



# TOOLS

## Building the Classroom Connection

### Introduction

This **Building the Classroom Connection** guide provides suggestions for orientation activities, reflection activities and classroom experiences that support apprenticeship and ideas for extending student learning beyond the apprenticeship experience.

### Preparing Students for Work-Based Learning

A well structured classroom orientation lays the groundwork for a successful apprenticeship experience. You can prepare students for learning in the workplace by helping them assess their own interests and skills, with the **OKCareerGuide.org Classroom Activity** as well as learn about what to expect at the workplace and build an understanding of the various aspects of the industry they'll be working with.

The **OKCareerGuide.org Classroom Activity** tool identifies six aspects that are common to any enterprise. Students should gain experience and understanding of the associated concepts and skills to be successful.

- **Tasks & Conditions:** Task and working conditions that are common to the careers within the industry where the apprenticeship will be located.
- **Interests, Skills & Work Values:** This looks at the work values, skills and interest that would make you successful in the career you will be apprenticing.
- **Education & Experience:** Suggested college majors and instructional programs that would make you successful and able to advance within the apprenticeship occupation.
- **Salary & Outlook:** Gives you the earnings you could receive based on the region or state you are doing your apprenticeship.
- **Related Occupations:** Allows you to explore related occupations that require similar skill to the apprenticeship you have chosen.
- **Additional Information:** Gives you information that may be required to work in certain occupations as well as organizations that support you in your career.

### Prepare Students to Maximize Learning

Helping students develop a context for the workplace tour maximizes their learning once they are at the workplace. There are several ways to do this.

- Discuss expectations for the experience and what the students may learn beforehand.
- Discuss behavioral expectations that will allow students to make the most out of the activity.
- Discuss what students know about the company and how the industry impacts them.
- Support students in research of the company and the industry so that they can ask meaningful questions during the workplace tour.
- Have students prepare questions and individual learning objectives that they would like to accomplish during the workplace tour.

Also, introduce frameworks and materials that will help students organize what they learn at the workplace. These frameworks include the SCANS skills and All Aspects of an Industry.



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### **Supporting the Worksite Supervisor**

The worksite supervisor essentially functions as an adjunct faculty member in apprenticeship experiences. One role of the teacher is to ensure that the worksite supervisor is trained and prepared to support the student in their learning. Clear procedures and regular communication among all partners are vital to this support. In your planning and preparation, make sure to provide worksite supervisors with materials that they can use to help maximize student learning. Through regular phone, e-mail and personal contact, you can support the worksite supervisors so that they also grow in their understanding of and ability to make the connection between academic and workplace learning.

#### **Tips on Delivering New Information to Worksite Supervisors**

- Be mindful of the supervisor's time constraints. Call well in advance to make appointments; and keep them!
- Deliver new information in person.
- Don't overwhelm them with paper.
- Allow plenty of time for discussion of the new information.

#### **Tips on Communicating with Worksite Supervisors**

- Develop a back-up plan in case the worksite supervisor is transferred to another department or location.
- Establish a steady pattern of e-mail communication.
- Encourage supervisors to call you with any questions.
- Encourage supervisor to communicate any instruction that needs to be added to the students education.
- Balance requests for time and attention with offers to help.

#### **Tips on Meeting with Worksite Supervisors**

- Understand that worksite supervisors do not follow school schedules.
- Get to know the supervisor's downtime and take advantage of it.
- Set up the next meeting before ending the present one.
- Establish objectives of the next meeting before it occurs.

#### **Tips to Ensure a Worksite Supervisor's Good Performance**

- Have strong supervisors train or orient new supervisors.
- Conduct effective orientation and check-in meetings; clarify expectations.
- Provide feedback on a consistent basis; don't wait until there is a problem.
- Be a good listener; check for signs of anxiety or confusion.
- Send supervisors thank-you notes and other tokens of appreciation.

#### **Tips on Ways to Assess the Learning Potential of a Workplace**

- Observe or shadow your students at work; see it through their eyes.
- Review job descriptions; interview the supervisor.
- Participate in mini-internships and engage in work that students will be doing.



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### Concurrent Learning Activities

As the classroom teacher, you have the opportunity to help enhance and expand students' apprenticeship experiences beyond the hours they spend at the workplace. Students' experiences at the workplace should be integrated with activities inside the classroom. Classroom activities and assignments that can be completed at the workplace support the students' growing understanding of the Industry.

### Organizational Chart

An interesting activity students can conduct at the workplace is to develop an agency/organization chart. This activity provides an opportunity for students to create a comprehensive view of the various roles, departments and divisions within the organization.

