



2026

Passing Your Probationary Period at Work

**A Practical Guide to
Succeeding in Your New Role**

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A message from our founder

The start of a new job makes anyone a little nervous, even if you know you're perfect for the role.

For many employees, knowing how much the spotlight is on them during a probationary period can make the anxiety worse.

Probationary periods aren't a bad thing; they're an opportunity for both sides to decide if the match works in practice. Across the UK, the United States, and Australia, probationary periods have become a standard feature of employment.

Most last between three and six months, though many US companies still follow a 90-day model. The intent is simple: to give employers a chance to assess performance and fit, and to give employees space to decide whether the culture and pace are right for them.

Research shows this period carries real weight. In Australia, one in eight employees resign during probation. In the UK, the number can be as high as one in five. That's a clear sign that probation isn't just for employers, it's for you too.

Of course, leaders shape how a workplace feels, even when they don't try to. In the UK, hiring has slowed right down. It takes roughly eight weeks to fill a role now, compared with under five last year. That gap makes probation run a bit longer than expected.

This report is designed to help you move forward in those first months with confidence. It explains how probation works across regions, what rights you hold, and how to build the habits and relationships that turn a trial period into a strong start.



A good probation period ends with clarity.

You know what's expected, where you fit, and where you're going next.

A handwritten signature of Sarah Bishop in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**SARAH BISHOP
FOUNDER & CEO**

Understanding Probationary Periods in the Industry



Every new job starts with a mix of excitement and uncertainty.

You're learning names, systems, and routines while trying to make a good impression. The probationary period exists to make that time useful rather than overwhelming. It gives both you and your employer a chance to see whether the role fits as well in practice as it did on paper.

For managers, probation provides a safety net. It gives them a clear view of whether someone can meet expectations, take feedback well, and fit into the team's rhythm.

For new hires, it's a window into the real version of the job, the one that exists beyond the interviews. When probation is handled well, it gives both sides time to learn, adjust, and build confidence together.

How long does it usually last?

Most probationary periods last between three and six months. The details vary by country and sometimes by role.

In the United Kingdom, three months is common, though senior or public-sector positions can extend to six or more months. The government's planned *Employment Rights Bill*, expected around 2026–27, aims to provide greater clarity on these timeframes and strengthen protection from the first day of employment.

What Employers Notice and Employees Can Learn

Managers tend to focus on a few steady themes: reliability, communication, curiosity, and growth. They notice whether you keep promises, ask good questions, and take feedback seriously. They also see how you handle small things like being on time, replying to messages, or following through.

Many organisations use HR systems to log feedback, but the daily interactions still matter most. A quick update after finishing a task or a simple "thanks for the guidance" often says more than a score on a dashboard.

Probation isn't about being flawless. It's about showing you can learn. Managers expect mistakes; they're looking at how you handle them. The early weeks tell you a lot about where you've landed.

Those first few months teach you a lot. Watch how your manager sets goals and how they respond when you ask a question. Notice how people treat each other once things get hectic. Check that you have the right tools and support.

If something feels off, ask. It's better to speak early than to guess later.

The culture will start to show itself as well. Some teams move fast and expect independence. Others prefer talking things through. Neither's wrong; you need to see where you work best.

How probation is changing

Work itself looks different now, and probation reflects that shift. Remote and hybrid teams mean communication and initiative count for as much as technical skill. Managers look for people who can stay visible, share progress, and build trust from a distance.

The focus on digital confidence is stronger, too. A survey found that nearly half of employers are recruiting for data and digital-focused skills. If you can show those during probation, that gives you a strong edge.

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that probation doesn't remove your rights. You're still protected against discrimination, unsafe work, and unfair treatment from your first day. The only real differences are usually shorter notice periods or a delay in some benefits.

It also isn't one-sided. If the job or environment turns out to be a poor fit, you can say so. Both parties share probation, and honest conversations at this stage can prevent larger problems later.

Your Rights During Probation

Probation can sound harsher than it is. The word itself evokes being tested or watched. In reality, probation is just the first stage of employment. You're still an employee, and you still have rights.

In the UK, you're still protected by the 2010 Equality Act and the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act. If your employer decides to end the contract early, they need to give you a week's notice if you've been employed for a month.

Knowing What You Deserve

Probation doesn't freeze your benefits. You continue to accrue leave, receive regular pay, and are covered by workplace insurance. In most places, you'll also see pension or superannuation contributions from your first payslip. Some employers delay access to private health or bonus schemes, but your basic entitlements keep running quietly in the background.

