



FIRST 90 DAYS WORKBOOK

Your practical guide to starting a new role with confidence

01

LEARN

Days 1-30

02

CONTRIBUTE

Days 31-60

03

GROW

Days 61-90

SWM Careers

Part of SWM Services

Two Specialist Brands. One Shared Purpose.

START STRONG.

Use this workbook throughout your first three months. Write in it, revisit it and use it to prepare for conversations with your manager.

Welcome to Your First 90 Days

Congratulations on your new role.

Starting a new job is exciting, but it can also feel overwhelming. Suddenly there are new people to meet, systems to understand, expectations to manage and a completely different workplace culture to navigate.

You may go from feeling confident and capable in your previous environment to asking basic questions again.

That's normal.

Nobody should expect you to understand everything on your first day.

Your first 90 days aren't about being perfect. They're about learning, building relationships, understanding expectations and gradually demonstrating what you can contribute.

This workbook will help you approach those first three months with greater confidence and purpose.

You'll explore:

Starting well

Meeting colleagues and building relationships

Understanding and managing expectations

Professional behaviour

Effective workplace communication

Building confidence

Learning your role quickly

Avoiding common new-starter mistakes

Reviewing your progress

Creating your own 30, 60 and 90-day plan

You don't need to complete everything immediately.

Use the workbook throughout your first three months and return to the exercises as your understanding of the role develops.

Your First 90 Days

A useful way to approach a new role is to divide your first three months into three stages.

Days 1-30: LEARN

Your priority is understanding.

Learn about:

Your role

Your manager

Your colleagues

Your organisation

Your customers or service users

Systems and processes

Workplace culture

Expectations

Priorities

Don't put yourself under pressure to change everything immediately.

Understand before you try to improve.

Days 31-60: CONTRIBUTE

You should now be developing a clearer understanding of your role.

Start moving from learning towards contributing.

Focus on:

Taking greater ownership

Delivering agreed priorities

Strengthening relationships

Applying what you've learned

Asking for feedback

Identifying improvements

Developing your skills

Days 61-90: GROW

By this stage, you should understand much more about your role and organisation.

Now consider:

Where can I add more value?

What have I achieved?

What still feels difficult?



What skills do I need to develop?

What feedback have I received?

What should my priorities be for the next six months?

Your first 90 days aren't the end of your development.

They're the foundations for what comes next.

1. Starting Well

You don't need to prove yourself on Day One

It's natural to want to make a good impression.

But trying too hard to impress people can sometimes have the opposite effect.

Your first few weeks should primarily be about listening, learning and understanding.

Be curious.

Ask questions.

Take notes.

Observe how things work.

Understand why things are done in particular ways before suggesting how they could be changed.

Before Your First Day

Prepare the practical things you can control.

Confirm where and when you need to arrive

Check travel arrangements or remote-working access

Understand the expected dress code

Re-read the job description

Review the organisation's website

Look at its mission, values and priorities

Review your interview notes

Prepare any documents you've been asked to bring

Get a good night's sleep

Give yourself plenty of time on the morning

Reflection

What attracted me to this role?

What am I most excited about?

What am I most nervous about?

What would help me feel more prepared?



2. Your First Week

Your first week can feel like information overload.

You might be introduced to dozens of people, systems, acronyms and processes.

Don't expect yourself to remember everything.

Focus on five things:



1. People Who do you need to know?



2. Priorities What matters most?



3. Processes How does work get done?



4. Culture How do people behave and communicate?

5. Expectations What does your manager need from you?

My First-Week Checklist

Meet my manager

Understand my immediate priorities

Meet my immediate team

Understand key systems

Complete essential induction/training

Understand working arrangements

Understand important policies

Identify key contacts

Arrange regular manager catch-ups

Ask how success will be measured

At the end of Week One

Three things I've learned:

Something I still don't understand:

One question I need to ask next week:

3. Meeting Your Colleagues

Your ability to do your job will often depend on other people.

Relationships matter.

You don't need to become everyone's best friend, but investing time in understanding colleagues will make it easier to communicate, collaborate and get things done.

Your Stakeholder Map

Think beyond your immediate team.

Person/Team	Why are they important to my role?	What do I need to learn from them?
My manager		
Immediate colleagues		
Senior leaders		
Other departments		
Customers/service users		
External partners		

Useful questions when meeting colleagues

Try asking:

"Tell me a little about your role."

"How does your work connect with mine?"

"What would be useful for me to understand?"

"What's the best way for us to communicate?"

"Is there anything you wish you'd known when you started here?"

People usually appreciate genuine curiosity.



4. Managing Expectations

One of the biggest causes of difficulty in a new role is unclear expectations.

You think you're doing well.

Your manager thinks you should be focusing on something completely different.

Don't guess.

Ask.

