

## “How to Design a WBL Experience” for Employers

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

### Getting Started

You do not have to be an educator or training expert to create an experience that helps students learn real-world skills. This workbook is designed for employers and their school and/or intermediary partners to plan a work-based learning (WBL) experience that connects students to meaningful work.

Whether it is a one-day site visit, 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 your workplace or industry
- A structure for supervision, feedback, and reflection

The school or intermediary and employer will work together to complete the workbook in three parts. In some cases, employers may complete it independently using the same steps below:

1. [Decide the WBL Structure](#): choose the format, timing, and level of engagement that fits your organization
2. [Choose the Competencies & Describe the Tasks](#): select the skills students will build and connect them to the real work they will do
3. [Plan the Logistics of Your Participation](#): determine the supervision, communication, and materials you will need for a successful experience

By the end of this process, the employer and school or intermediary partner will have a shared outline of what the student will learn, do, and practice during their experience. This document can then be used to ensure alignment between classroom instruction and workplace learning, and to complete the student’s official training plan.

### Before You Begin

WBL should be meaningful for students and manageable for employers. Before you design your experience, take a moment to think through a few basics.

- Do you have meaningful projects, tasks, or problems a student(s) could work on (either with your organization or within their classroom)?
- Can you identify someone who will interact with the students?
- Can someone from your organization offer feedback regularly, even briefly, during the experience?

**If you answered “yes” to most of these, 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.

<p><b>When and where will it take place?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will this happen during the school day, after school, or in the summer?</li> <li>• Will students be on-site at your workplace, participating remotely, or based in a classroom?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>How long will it last?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many days, weeks, or total hours will students participate?</li> <li>• How often will you or your staff interact with them?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>What will your role be as an employer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will you or your staff directly supervise students?</li> <li>• Will you share feedback or insights to help students understand how their work aligns with industry standards and expectations?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Who else will be involved?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will other employees or departments help host activities, mentor, or provide feedback?</li> </ul>	



## STEP 2: CHOOSE COMPETENCIES & DESCRIBE TASKS

Competencies describe what “good” performance looks like in your 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.

Examples:

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 brainstorm the skills, behaviors, and habits that are most important in your 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.
  - **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 and the school understand what success looks like and how student learning will 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 and helps whoever is coordinating the

experience (whether it's you, a teacher, or another partner) plan out daily activities, provide feedback, and measure progress.

Technical Competency	Tasks/Activities for Students	Proficiency Level (Novice, Developing, Proficient)
<b>Example:</b> Managing data accurately and responsibly to support business operations	<b>Example:</b> 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.	<b>Example:</b> 1. <b>Proficient</b> - Consistently follows the company's folder structure and naming rules. 2. <b>Proficient</b> - Updates the tracker consistently, on time, and with accurate information.





Employability Competency	Tasks/Activities for Students	Proficiency Level (Novice, Developing, Proficient)
<p><b>Example:</b> Communicating clearly and professionally with team members and clients</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share a brief, accurate summary of progress, questions, and next steps during check-ins or team meetings.</li> <li>2. Draft short, clear messages that use appropriate tone, proper grammar, and include all necessary details when communicating with coworkers or clients.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Proficient</b> - Shares clear, accurate progress updates during meetings or check-ins.</li> <li>2. <b>Proficient</b> – Composes messages that use a professional tone, correct spelling and grammar, and includes all necessary details.</li> </ol>



### 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 your 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"> <li>• Who will supervise, mentor, or interact with students?</li> <li>• If classroom-based, who will your organization partner with (such as a teacher or facilitator)?</li> </ul>	
Scheduling & Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When and how often will students engage with your team? How long will the experience last?</li> <li>• Will there be milestones such as orientation, kickoff, check-ins, or presentations?</li> </ul>	
Materials & Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What tools, space, data, or materials will students need?</li> <li>• Are there safety, confidentiality, or access considerations?</li> <li>• If classroom-based, will you provide case studies, datasets, or example problems?</li> </ul>	
Coordination & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you share updates, feedback, or questions with your school or intermediary partner?</li> <li>• Who will manage scheduling, attendance, and progress tracking?</li> <li>• How will you provide feedback on student performance or work products?</li> </ul>	

When you have completed the chart:

- Review your answers with your school or intermediary partner
- Confirm supervision, communication, and scheduling expectations
- Use this plan to guide day-to-day coordination and support student success