Your employer can't fire you because of your race, gender, age, or disability. They can't hold back your pay or ignore safety rules. If something feels off, say, bullying or unsafe work, tell someone. Talk to your manager or HR. You're not overreacting by raising it. You're protecting your right to feel safe at work.

Surviving Probation: Essential Strategies for Success

Starting somewhere new is awkward. You walk in wanting to do well, but half the time you're just trying to keep up. Everyone already knows the shortcuts. You're still figuring out who to ask when something breaks. That's fine, that's what this part is for.

First 30 Days: Laying the Groundwork

Those first few weeks are about building roots, not racing ahead. Everyone knows you're new. What they notice is how you handle it.

Get clear early

Have a short chat with your manager about what matters most right now. Ask, "If I get three things right this month, what should they be?" You'll sound focused, not needy.

Keep a light plan

Sketch out rough goals for 30-60-90 days. Even just a page of bullet points. It gives you direction when everything still feels like alphabet soup.

Learn what the job actually is

The job description is only half the story. The real work shows up late on a Friday afternoon. That's when you see how decisions are made, who signs off on what, and what always seems urgent. Pay attention there; that's where the culture lives.

Meet people before you need them.

Introduce yourself. Ask small questions. Listen. The person who explains the copier today might save your project next month.

Build good habits fast.

Turn up on time. Keep your calendar tidy. Write things down. Reliability gets noticed.

Get to grips with the tools.

Every workplace has its tech challenges. Shared drives that hide files, systems that freeze, passwords that never work right. Figure them out early so they stop slowing you down.

At the end of month one, your goal is simple: people should know you're organised/organized, easy to work with, and genuinely trying to understand the place.

Days 31-60: Adding Value

By now, you've stopped asking where the meeting room is. This is the stretch where learning turns into contribution.

Start taking initiative

Look for small gaps and fill them. Maybe tidy a messy process, spot an error in a report, or take a routine task off someone's plate. Small wins count.

Ask for more to do wisely

Let your manager know you're keen to help more. A simple line works: "If a project needs an extra hand, I'm happy to help."

Keep relationships warm

Check in with teammates. Share updates before they chase you. A short "I've finished that task; let me know if anything needs tweaking" does wonders.

Something will go wrong. Breathe. Explain the issue, suggest a fix, and move on. Managers remember who stays steady under pressure.

Ask for feedback, then act on it.

You don't need a formal review. A quick, "How's my work landing so far?" works. Listen, take notes, and make one visible change. That's how trust grows.

By the end of month two, people should see you as someone dependable, someone who doesn't just learn, but contributes.

Days 61–90: Making It Count

Now you're part of the rhythm. You know names, systems, and the shortcuts nobody writes down. This is where you turn consistency into impact.

Deliver what you promised.

Meet the goals you set at the start. Keep a list of what you've achieved: finished tasks, feedback received, things you've improved. You'll need it for your review.

Bring one good idea

It doesn't have to change the world. Maybe a simpler report, a quicker workflow, a tweak to a client email. Thoughtful suggestions show you care about the bigger picture.

Help someone else

If a new starter appears, show them the ropes. Teaching a process out loud demonstrates that you understand it and builds goodwill quickly.

Show you're in it for the long haul

Have a short conversation about what comes next: projects you'd like to try, skills you want to build. It signals to your manager that you're thinking beyond probation.

Prep for your review

Keep it honest. Talk about what's gone well and what you've learned. If something didn't work as expected, note what you changed. Growth matters more than polish.

By the time your first ninety days are up, the goal isn't just to "pass." It's to have people thinking, "I can't imagine the team without them." That's the real finish line.

Habits that help you through

- A few habits make any probation period easier:
- Be on time. It shows respect for other people's time.
- Keep your word. If you promise something, deliver it.
- Ask when unsure. Guessing quietly costs more time than asking aloud.
- Stay calm. Everyone makes mistakes. The people who recover quickly earn trust.
- Be kind. The way you treat colleagues matters as much as what you produce.

These are habits that make you dependable, and dependable people always make it past probation.

Seeking and Incorporating Feedback

Feedback during probation is how you learn what's working and what isn't. Nobody gets everything right in the first few months, not even those who appear confident. People who request feedback settle in faster.

Your manager's learning how you operate, and you're learning their style too. Feedback keeps you in sync. When you ask for it, you're really saying, "I care about doing this right." Managers pay attention to that attitude.

How to ask for it

The best feedback comes from specific questions. Broad ones like "How am I doing?" tend to produce vague answers. Try narrowing it down:

- "Was my report clear enough, or should I format it differently next time?"
- "Did I handle that client call the way you expected?"
- "What's one thing I could do better next week?"