Five Questions to Ask Your Manager



1. What are your priorities for me during my first three months?



2. What would a successful first 90 days look like?



3. How will my performance be measured?



4. How do you prefer us to communicate?



5. How often should we review my progress?

Clarify priorities

When everything feels important, ask:

What needs doing now?

What can wait?

What does good look like?

When is this needed?

Who needs to be involved?

Clear expectations reduce unnecessary stress.

5. Professional Behaviour

Professionalism isn't about wearing a suit or using complicated language.

It's about being someone other people can trust and rely on.

Professional behaviours include:

Reliability

Do what you say you're going to do.

If you can't, communicate early.

Punctuality

Be ready for work, meetings and deadlines.

Respect

Treat people professionally regardless of their position.

Confidentiality

Understand what information can and cannot be shared.

Accountability

Own your work and your mistakes.

Curiosity

Be willing to ask questions and learn.

Self-awareness

Think about how your behaviour affects other people.

6. Understanding Workplace Culture

Every organisation has written rules.

It also has unwritten rules.

During your first few weeks, observe.

How do people communicate?

Formal or informal?

How are decisions made?

What happens during meetings?

How do people challenge ideas?

What behaviours seem to be valued?

What causes frustration?

How quickly are people expected to respond?

Understanding workplace culture doesn't mean changing who you are.

It means understanding the environment you're working within.

7. Communication

Good communication is one of the fastest ways to build trust.

Don't assume everyone communicates like you

Some managers want regular updates.

Others prefer you to work independently and raise issues when necessary.

Some colleagues prefer email.

Others prefer Teams, Slack, phone calls or face-to-face conversations.

Find out.

A simple communication rule

When giving an update, consider:

What's happened?

What does the person need to know?

Is there a problem?

What action is needed?

Who needs to take it?

By when?

Before sending an email or message ask:

Is this clear?

Is it necessary?

Does the recipient know what I need from them?

Have I included the relevant information?

Would a conversation be easier?

8. Asking Questions

New starters sometimes avoid asking questions because they're worried about looking inexperienced.

But you're supposed to be inexperienced in this particular role.

Nobody reasonably expects you to know everything.

Good questions demonstrate curiosity.

However, try to become increasingly independent.

Before asking, consider:

Have I checked my notes?

Can I find the answer myself?

Have I been told this previously?

Who is the best person to ask?

Keep a notebook or digital document for questions and answers.

You'll gradually build your own personal guide to the role.

9. Learning Quickly

Starting a job can feel like trying to drink from a fire hose.

Don't try to remember everything.

Create a system.

Your Learning Log

What I need to learn	Who/what can help?	Target date	Completed

Try the Learn → Do → Reflect approach

LEARN

Watch someone, read the guidance or receive training.

DO

Try the task yourself.

REFLECT

Ask:

What worked?

What didn't?

What would I do differently next time?

Learning becomes much faster when you actively reflect rather than simply repeat tasks.

10. Building Confidence

Starting somewhere new can knock your confidence.

Yesterday, you might have been the person everyone asked for help.

Today, you don't even know how to book a meeting room.

That doesn't mean you've suddenly become less capable.

You're simply working in an unfamiliar environment.

Remember:

Confidence usually follows competence.

And competence takes time.

Instead of expecting yourself to know everything, look for evidence of progress.

My Weekly Wins

At the end of each week record:

Something I understand now that I didn't last week:

Something I did well:

Positive feedback I received:

Something I found difficult:

One thing I'll focus on next week:

Small wins add up.

11. Asking for Feedback

Don't wait until your probation review to discover how you're doing.

Ask regularly.

Try:

"How do you think I'm settling in?"

"Is there anything you'd like me to approach differently?"

"What am I doing well?"

"Where should I focus on improving?"

"Is there anything you expected me to have progressed further with by now?"

Feedback isn't criticism.

It's information.

And information helps you improve.

Feedback Record

Date: _____

Feedback received:

What am I doing well?

What should I improve?

What action will I take?

12. Common Mistakes to Avoid

Mistake 1: Trying to change everything immediately

You might spot things that could be improved.

Understand why they're done that way first.

Mistake 2: Constantly talking about your previous employer

"At my old company we..."

Occasionally useful.

Constantly irritating.

Bring your experience with you, but recognise you're somewhere new.

Mistake 3: Pretending you understand

If you don't understand something, ask.

It's usually easier to clarify now than fix a mistake later.

Mistake 4: Getting involved in gossip

You don't know the relationships or history yet.

Stay professional and neutral.

Mistake 5: Saying yes to everything

Enthusiasm is positive.

Overcommitting isn't.

If you're unsure about competing priorities, ask your manager.

Mistake 6: Hiding mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes.

Acknowledge them.

Tell the right person.

Help fix them.

Learn from them.

Mistake 7: Waiting for people to tell you how you're doing

Ask for feedback.

Mistake 8: Expecting yourself to know everything immediately

Give yourself permission to learn.

