

Work Experience Reflection Guide

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A guide to help you make the most out of your work experience placement.

This guide will help you record and reflect on your work experience. We know it's difficult to break down all that you've seen and done each day into something tangible and insightful. So, we've decided to make it easy and tell you what you should be looking out for, and how to effectively reflect on what you've seen or done!

It's split into 3 sections.

1. Introduction

- Explores why reflecting on your work experience is important, and what key skills to look out for during your placement.

2. Daily Log

- Here we explain how to effectively record what you observed or demonstrated each day, and how to draw out the key take home messages from your experience.
- You have space to record your own activities and insights from your placement. You can use our sample reflection as a guide.

3. Skills Log

- Here we explain how to effectively reflect on the different skills you may have observed or demonstrated during your placement that are relevant to medicine.
- You will be given space to reflect on a time you have observed or demonstrated each of these skills. You can use our sample reflection as a guide.

Take your time to read through our guidance and examples so you can see the best way to approach your reflections.

Why is recording my work experience important?

Work experience is an important part of your journey into medicine, as it allows you to gain insight into the profession and helps you know if this is truly the career you want. It allows you to discover key skills healthcare professionals should have, and the kind of lifestyles that are possible.

Beyond this, reflecting on your work experience is really important for your personal statement and interview. Your application should show that you have thought your decision to study medicine through, and that you have a good idea of what you're undertaking. You want to show the admissions team that you understand the realities of the career first-hand - the good, the bad and the ugly. This is done by you reflecting on what you've seen during your placement and thinking about how this has affected your decision to study medicine, whether that's in a positive or negative way.

Your work experience placement doesn't necessarily have to be in a clinical environment (e.g. a hospital or a GP). You can reflect on your work experience in a dentist, pharmacy or care home in exactly the same way. In fact, even if you've done work experience in a nursery or school, or something far away from healthcare, there is still a lot you can take away from it. So please don't be disheartened if you can't get work experience in a hospital - there's still so much value in all the other experiences, so long as you've reflected on it.

In this guide, we'll take you through the key skills required to be a doctor. We'll give you examples on how to effectively record and reflect on your work experience and give you a template so you can get started on recording your own journey!

What are the key skills I should look out for during my work experience placement?

To make the most out of your work experience placement, it's important that you try and find examples of yourself or others demonstrating key skills. Whether this is in a healthcare setting or elsewhere, there are always going to be people interacting, and you want to pay close attention to these interactions.

You want to find good examples of a time where you or a member of the team displayed the following skills:

1. Leadership

Think of examples of how the leader (e.g. consultant, manager) would delegate and prioritise tasks, how they would support the team (both practically and emotionally), or how they would handle unexpected problems.

2. Teamwork

Think of examples where you or members of the team communicated and supported one another. Explore the different roles in a team and the common goal they are all working towards.

3. Effective communication

Think of examples where you or a member of the team explained something clearly to a patient/colleague/client, de-escalated a tough situation or broke bad news.

4. Empathy

Think of examples where a you or a member of the team showed empathy and compassion to a patient/colleague/client, broke bad news, listened attentively, offered advice and support or responded in a holistic way.

5. Organisation and time management

Think of examples where you or a member of the team prioritised tasks effectively, adapted to changes easily, and worked efficiently.

6. Professionalism

Think of examples where you or a member of the team responded in a professional way to a patient/colleague/client being inappropriate, or how you/they handled a particularly challenging ethical situation.

There are a number of other skills that are also relevant to medicine - the list doesn't end here. Can you think of 3 other skills that are important for doctors to have?

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Finally, it's important to note that more than one of these skills can appear in the same example you identified.

Let's look at an example of this:

You're on your work experience placement and you see a nurse responding to a patient that is angry about the side-effects they're having to a particular medication. The nurse may display **professionalism** by remaining calm and patient. They may **effectively communicate** with the patient and find out what reaction the patient is having and why they are angry. They may **empathise** with the patient's distress and comfort them. Then, they may inform a doctor that the patient is experiencing side-effects and may need a different medication, displaying key **teamwork** skills.

And just like that, this one example demonstrates 4 key skills that are important for doctors to have.

DAILY LOG

How do I document my work experience effectively?

The best way to record your work experience is to have a diary, be that online or on paper. It's good to know what you've done each day - so try to remain up to date (and don't rely on your memory at the end of the week). We've given you space to keep your own log in this guide - feel free to add more pages if you need it. Here is an example of what it could look like:

Daily log

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

Date: 10/11/2020

Work experience: hospital - cardiology ward

Today I shadowed the consultant on the cardiology ward. I observed the ward round and reviewed all the patients and their medications. I saw how the consultant would always ask the patients how they were feeling, and then based on this and the up-to-date observations, she would adjust the medications.

I also got to see a patient with heart failure whose legs were swollen up to their knees and they had fluid in their lungs. The patient was struggling to breathe and was being given oxygen. They looked uncomfortable, and the consultant asked if they needed extra pillows. The consultant showed me the patient's x-ray and showed me how to measure the size of the heart (to see if it's enlarged - it was!). They told me they were going to treat the patient with a drug called a diuretic that helps get rid of fluid from the body (we learnt about this in biology!).