These kinds of questions take the pressure off your manager to find something to say. They also make it easier for you to act on the answers.

When feedback comes, listen. Don't rush to explain or defend yourself. If something sounds unclear, ask for an example.

What you do after a conversation matters most. Show that you've listened. Make one visible change, and let your manager know you tried it. A quick, "I used your suggestion on that report; it flowed better," tells them their effort made a difference.

If you keep doing this, your probation review won't hold any surprises. It'll just be a recap of things you've already discussed along the way.

Training and Development

Feedback tells you what to work on. Training is where you actually get better. Probation isn't only about proving yourself; it's the best window you'll get to learn fast and build the habits that last.

Sometimes the formal onboarding covers everything. Often, it doesn't. If it feels thin, ask something like: "Could we go over the main things I should be learning this month?" Most managers appreciate someone who wants a bit of structure. It saves them the guesswork later.

Everyone has weak spots. Maybe you're fine on the technical side but shaky on the process. Perhaps you know the system yet still get lost when things move faster. Write those insights down. Seeing them on paper takes the sting out of it and gives you a starting point.

Every company has old guides, recordings, or short courses hiding somewhere on the intranet. Dig a little. You'll find something useful. When you do, mention it: "That quick tutorial helped me sort the new report layout." It's not bragging. It's proof you care enough to figure things out.

Watch the pros who get things done. Ask how they do it, what shortcuts they've found, what they wish they'd known early on. That's the kind of training you won't find in a document. Sometimes it's a five-minute chat in the kitchen that saves you an hour next week.

Don't wait for a schedule or permission. Try something new each week: one tool, one task, one better way to explain something. Keep a small notebook or notes on your phone. Those tiny improvements pile up fast.

Building Relationships and Cultural Fit

People often think probation is about skills, and it's also about connection. Skills might get you hired, yet relationships keep you there. You can hit every target and still struggle if you never build trust.

In your first few weeks, you'll probably feel like an outsider. Everyone already has shorthand, routines, and unspoken jokes. You're still figuring out who to ask for what. Don't rush it. Spend that time watching how people actually work together.

Who speaks up in meetings? Who's the person everyone quietly turns to when things go wrong? Which conversations happen over coffee and which ones stay formal? Those clues tell you more about how a team functions than any handbook could.

Say hello to people you pass. Learn names. Make an effort to be part of the community.

Reliability is what people remember most. If you promise, deliver. If you don't know, ask. Nobody expects you to be perfect, but they do remember steady effort.

Listen more than you talk, especially at first. Give yourself a little time to understand how this particular group solves problems, how they handle pressure, and what tone they use when things get tense. Matching that tone early helps more than you might realise.

Every company says it has a "great culture." What that means in reality is how people behave when things aren't going smoothly. That's when the real culture shows up.

Pay attention to how feedback is given. Are mistakes treated as part of learning, or do they spark blame? Do leaders make space for questions, or do they prefer silence?

If you're unsure how to fit, mirror the best parts of what you see: the helpfulness, the calm under pressure, and ignore what doesn't sit right. You can adapt without losing yourself.

Culture fit doesn't mean becoming someone else. It simply means demonstrating that you understand the values the team already upholds.

Good relationships grow from the small things. Check in with a teammate, say good morning, and follow up on promises. It doesn't take much, just steady effort. Over time, that's what builds trust.

If you're remote, the connection takes more effort. Cameras on, clear updates, short, friendly messages, those small signals remind people you're present. Silence in a remote setting is mistaken for disinterest.

Humour helps too, when used gently. Laughing at your own learning curve makes everyone more comfortable.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Nobody walks in planning to fail probation, but it still happens. It's not usually about skill. It's the little things: missed messages, late replies, forgotten updates. They pile up. The good thing is, once you see those patterns, you can stop them before they grow.

Mistake 1: Going Quiet:

If you disappear into your work and stop talking, people get nervous. Silence gets read as trouble. When your manager doesn't hear from you, they fill in the blanks, and not always kindly. You don't have to give a full report every hour, just small updates. A message to say you've wrapped something up or hit a snag keeps everyone calm. It shows you're present, and that matters more than sounding perfect.

Mistake 2: Treating feedback like criticism:

Everyone gets feedback during probation. That's what it's for. Those who struggle often take it personally rather than using it. Managers know you won't get everything right. They're watching to see if you learn and adjust.

Mistake 3: Overconfidence/Overcorrection:

Some people push too hard to prove themselves. They say yes to everything, stay late, and burn out halfway through. Others hold back too much, scared to overstep. Both can confuse your manager. Try to find the middle ground. Contribute steadily, follow through, and make time to rest. Managing your energy is a quiet strength that good teams respect.