13. Your First 30 Days

Focus: LEARN

During your first month, aim to understand your environment.

By Day 30, can you answer these questions?

What are my main responsibilities?

What are my manager's priorities?

How will my performance be measured?

Who are my key colleagues and stakeholders?

What systems do I need to use?

What are the important processes?

What are the organisation's priorities?

How does my role contribute?

What workplace behaviours are expected?

Where can I go when I need help?

Day 30 Reflection

My biggest achievement so far:

My biggest learning:

The relationship I most need to develop:

Something I need more support with:

My priority for the next 30 days:



14. Days 31-60

Focus: CONTRIBUTE

Now start taking greater ownership.

Consider:

What responsibilities can I take on independently?

Where can I add value?

Which relationships need strengthening?

What feedback should I act on?

Where do I still need support?

My Days 31-60 Goals

Goal 1

Actions

Goal 2

Actions

Goal 3

Actions



15. Days 61-90

Focus: GROW

By now, you should be moving beyond simply being "the new person".

Think about your longer-term development.

Ask yourself:

What am I now confident doing independently?

Where have I added value?

What feedback have I acted on?

Which skills have I developed?

What do I want to learn next?

What could I contribute over the next six months?



16. Your 30 / 60 / 90 Day Plan

DAYS 1-30 — LEARN

My three priorities

People I need to meet

Things I need to learn

Success will look like:

DAYS 31-60 — CONTRIBUTE

My three priorities

Responsibilities I want to take greater ownership of

Relationships I want to strengthen

Success will look like:

DAYS 61-90 — GROW

My three priorities

Skills I want to develop

Ways I can add greater value

Success will look like:

17. Preparing for Your Probation Review

Don't start preparing the night before.

Keep a record throughout your first few months.

My Evidence Bank

Record examples of:

Achievements

Positive feedback

Problems I've solved

New skills I've developed

Relationships I've built

Challenges I've overcome

Training I've completed

Ideas I've contributed



18. Your 90-Day Review

Congratulations — you've reached the end of your first three months.

Take some time to recognise how far you've come.

Looking Back

What am I most proud of?

What have I learned about myself?

What have I learned about the organisation?

What has been more difficult than expected?

Which relationships have been most important?

What feedback have I received?

What would I do differently if I started again?



19. Looking Forward

Your first 90 days were about establishing yourself.

Now think about the next stage.

My Next Six Months

Three professional goals

A skill I want to develop

A relationship I want to strengthen

Something I'd like to take greater responsibility for

Something I'd like to achieve

Your First 90 Days — Quick Checklist

Start Well

- Understand your role
- Clarify expectations
- Ask questions
- Take notes

Build Relationships

- Get to know colleagues
- Identify important stakeholders
- Understand how people prefer to communicate
- Be helpful and reliable

Learn

- Understand systems
- Learn key processes
- Ask for training
- Keep a learning log

Communicate

- Keep your manager updated
- Ask when you're unsure
- Listen carefully
- Communicate problems early

Build Confidence

- Record weekly wins
- Ask for feedback
- Recognise your progress
- Don't expect perfection

Demonstrate Professionalism

- Be reliable
- Meet deadlines
- Respect confidentiality
- Take responsibility
- Avoid workplace gossip

Prepare for Your Review

- Record achievements



Keep examples of feedback

Review your objectives

Identify development needs

Prepare your next goals



Ten Things to Remember



1. Nobody expects you to know everything on Day One.



2. Listen before trying to change things.



3. Ask questions rather than pretending you understand.



4. Relationships matter as much as tasks.



5. Clarify expectations instead of guessing.



6. Ask for feedback throughout your probation.



7. Mistakes are opportunities to learn — if you take responsibility for them.



8. Don't compare your Week 3 with somebody else's Year 3.



9. Keep a record of your progress and achievements.



10. Give yourself time. Confidence grows as your experience grows.

One Final Thought

Starting a new role isn't about demonstrating everything you know.

It's about showing that you can learn, adapt, contribute and grow.

There will probably be days when you feel confident and days when you wonder whether you know what you're doing.

That's part of starting something new.

Keep learning.

Keep asking.

Keep building relationships.

Keep reflecting on your progress.

And remember:

You were offered the job for a reason.

Now give yourself the time and opportunity to grow into it.



Continue Your Career Journey with SWM Careers

The First 90 Days Workbook is part of the practical career support available from SWM Careers, one of the two specialist brands within SWM Services.

We help individuals navigate their careers with practical, straightforward support covering:

Career planning

CVs and applications

Interview preparation

Starting a new role

Career change

Graduate careers

Confidence and personal development

Professional development

Join the SWM Careers Community

Join our free community to receive practical career guidance, new resources, articles, tools and updates from the SWM Careers team.

Your career doesn't have to follow somebody else's path.

We'll help you take your next step.

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