

5 Tips for starting your graduate employment in a home-based world - etiquette and professionalism are still key

CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE
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As a student you will have been used to working from home during your studies but wherever you call home as a student, home-based work for an employer, or for yourself, is different altogether.

What is different about working from your home for an employer? Apart from the obvious, lack of office, proximity to colleagues and so forth, it is really important that you have set professional boundaries, work etiquette and the right technology to help you to achieve what is asked of you. Here are some tips to help

1. Before you start

Make sure you know what is required of you to complete the tasks set. Don't try to bluff your way through without asking lots of questions if you are unsure. They will rather you ask now than a couple of months in, when they realise you got the wrong idea about something. Check and check again if you need to.

Be sure of the hours they are expecting you to follow as you will still need to show up on time for work – are they set hours? If they can be worked flexibly, keep check of your time and tasks you did over the week – you might need to evidence how you are using your time. Are there any company policies and ethics you need to follow or does the work involve personal data or client confidentiality? Most roles have elements of this so you will need to be clear about how you ensure privacy is upheld and information is secure while you are home-working

2. What technology will you need to use to get the job done?

Check the platforms and equipment they require – what will they provide and what do they expect you to provide? If they require you to be able to print documents or use your own mobile, will they reimburse you any costs and how will you reclaim these?

If the company provide you with equipment; laptop, pc or mobile, check first before you use them for personal use or outside of your work hours. It needn't be anything illegal, but if you access non work sites using the works computer during work hours you may find yourself explaining why.

If you need any training on the systems they require, it would be good to know in advance, so you can either brush up on your skills, doing a quick online course or ask them if they provide training as part of their induction.

3. **Communicating with your colleagues remotely**

There is defined, often unspoken email etiquette in the professional world which you may find differs with internal emails to those sent externally. Best practice is to ensure all emails are professional – often emails get forwarded – think about what you’re saying and how you are saying it.

Stating the obvious, but don’t forget to check grammar, punctuation and spelling. Everyone has the occasional typo, but you don’t want to be the person who writes an email to an important client only to get your spelling corrected by your manager.

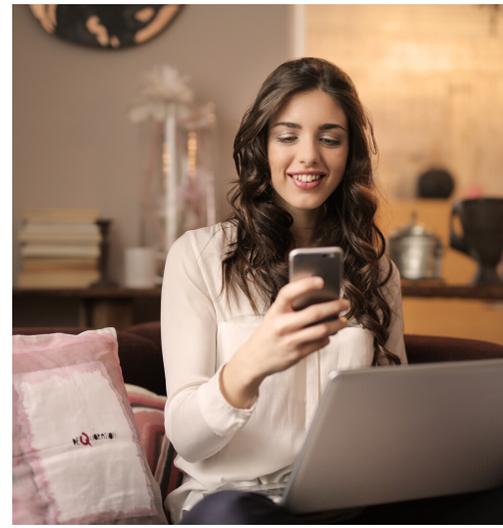
Read the tone of the email and how this might come across – email wording has a habit of appearing more stern than you meant it to, so if you’re finding it hard to put into words, ask yourself if a phone call would be better.

This has the potential to act as an opportunity to network and introduce yourself to colleagues too. Remember, your “employer” isn’t just your new manager. Be courteous to everyone you encounter at the company from reception to HR.

Be prepared too, for video conferencing with colleagues and clients. Test the technology, be aware of your background, the lighting, camera angle and location. If you can’t choose your location, see if you can set a virtual background.

Maintain natural eye contact and don’t be distracted by things around you – it’s very off-putting and rude to be answering emails or messaging on your phone when you are supposed to be focused on what is being said in a meeting. Body language is important too – smile, be engaging and input to the meeting where you can, but mute yourself when you aren’t speaking.

Everyone expects an occasional comical or cute interruption from a pet or family member, but if this happens all the time and the others in the meeting are busy people it just becomes annoying so be prepared and think of your colleagues’ time.





4. Making the most of your opportunity - networking from your laptop

Be interested in what other people are doing - if you are lucky enough to find homebased work you can still use opportunities to network with colleagues inside and outside of the company. Be interested in what others do, who people are and share ideas. This helps you to stand out from others - they will be impressed and appreciate you sharing ideas or research you have discovered to help their work or the company's aims.

Ask for help in return - don't try to wing it on your own. Colleagues are flattered if you ask for their advice and could then refer you to another colleague who you might not have linked with yet. As you develop your contacts, make sure you connect with them using LinkedIn, this way you will have a record of who you worked with if you need them in the future. Golden advice is; during your employment or internship, never burn bridges and treat everyone like they will someday be in a position to offer you a job - it may not be immediate, but could end up being the truth.

5. Professional boundaries and your wellbeing

It's ok to be flexible to support your employer but, where possible, keep to your hours - every employee can tell you a time when they worked over and above to get a task done or worked over their hours to support a team member, but if this becomes the new normal for you, its equivalent to unpaid work. The boundaries are even more easy to blur when a task is calling you and your laptop is open when you're catching up with your favourite box set. If it's possible, try to ensure your space is cleared away after you've finished work, so you can separate work and home life more easily.

Are you sitting comfortably? If you spend a 6 to 8 hour day slumped over your laptop on the bed or sofa, this is will cause physical issues with your back, neck and more! Have breaks - a few minutes away from your desk to walk, make tea or stroke the dog is going to help you focus and help your eyes have a break too.

There have been several funny stories of embarrassing moments on a works video call. No one expects you to work from home in a suit and tie but getting into a routine of getting showered and dressed for work, even if this is home-based, really helps you to create the professional mindset you will need to be taken seriously. Its times like these you want to stand out from the crowd in a good way and not for getting caught in a Zoom meeting wearing your dressing gown!