

Guest Post! What I wish I knew as a new grad Occupational Therapist!



TOPIC: What I wish I knew...

If you have stumbled across this blog post, you are probably a newly graduated occupational therapist! Congratulations on completing your degree! So ...what now?

If you are anything like I was, when you graduate, you are SO VERY READY to enter the workforce after many years of juggling studying and working casual jobs. As such, the prospect of starting your OT career is both equal parts exciting and nerve-racking!

The broad nature of Occupational Therapy can make it difficult to know how and where to start when you graduate. It's likely, from university placements and possibly other work experiences, you'll have some idea of your interest area in OT. But, depending on how your university decides your placements, where you live and the unique experiences you may have had leading up to graduating, you may not yet have gained experience in the area you think you might want to work in. This can make it feel like getting your 'ideal' first job in your area of interest, is going to be hard.



Below are a few pieces of general advice from us OTs who've been around the block.

When looking for your first job...

- **Apply broadly:** Yes, this may seem like generic and

obvious advice but really – apply as broadly as you can. Be open to different job opportunities that may be available to you when you graduate, even if, on face value, they might not seem like your “ideal job”(hint hint, nudge nudge, ideal jobs do not exist!)

- **Be creative:** If you’re concerned about gaining experience in your preferred field, think if there’s another way you can get this outside of your first job? I.e. volunteering, joining an interest group, doing relevant CPD/free webinars. Don’t forget to use your university as a resource as well.
- **Just go for it!:** If you aren’t sure exactly where you want to work, you’ve got nothing to lose! Jump right in and try something. Chances are you won’t know if you enjoy something until you try it.



Yay – your first job!

- **Look for a team environment:** A new graduate may find it easier, and have more support, if their first OT role is within a team environment and where they are not the

sole OT. This allows you opportunity to shadow and learn from others, ask questions often and learn about the roles of other health professionals. The sorts of environments you'll most likely find such roles include hospital or community teams in the public/private sector, not-for-profit organisations and sizeable private practices.

- **Ask about supervision and training in your interview:** As a new graduate, ensure you ask potential employers about supervision and training. Good questions might include:
 - Is there a structured process as part of your new graduate training? i.e. periods of shadowing/observation, increased supervision or training to complete. This might be particularly relevant if the role is not advertised as a graduate role.
 - How often will you have supervision and who will this be by (i.e. by an OT or another health professional?).
 - And for private companies or smaller businesses – has the workplace had new graduates before?
- These questions will give you an idea if the workplace knows how to support a new professional and the unique learning journey they experience. For many grads, starting their first professional job coincides with their first time living out of 'home' and/or moving to a new place, and away from traditional supports like family and friends. With this in mind, it's important you know your new workplace will be a supportive environment.

It should also be noted...

- Whilst we've just said team environments are likely a supportive way to start your OT career, working as a sole practitioner as a new grad has its benefits as well, especially in the long-term. Whilst those first

months will likely be a steep learning curve, the skills you will acquire in sole OT work, such as working autonomously, time management, and self-help skills are invaluable and will help you to no end in your career. Consider what type of person you are and how a role such as this would challenge, but also reward you. If you find yourself needing some extra help, have a look at...

- OT Australia Mentoring
- Plethora of Facebook pages for Paediatric OTs/ interest groups around the world.
- ...or write a comment to use below! We'll point you in the right direction.

During your first job (and forever after)...

- **Keep track of your CPD and be organised from the get-go:**
No doubt, like many of us, you'll have no trouble at all attending all your CPD when you start your OT career, however... like many of us.. you might not be the best at documenting it. Believe us when we say – save yourself a meltdown in 5, 10, 20 years time and start a folder/excel spreadsheet early – and keep it updated. You never know when you might be audited by your professional body. Check your CPD documenting obligations here...

- Australia:
<https://www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards/Continuing-professional-development.aspx>
- UK: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/cpd/>

Other quasi-inspirational stuff about OT...

- OT is a truly global career and we have a professional body to prove it – The World Federation of Occupational Therapy. Our international existence opens up endless possibilities for you in your career. If you're interested in working internationally, you've picked

well!

- Despite this, you will still find yourself explaining the OT role everywhere. you. go. If it's not to patients/clients, it will likely be to non-OT colleagues, and if it's not them, it's at every dinner party for the rest of your life. Take on the challenge (no doubt, as you did at Uni) and be an OT advocate about our great profession.
- Any fixed ideas about what your career will look like, throw them out the window – it will look like something else and that's exciting. You'll probably start trying an area OT when you graduate and realise, you do or don't like it as much as you thought, and this leads you onto roles and things you didn't even know existed.

Good luck and happy OT-ing!