

DOCUMENTING FREE-LANCE WORK or SELF-EMPLOYMENT ON OPT

Art students often have non-traditional OPT employment situations. If this is you, then you need to take extra steps to document that you are maintaining your F-1 status - working at least 21 hours per week in your particular field of study and accruing no more than 90 days of unemployment.

To help document that you are employed:

Create a log and keep detailed records of each job:

- Start and end dates of employment
- Your work schedule, including the number of hours worked per week
- Job title and description of your position, including how it relates to your degree
- Name/address of employer, including your supervisor's contact information
- Compensation, if any

Examples of documents that help support these records include an offer letter, contract, timesheet, payslip, print out of the job posting, business card of your employer, letter from your employer, etc.

There's no "standard format" for keeping a log, some students create an Excel sheet, others use a paper notebook. Using a format that is electronic or web-based has the advantage of being accessible from more than one location and not getting lost as easily. Your records should also be clear and easy for someone else to understand.

When keeping track of your hours, include time spent in the studio working on pieces, meeting with clients, preparing for a gallery show, traveling to a film shoot, etc... Document ALL the time you spend in relation to your career each week.

Keep copies of all documents related to each project or job, e.g. e-mails, offer letters, request for a commissioned piece or project, contracts, tax documents, etc...

Request a letter from each project or employer that confirms the details of the project, i.e. the scope of work to be performed, the dates between which you are expected to be working on it, and the expected number of hours.

Documentation from an employer is best, if available, but your documentation is better than not having anything.

Keep all of the documentation mentioned above – hours log, offer letters, contracts, etc... - organized and in a safe place. Update the SEVP Portal for EACH job that you have on OPT, even if they are small jobs. When you record your employment in SEVIS, you are making sure not to accrue unemployment time!