



Job Focus: Working Student

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[Back to Articles...](#)

What is the process to get a working student position?

Research. Research who is offering working student programs, who you really want to learn from and even find out what programs other successful people in the horse industry started out as working students for. Someone said to me once that it would always be more rewarding to scrub buckets for someone I respected and could learn from, than riding horses for a lesser professional, and I've tried to remember and apply that in as many situations as I can. It's not often that inexperience will matter if you have enthusiasm and a willingness to learn and work hard, so I think that when applying for working student positions you aim for the absolute best programs and riders that you can. You might have to just approach trainers and explain that you are willing to work really hard in any capacity or role that would be useful to them, in exchange for whatever you are hoping to get out of the experience. I would suggest being extremely specific in this stage of the process because obviously, when dealing with unpaid labour it's easy to be taken advantage of if you don't gauge how sincere the potential employer seems or if you don't list your requirements.

What are the positives and negatives?

Even though I look back on my experience as a working student as one of my favourite summers, I also have probably never worked so hard in my entire life. Having done lots of showing and traveling with horses but never actually grooming for a busy show and sales barn with a Grand Prix rider, it was definitely a culture shock. I distinctly remember very early on being dropped off alone at the Bromont horse show with an equipment trailer packed full of tack trunks stacked three-high and set up equipment, and nothing but a dolly and one bottle of water; I was thinking that this might be how I die. As a working student you will often find that you work longer and harder than the other employees because so much of the experience is proving you want to be there and are a worthy recipient of someone's time and knowledge. You might feel slightly taken advantage of from time to time, and you will definitely feel like it's unfair on the days you end up mucking 15 of the 20 stalls or end up spending an entire day scrubbing floors, but on the days you have a really great lesson or get to groom the good horse, or learn how to do something new it will seem completely worthwhile. The only real negative is not making any money, but if you can financially handle having no income for a period of time I don't think you will particularly regret that part either. The entire experience will probably occur in varying levels of crippling exhaustion, but in a fulfilling way that makes you feel like you're accomplishing something important. Being a working student may not be for the faint of heart, but neither is the horse industry in general, so for many, their time spent as a working student served as an introduction to long and successful careers in horses.