- Have the student create an organizational chart for the entire agency/organization and his or her division/department.
- Have the student indicate where their supervisor is on the organizational chart.
- Make sure the student lists the job title for each position and includes the names of the various people who hold the positions.
- Ask the students if they see the organization operating the way the chart suggests, i.e. whether communication and/or authority flows in the way depicted or if there are other people in the workplace who seem to have powerful responsibilities though they may not be at the top of the hierarchy.

### The Importance of Reflection

Students involved in apprenticeship should reflect both verbally and in writing on what they have experienced and learned. This helps to internalize the learning and skills they have developed and promotes self-awareness and personal assessment.

Reflection refers to any process that a person uses to think critically about their experiences. Writing, reading, speaking, listening, discussing and presenting are all possible methods of reflection. It is in the act of reflecting that a person forms understanding from the experience, extends that understanding to other situations, and comes to "own" the knowledge he/she has acquired. For example, we are bombarded with experiences and bits of information every day, most of which we ignore or attend to in a cursory way. We learn the most from experiences that draw our attention, cause us to sit up and take notice, or make us step back and think.

Learning happens through a mix of theory and practice, thought and action, observations and interaction. Reflection is the key to getting meaning from any experience, and to linking experiences with specific learning standards and can be accomplished with the **Apprenticeship Journal**.

**Reflection is an essential part of apprenticeship. Reflection activities serve a number of functions during the course of an experience. These activities can be used along with the Apprenticeship Journal to:**

- Help students think critically about their experiences;
- Help students make personal connections to their experiences and to their learning;



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- Guide the learning process and deepen or extend the learning that takes place;
- Integrate apprenticeship with academic content and learning standards;
- Cause students to think about and internalize the skills they use (such as interpersonal skills, planning skills) in apprenticeship;
- Provide a tool for students to use to self-assess (e.g., what they are learning, what they find difficult, how their group is functioning; etc); and
- Assess student learning, group process, or any other aspect of apprenticeship.

### **Reflection Throughout the Process**

It is important that students are given an opportunity to reflect before, during and after their apprenticeship experience so they may shape the course of their learning and handle problems as they arise. Reflection on students' attitudes and expectations prior to the experience is especially important if students will be working in environments such as nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, animal shelters, homeless shelters and soup kitchens. All of these places can bring students face-to-face with an aspect of life that may be new and perhaps uncomfortable for them.

It is not enough to ask students to reflect. They must also get regular feedback on their reflective responses. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers collect reflective journal responses or ask students to do a formal verbal report or a final paper only at the conclusion of the program. This approach does not allow students to learn from their mistakes, correct assumptions, become a more careful observer or learn to challenge their stereotypes. Even if an adult diligently adds notes and comments to end-of-term reflections, students are less likely to read and learn from these notes and comments.

Ideally, the teacher and/or supervisor can provide feedback to student reflections on a weekly basis. This can be difficult when a teacher has multiple students engaged in apprenticeship, or when a workplace partner manages several staff members. One way for teachers to facilitate feedback on reflection is to institute peer read-around as a way of getting every paper read and helping to bring to the surface the larger questions and problems associated with apprenticeship and intellectual growth. This process converts the written reflective process into an oral reflective process.

### **Reflection Can be Sorted into Three Types:**

- Cognitive reflection helps students examine the new knowledge and skills they acquire from their experience: information, data and alternative ways of knowing or perceiving. Curriculum links are usually addressed as part of cognitive reflection.
- Affective reflection leads students to examine what they feel as a result of an experience through their emotions or attitudes. Drafting a thank you letter to the workplace host offers an opportunity for affective reflection.
- Process reflection examines what students learn from experiencing a process: planning, consequences of one decision making scheme versus another or working with others.



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Journals are the most commonly used reflection tools, but it is important to recognize that there are several modes by which students can and should reflect. Verbal, written and performance reflections can all allow students scheduled, structured time to review, think about and analyze an experience to gain deeper understanding.

Journals can be used with students for multiple purposes. What is critical when having students use a journal is that you are clear about what the expectations are for the assignment. Consider whether or not the journal is for the students' own processing or if feedback and analysis from the teacher will be expected. This will affect what the students write and how each student will utilize the feedback. Whatever model of journaling you choose for students, they will need to know whether and for what purpose you will read the entries. In the Tools section, you will find one example of an apprenticeship journal assignment.

Personal journals can be useful to students as a place to simply capture their experiences and responses to those experiences, without regard for mechanics or specific learning outcomes. Personal journals should be snapshots filed with sights, sounds, smells, concerns, insights, doubts, fears and critical questions about issues, people and most importantly the student him/herself. A personal journal isn't a work log of tasks, event, times and dates. In a personal journal students should write freely, grammar and spelling should not be stressed in the writing (unless and until the student turns one of the entries into a final draft for the group or teacher). Honesty is the most important ingredient to successful personal journals.