Mistake 4: Avoiding difficult conversations

Unspoken problems turn into bigger ones. Managers might think you've checked out when you're just unsure. Bring it up early. Keep it calm. Even a short chat like "Can we talk about how things are going?" can reset everything.

Mistake 5: Forgetting the basics

The mistakes that cause trouble during probation are often tiny. Being late, missing messages, joining in on gossip, they seem small, but patterns form quickly. People notice reliability before they notice big wins. Showing up, following through, and being kind will get you further than you think.

The biggest mistake of all

The real danger during probation isn't doing something wrong. It's not learning from it. Everyone slips up; that's part of starting anywhere new. What matters is how you recover.

If you miss a deadline, own it and explain how you'll stop it from happening again. If feedback stings, take a breath, then act on what's useful.

You don't need to avoid mistakes completely. You need to show that you see them for what they are: chances to improve, not verdicts on your worth.

The Probation Review Process

The word review tends to make people nervous. It sounds formal, maybe even final. In reality, a probation review is just a conversation: a pause to look at how things are going. It's a chance to take stock before moving forward.

If your manager has been giving you feedback along the way, there shouldn't be any surprises. The review is less about catching you out and more about checking how everything's working, for both sides. You're still deciding if the job fits you, too.

Before the review

Start prepping early. Take a quiet minute to think about your first day and what's changed since. Write down what you've learned, what you've finished, what you've figured out. Include the hard parts too: the things that went wrong and what they taught you. Managers notice when someone's honest about that.

During the review

When the meeting starts, take a breath. You don't need to perform. You need to talk about your work honestly.

Most reviews follow the same loose pattern: what's gone well, what needs focus, what happens next. When you describe your progress, use real examples: *"In my second month, I started managing the supplier emails. At first, I needed help checking details, but now I can handle them independently."*

If your manager gives feedback that's hard to hear, pause. Listen all the way through. Ask for an example if something's vague. When you get the chance, talk about what you want to develop next. Maybe you'd like to lead a small project or learn a system you've seen others use. It doesn't need to sound ambitious; it just needs to sound thoughtful.

The outcomes

There are usually three.

- **Passing.** The most common. This means your probation is complete, and you'll transition to permanent employment. You'll often receive a short letter confirming it, along with any changes to pay or benefits.
- **Extension.** This one can sting at first, but it's not necessarily bad. Sometimes a manager may need more time to review your work, especially if you joined during a busy period. Ask what they want to see in the next few months and how you'll be measured. That gives you control.
- **Ending the role.** It happens occasionally, usually when the job isn't the right fit on either side. If it does, you're still entitled to notice and pay for your work. Ask for written feedback if you can. You'll want it later, when you're ready to learn from the experience.

After the review

Take time to reflect before rushing ahead.

If you're staying, keep doing what worked: ask questions, show initiative, communicate. Those are the same habits that build long-term success.

If you've been extended, treat it like a second chance, not a setback. Now you know exactly what's being looked for.

If the opportunity ends, be kind to yourself. A job ending during probation doesn't define your ability; it just means the match wasn't right. You'll carry the lessons into whatever comes next.

If your probation's confirmed, take a moment to breathe. It's an achievement. Then, turn your focus to the months ahead. Keep doing what worked: asking, listening, and steady follow-through. Those habits are what turn a good start into a lasting career.

If it's extended, don't treat it as a failure. It usually means your manager believes you can get there with more time. Ask what they want to see and set clear goals for yourself.

Probation feels like a test, but it's really time to learn how you fit. You're defining your role, what you need, and where you can grow. Most of the time, it comes down to five habits:

When you strip it all back, success in probation comes down to five things:

- **Clarity:** ask until you understand what's expected.
- **Performance:** do what you said you'd do, and do it well.
- **Communication:** keep people in the loop.
- **Relationships:** be kind, be fair, and work with people.
- **Initiative:** notice what needs doing and take action.

If you hold onto those, everything else falls into place. Remember, probation goes both ways. You've been watched, but you've also been watching. You've seen how people treat each other and how your manager leads. If it feels like the right place, give it your best. If not, apply what you've learned and find a better fit.

Probation ends, but growth doesn't. Every lesson from these months sticks with you. You've already done the hard bit. Now keep pushing forward, one day at a time.

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A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- Recruitment: finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- Sales & Leadership Training: developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- Speaking & EmCeeing: energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- Coaching: supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.



Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon - "Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams" by Sarah Bishop