

Balancing High School and Part-Time Work

Like many high school students, you may want — or need — to work part time. Working takes a lot of time and energy, though, so before getting a job, make sure that you think about your ability to handle both work and your education.

Important Considerations

You have to weigh a number of factors when deciding whether to take on a part-time job. It's important to get as much information as possible, so you can figure out what choice makes the most sense for you.

Schedule a meeting with your school counselor to discuss the idea of working. Talk to your counselor about why you want to work and what type of position you're seeking.

Voicing your goals to someone else can help you make decisions and figure out your priorities. It can also help you judge whether you can do both — work and study — successfully. To help answer this question, ask yourself:

- Am I an organized person?
- What kind of study habits do I have?
- Do I make good use of my available time?
- Will I be able to manage my schedule effectively if I take on a part-time job?

Think about the pros and cons of working. On the plus side, a job can teach you about commitment, time management and responsibility — and, of course, handling money. On the minus side, a job can cut into the time you have for sleeping, studying and socializing.

Brad MacGowan, of the Career Center at Newton North High School in Massachusetts, thinks that working can be a valuable part of a student's life, if taken on responsibly. "You can derive a great deal from working, considerably more than just money," he says. "In most cases, you can acquire a nice dose of discipline and a whole new set of skills and experiences." In addition, your supervisor may be willing to write a strong college recommendation for you.

School Comes First

Schoolwork, including homework and studying for tests, should always be your top priority. MacGowan cautions students who do decide to work, "If you are rushing through your assignments ... or not studying enough for tests because of work, it's time to cut back or quit and find a less time-consuming job."

He reminds students that "the activities and courses students choose vary considerably, so it's important for young people to keep their individual situations clearly in mind." MacGowan continues, "For example, student actors should allow for the fact that they won't have as much time during performance seasons. Student athletes need to remember the times of the year that they'll be tied up with games and practices. Other students who are in classes that make considerable demands outside of the classroom must keep that reality in mind."

Additional Tips

Although working and going to school is challenging, it can be a rewarding experience if you use some foresight. These tips can help you handle the situation and make the most of your time:

- Discuss your plans with your family. Balancing the demands of school and work is easier with their support.
- Start slowly; don't commit to working a lot of hours immediately.
- Avoid time conflicts by planning your class and work schedules as far ahead of time as possible.
- Use your time efficiently. You can use 10 minutes waiting in a line to go over a few pages of assigned reading. If your job has a lot of downtime and your boss has no objection, you can use slow periods to do schoolwork.
- If you commute to your job on public transportation, bring your schoolwork with you so you can work along the way.
- Be flexible and willing to make sacrifices. You may have to cut down on some other things you'd like to do because of your school and work commitments.
- If you have too much on your plate, admit it. Then cut back as needed.
- Schedule relaxation time. Everyone needs some downtime to stay happy and healthy.