Learning journals are places for students to reflect on experiences and articulate how those personal experiences help them learn, expand, reinforce or apply specific learning standards and or skills.

*Learning journals can include:*

- Descriptions of the experiences, research or other tasks done in the apprenticeship experience;
- Reflection on how these tasks directly or indirectly illustrate learning standards (e.g., What did I find out from my dig with the archeologist that illustrates human impact on the environment?);
- Reflection on where else the student sees evidence/applications of this learning standard;
- Thoughts about the implications of what the student has learned (e.g., What do I think archeologists will find in a thousand years based on our current impact on the environment?);
- Reflection on the skills that were learned or used in experiences (e.g., What did I learn about interpersonal communication from interacting with the archeologist? How did I use teamwork in the experience? How well did I do as part of the team and how could I improve?).

As part of the learning journal, students can also assess themselves, their learning and their group participation, progress on work tasks, improvements to be made, places where teacher or supervisor help is needed, questions for which they need answers or clarification.



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### **The Classroom Journal**

In this exercise, students reflect upon their classmates' and teacher's journal entries. The collective experience is shared in this way without the necessity of face-to-face time. Prompt your students by writing the first entry. Then each day have a different student write an entry that reflects upon the most recent contribution before his/her own, and add new journal material for the student who gets the journal the next day to reflect upon.

### **Beyond the Apprenticeship Experience**

The support teachers provide students after their apprenticeship experience is significant. Connecting the students' workplace experience to their next step helps keep the learning continuous and dynamic for both students and their supervisors.

### **Activities with Worksite Supervisors**

The final visit with the worksite supervisor is a critical moment in the learning process. Take advantage of this meeting to help the student and worksite supervisor reflect together on the learning and growth that have taken place.

Have the student and the supervisor evaluate the experience using the **Apprenticeship Program Evaluation**. These documents will help you with your program's continuous improvement process.

### **Activities with Students**

The following activities provide students with opportunities to take their experience to another level, making it significant to their personal career development and goals.

### **Connecting the Dots Between Academic and Workplace Skills**

Divide students into two groups. Have one group brainstorm and list all the skills they observed being used during their apprenticeship experience, and the other brainstorm and list all the skills they use at school, both academically and socially. Reconvene and have students compare lists. What skills do they use in school that are used at the workplace? What opportunities do they have in school to further develop workplace skills? Discuss how students can develop workplace skills outside of school.

### **Seeing is Believing**

Have students reflect on their observations during their apprenticeship experience and compare these with their high school experiences and/or expectations. Discuss selected topics (for example, How does workplace communication differ from that at the high school? How does the workplace dress code differ from the school's? How do employees' workspaces differ from students'—and what do students prefer? How does workplace technology differ from the school's?) Have students follow up with suggestions or an essay regarding how schools can prepare them for the transition between school and work.



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### **Oral Presentation**

Students can complete an oral presentation of their experience for their class. Presentations can include observations about the workplace or the workplace host. Students can present about occupations they observed, skills they observed that were necessary to perform work duties; additional skills identified as desirable or beneficial to this occupation. Valuable presentations also include an analysis of additional necessary training, education and experience or steps that could be taken for students to develop a career pathway for this occupation. As students identify skills for each occupation, a giant or master list of skills can be developed, on which a new skill is added when mentioned and is checked when repeated. Discuss skills that are most common, skills that are often identified as necessary and skills that are most desirable. Have students identify how they can further develop skills listed.

### **Student Evaluation Meeting**

After the students have received their evaluations and you have met with the students and worksite supervisors to discuss them, have a meeting with each student and go over the grading and evaluation rubric and discuss the student's grade.

### **Personal Action Plan**

Have students determine an action plan for their own career. Have them determine what their next steps are in developing their skills, in selecting a formal educational path and in getting exposure in the workplace to experiences that will help them progress toward their goals. Work with them to develop a timeline and benchmarks. Have them identify which activities in their plan will be helpful to them even if their career goal changes.

### **Interview Anecdotes**

Have students get into small groups. Provide common job interview questions to each group and ask each individual to construct a sixty-second story to respond to one of the questions using an experience from their apprenticeship experience to illustrate. These stories should illustrate the answer to the interview question with an anecdote. Have the students participate in interview panels and evaluate their peers.

### **The Next Step**

At the end of the apprenticeship experience, it is important to support students in taking the next step. Whether in the classroom as a group activity, as part of an end-of-program presentation or in a writing assignment, students should be given an opportunity to plan their next step based on the learning they have experienced.

The classroom connection is an important component of any apprenticeship program. As a teacher, you are the partner who can see the whole picture and help the students to make the most of the experience. Take advantage of the classroom environment in order to help students learn from each other's experience and support one another in their growth and development both academically and in the skills and competencies.