

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!

GUEST POST: What is Occupational Therapy?



TOPIC:

“So...what is Occupational Therapy?”



WHAT :

Don't worry if you find yourself asking this question when you first meet an Occupational Therapist (or even several times afterwards!).

Believe me – we understand! Our job title can be hard to understand from our name alone.

Let us provide some clarity...

Occupational Therapy is an allied healthcare profession that focuses on supporting people to participate in their “occupations” at times when these are challenging or not possible, such as through an injury, condition, disability or an undiagnosed problem. For us as Occupational Therapists (or OTs), the focus is less on what the diagnosis is, but on how it impacts someone's participation in *occupations* that are meaningful to them.

As OTs, we see occupation as everything a person

- wants to do (e.g. ride a bicycle)
- needs to do, (e.g. eat, sleep, get dressed), or
- has to do (e.g. go to work)

You'll find OTs in a number of different settings including hospitals, community centers, schools, private clinics and healthcare-related, not-for-profit organisations.

Whilst the role of an OT can look different in different

settings and when working with different populations, the core of Occupational Therapy remains the same – supporting occupational participation!

For the purposes of Look Hear, we'll be focusing on the role of OTs working with children in the community, meaning the child is not needing the specialist care of a hospital. If we think about the occupations of children in the community, these include:

- Self-care skills; toileting, washing, dressing, brushing teeth
- Student skills: writing, attention in classroom, organization
- Play skills: pretend play, playing video games, riding a bicycle, using musical instrument

...just to name a few! Think about all the things your child does during the day from the second they wake up, until they go to sleep– these are their occupations!

HOW:

Occupational Therapists can support a child's participation in an occupation in a few different ways. They can:

- change or adapt something about the child as a person (e.g. teaching/developing a skill, like the steps to riding a bike, or tolerating a the noisy hairdryer at the shopping centre)
- modify or change something about their environment (e.g. equipment to help them in the bathroom)
- change the way they do the task (e.g. tie their shoelaces a different way)



Help me do it alone.

Following an initial meeting and assessment with the child and their parent/caregivers, an OT will then work with the child and their family in supporting them to achieve their goals. Occupational Therapy intervention may look different depending on the:

- specific difficulties a child has, and challenges they are experiencing with their occupations as a result,
- the specific approach used by the therapist themselves, and
- the service the therapy is accessed through, such as public or private services.

Further information:

How do I find an OT?

Australia

Occupational Therapy Australia

- The best way to find out how an OT can help you and obtain a referral under Medicare, speak to your GP.
- To find a private practice OT, use the private practice directory on the Occupational Therapy Australia website

here.

- To find an OT in your local area via the National Health Services Directory [here](#):

United Kingdom

[Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#) here.

Finding an Occupational Therapist

- Talk to your GP about contacting an occupational therapist locally, through the NHS.
- Use the online directory on the [Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#) website or [Health and Care Professions Council \(HCPC\)](#), including independent therapists who work outside of the NHS.

[Check out our Occupational Therapy Page](#) here.