Other less interesting things: the junior doctor would do lots of notetaking during the ward round; the multi-disciplinary team meeting took place at 11am where the doctors would discuss complex cases and come up with a plan together.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

- Important to ask patients how they're feeling and not just change medications based on the observations alone. Needs to be a shared decision.
- Make sure patients are as comfortable as possible (e.g. offering pillows) - shows empathy!
- A combination of patient symptoms and x-ray results (and other investigations), determined the diagnosis and management plan → logical, problem solving!
- Note-taking is a very important part as it monitors the patient's progress and makes sure every member of the team is up to date. Boring, but important.
- MDT meeting - shows how the team works together and shares responsibility over the patients, especially for difficult cases. Good support system for doctors.

Skills I observed: empathy, patient centredness, problem-solving, documenting, communication

Your daily logs can be more or less extensive than this, but the idea is that you want to not only describe what you've seen or learnt, but delve deeper and think about how each aspect relates to the role of doctors/health workers, the skills that are needed in medicine, the environment that is fostered, the practice of medicine itself, and so on. There's no point just listing or describing your experience, you need to show what you've learnt from it and how it has shaped your decision to study medicine.

As tedious as it may sound, you will thank yourself so much for this later when you're writing your personal statement or preparing for interviews, as 80% of the work will already be done for you! Now it's your turn.

Day 1 [insert date]

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

What skills did I observe/demonstrate today?

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What skills would I like to observe/demonstrate tomorrow? What can I do to achieve this?

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Day 2 [insert date]

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

What skills did I observe/demonstrate today?

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What skills would I like to observe/demonstrate tomorrow? What can I do to achieve this?

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Day 3 [insert date]

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

What skills did I observe/demonstrate today?

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What skills would I like to observe/demonstrate tomorrow? What can I do to achieve this?

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Day 4 [insert date]

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

What skills did I observe/demonstrate today?

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What skills would I like to observe/demonstrate tomorrow? What can I do to achieve this?

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Day 5 [insert date]

Describe what you did, learnt or observed. Describe parts that you enjoyed, and parts you did not enjoy.

What are the key take-home messages from today?

What skills did I observe/demonstrate today?

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What skills would I like to observe/demonstrate tomorrow? What can I do to achieve this?

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How do I effectively reflect on key skills I've developed or observed?

So, you've documented your work experience. Now it's time to really zoom in on key skills you've observed or demonstrated during your placement and understanding the importance of them.

In the introduction, we explored some of the key skills that a healthcare professional needs in order to thrive in their career. These include (but are not limited to): leadership, teamwork, effective communication, empathy, organisation, time management and professionalism. It is for this reason that your application (personal statement and interview) should demonstrate an appreciation of these skills, including times where you have displayed these skills.

During your placement, keep an eye out for these skills and at the end of each day, ask yourself the following question: did I observe/demonstrate [insert skill] today?

For example, ask yourself:

1. Did I observe/demonstrate any effective leadership today?
 - 1) Did I observe/demonstrate strong teamwork today?
 - 2) Did I observe/demonstrate good communication skills today?
 - 3) Did I observe/demonstrate empathy today?

Over the following pages, we'll be giving you space to reflect in detail on different skills you've observed or demonstrated during your placement. You should use these questions to delve deep into your experiences and recall relevant events in detail. In all your answers, make sure to emphasise *why* the skill you saw was important.

Have a look at our example below to see how you can formulate your answer.

Sample answer: *Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated good communication skills during your placement.*

Describe the event: I learnt a great skill to do with communication this afternoon! The consultant I was shadowing in the respiratory department had her clinic today, where she unfortunately had to break the bad news of a cancer diagnosis to a patient. I was curious to see how the doctor would handle the situation. The doctor made sure the patient was sat down and prepared her for the news. She gently informed her of the diagnosis and gave the patient a moment to digest it. Then, the doctor asked the patient what she understood from the diagnosis, allowing the patient to speak. The patient was then able to tell the doctor all her concerns. The doctor answered all the patient's questions and reassured her.

Why is this skill important? When the patient had left, the consultant explained to me that often, when giving quite serious diagnoses, patients have a lot of questions. There's no use overwhelming the patient with information before you've identified what it is the patient cares about and wants to know. Giving the patient the opportunity to speak and tailoring the conversation to meet their needs showed excellent communication skills. This, I believe, makes patients more confident in their care and in the healthcare team.

Take home message: I learnt that effective communication is a lot to do with understanding the perspective of the person in front of you - it's not always about how you can get your point across, but how well you can listen as well. Therefore, it requires empathy and active listening skills too!

Now it's your turn! We've written out some questions for you to prompt you to reflect on key skills you might have observed during your placement. Now, if you've observed a skill that isn't mentioned below but you think is important in healthcare, simply add your own question. You just need to substitute the relevant skill into the question and follow the same reflective process to answer it.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated good **teamwork skills** during your placement?

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated **effective leadership** during your placement?

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated **excellent communication** during your placement?

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated **empathy** during your placement?

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated good **organisation or time management** during your placement.

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

Give an example of a time you observed or demonstrated **professionalism** during your placement.

Remember to describe the event, explore why the skill was important in this scenario, and what your take home message is.

And that brings us to the end of the work experience guide!

We hope this helps you to record and reflect on your work experience placements. Remember, you can always add more pages to the daily logs and skills logs if you feel it's necessary. Once you're finished, keep your reflections safe, ready for when you're writing your personal statement and preparing for your interview. Medical schools place great importance on effective reflection, so the more capable you are of doing this, the more they'll love you!

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