (Novice, Developing, Proficient) |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Example: Communicating clearly and professionally with team members and clients</p> | <p>Example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share a brief, accurate summary of progress, questions, and next steps during check-ins or team meetings. 2. Draft short, clear messages that use appropriate tone, proper grammar, and include all necessary details when communicating with coworkers or clients. | <p>Example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proficient - Shares clear, accurate progress updates during meetings or check-ins. 2. Proficient – Composes messages that use a professional tone, correct spelling and grammar, and includes all necessary details. |
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STEP 3: PLAN THE LOGISTICS OF YOUR PARTICIPATION

Once you have identified the competencies, tasks, and proficiency levels for your WBL experience, the next step is to think through how it will all come together in practice.

The details may vary depending on whether students are on-site at a workplace or completing projects in a classroom or career center, but the key considerations remain the same.

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Staffing & Supervision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will supervise, mentor, or interact with students? • If classroom-based, what employer will the experience partner with? | |
| Materials & Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tools, space, data, or materials will students need? • Are there safety, confidentiality, or access considerations? • If classroom-based, how will students receive case studies, datasets, or example problems? | |
| Coordination & Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you share updates, feedback, or questions with your employer partners? • Who will manage scheduling, attendance, and progress tracking? • How will you track feedback on student performance or work products? | |
| Course Alignment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the experience occurs when school is not in session (for example, during school breaks), it cannot be used to award course credit. • If the experience occurs while school is in session, identify the course(s) it aligns with and the credits the student will earn. | |

When you have completed the chart:

- Review your answers with your intermediary or employer partner
- Confirm supervision, communication, and scheduling expectations



- Use this plan to guide day-to-day coordination and support student success

STEP 4: SELECT A WBL EXPERIENCE

Now that you have defined the structure, chosen competencies, described tasks, and planned logistics, it's time to decide what type of work-based learning experience will give students the best opportunity to practice and apply their skills.

When selecting a WBL experience, consider:

- **Format and duration:** Will it be a semester-long internship, a classroom-based experience, or a multi-year apprenticeship?
- **Alignment with competencies:** Which types of experiences will allow students to develop both technical and employability competencies you've identified?
- **Resources and support:** What supervision, materials, and partner involvement will be needed to ensure the experience is successful?

Selecting the right type of WBL experience ensures that students can actively apply what they are learning, gain confidence in their abilities, and see how classroom knowledge connects to real-world work.

Discover descriptions, examples, and guidance for all 11 work-based learning models in Ascend's [Work-Based Learning Experiences for Indiana's High School Students](#).

Employer-Hosted Experiences

- Micro-Internship
- Employability Skills Co-Op
- Academic Internship
- Technical Internship
- Youth Apprenticeship
- Pre-Apprenticeship.
- Registered Apprenticeship

Classroom-Based Experiences

- Industry-Developed Team Challenge
- Workplace Simulation



- Student Entrepreneurial Experience
- School-Based Enterprise

STEP 5: ENSURE ALIGNMENT WITH DIPLOMA SEAL REQUIREMENTS

Three of Indiana’s optional diploma seals include work-based learning as part of their requirements. As you plan your experience, think about how its structure, hours, supervision, and skill development could help students progress toward earning one or more seals.

For a quick overview these diploma seals and their requirements, visit [Ascend’s High School Diploma Seals with Work-Based Learning Requirements](#).

Use the questions below to identify how this work-based learning experience may align with the seal requirements.

Estimated # Hours of Work-Based Learning Completed Through This Experience: _____

| Will this experience... | Details / Notes |
|---|---|
| enroll students in one or more courses that are part of an NLPS pathway ? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| provide an opportunity for students to earn college credit? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| provide an opportunity for students to earn a credential of value ? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| align to courses needed for students to earn the Indiana College Core ? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| assess students’ communication, collaboration, and work ethic skills? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

If you selected **Yes** for any item above, your experience is likely aligned to one or more diploma seal requirements. Connect with the guidance department or a school administrator to verify and ensure proper documentation.

