

# Flexible work

## *Adjusting the when and where of your job*

by Elka Maria Torpey

**E**llen Celarek's top priority is her kids. So, when looking for a job, she makes family-friendly work a priority, too.

With flexibility in mind, Celarek, of Schaumburg, Illinois, found employment that lets her work at home part time, often during the hours of her choice. "My job fits perfectly with my schedule," she says. "I can take the kids to the doctor or help out at school when I want."

Many people today are seeking flexibility at work. Parents, like Celarek, may want more time for family. Students hope to fit employment into a busy class schedule. And some people look for work after retirement. Whatever their situation, they're not alone in wanting a job that's a better match for their lives.

The following pages explain some options for gaining greater control over your worklife. The first section gives general advice on how to make a current job more flexible—or how to find a more flexible one. The next three sections identify options that will let you work less, work at home, or work alternative hours; each talks about specific arrangements, their pros and cons, and how to get them. Sources for more information are provided at the end of the article.

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# Would you like to work fewer hours, set your own schedule, or work at home? Read here about some of the options for balancing your job with your life.

## Get flexible: Work on your terms

Everyone has preferences regarding flexibility and work. For some, the ideal flexibility might mean bringing an infant to work for onsite childcare. For others, it might mean choosing the types of tasks that they do. Still others might seek a career that lets them leave their job for a while, then return later without having to take a cut in pay or seniority.

Your own preferences for flexibility and the types of jobs you'll consider may depend on personal needs, skills, educational background, and other factors. But whatever your circumstances, there are some general ways to enhance the flexibility of your work, either by making a current job more flexible or by changing to a more accommodating one.

### Start with your current job

If you're already working, ask your employer if your position can be adapted to fit your needs. Before talking to your boss, however, prepare to make a strong case for how flexibility benefits your employer as well as yourself.

Start by looking into flexible work options and your employer's policies on their use. Find out if other employees have successfully used the arrangements that interest you. And for arrange-

ments that involve cutting back on work hours, talk to the human resources department to learn how your benefits might be affected.



After gathering some facts, write up a formal proposal to present to your supervisor or whoever has the authority to agree to the change. A strong proposal explains how the arrangement will work and what its advantages are. It anticipates concerns that a supervisor or manager might have, such as coordinating staff meetings around a flexibly scheduled worker—and then presents solutions, such as an agreement to go to the office on days when meetings are held. (For a sample work-at-home proposal, see the box on the facing page.)

Lois Backon, of the Families and Work Institute in New York, suggests giving your supervisor specific options. “People like choices, managers like choices,” she says. “They like to be presented with solutions that work for both the employee and employer.” In addition, Backon suggests offering to try the arrangement as a pilot program or for a specified time and then meeting to discuss how it is going and whether it should continue.

Not all positions can accommodate flexible arrangements, and not all employers are willing to try them. But if your current job isn’t suited for flexibility, you might be able to find another one that is.

## Get a different job

If you need to change jobs to meet your requirements, you’ll discover that looking for a flexible position is much like looking for any other type of position. The difference is that you make flexibility a priority, just as you might emphasize salary or location.

Michael Smyer, professor of psychology at Boston College’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in Boston, gives jobseekers looking for flexibility the same advice he gives to any jobseeker. “You have to answer three questions,” says Smyer, also the co-chair of the school’s Center on Aging and Work. “First, what about work do you really like? Second, what are you good at? And third, who’s going to pay you to do this?” Later, address how to make the work flexible and which employers and types of jobs are likely to be adaptable.

**Finding flexibility.** Sometimes, a job search is easier if you start with what you know. This approach worked for Doris D’Errico of Youngstown, Ohio. Before retiring as a registered nurse, D’Errico asked her employer to rehire her in a more flexible position. Now, as a per diem nurse, she works for the same hospital but has greater control over the days she works. And her job matches the lifestyle she wanted in retirement. “I can basically

work at my pleasure,” she says. “The best part is that I’m retired, but I can still remain active in work I’m familiar with.”

Other times, you might want to consider a new line of work or a new employer. Celarek, for example, worked in the travel industry before starting a family. When her job no longer accommodated her desired schedule, she left it and eventually switched to a field—and an employer—that did.

**Flex-friendly workplaces.** Some employers are known for allowing flexibility. The Federal Government is one employer that lets many of its workers participate in flexible work options. Rankings of the best workplaces, such as those for working parents or for information technology workers, can help you identify other employers who excel at offering flexibility.

But many employers not found on rankings also provide the possibility for flexible work. Employer recruitment materials, including Web site career sections, often indicate when employees are eligible for certain flexible arrangements. Another way to determine an employer’s flex-friendliness is to inquire directly. You might, for example, ask during an interview about the organization’s work-life benefits.

Remember, however, that employers seek candidates who are qualified for the job and whose main focus is work—not flexibility. For this reason, experts caution that jobseekers wait until after they’re offered a job to ask a prospective employer if they can work at home or for other flexible benefits. And keep in mind that many employers require new employees to complete a probationary period before they are eligible for flexible scheduling or part-time work.

## More to consider

Getting a flexible work arrangement can be situation specific. Even if an organization is in favor of flexible options, there is no guarantee that you will be allowed to use them.

Employer reluctance to embrace flexibility may be based on previous failed attempts. “If a boss had a bad experience with an employee who misused the policies, he or she will feel differently than if it was a positive experience,” says Backon. “Both employers and employees need to know that workplace flexibility must work for the business as well as for the individual.”

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# Sample work-at-home proposal

Are you considering working from home but aren't sure how to arrange it? It might be as simple as asking your supervisor, in writing, for approval to do so. Write your proposal as you would any internal business proposal, demonstrating that you have thoroughly considered the details and addressing potential concerns. To help you get started, here's a sample proposal for a work-at-home arrangement.

DATE: July 1, 2007  
TO: Donna Smith, Director of Market Research  
FROM: Jill Jones, Research Associate  
SUBJECT: Telecommuting proposal

I am proposing that I work from home once or twice per week. Over the 5 years that I have worked for *Market Researchers*, I have shown that I can work independently and complete tasks with little supervision. A telework arrangement will allow me to better meet both work and family obligations, in addition to providing other benefits for our company.

## Job responsibilities

My current job as a marketing researcher is well-suited to at-home work. I spend much of my time conducting online market research, collecting and evaluating survey results, and writing reports. Each of these tasks can be conducted as well from home as from the office; for example, the statistical and word-processing software I use is already installed on my computer at home. Any tasks that require being in the office, such as communication with other staff members, will take place on the 3 or 4 days that I am in the office or via telephone or e-mail.

## Setup and communication

I will work from my home office, which is equipped with a desktop computer, telephone, fax, printer, and other necessities. With online, e-mail, and telephone access, I will be able to complete my work and keep in touch with people in the office. Phone calls, for example, can easily be forwarded from my office to my home telephone; I can also check my office voicemail from home.

## Schedule

I would like to work from home 1 or 2 days a week, on a prearranged day or days that are best suited for our office. I will come into the office for meetings or other important events, as needed.

## Benefits

- **Time savings.** With the 1½ hours saved on commuting each day I work at home, I can remain dedicated to work but still have time to fulfill family commitments. This will be especially helpful during our busy season, when long days, nights, and weekends are frequently required to finish projects.
- **Increased productivity.** I will be able to complete many of my daily tasks, such as assessing survey results and writing reports, more efficiently with fewer distractions at home.
- **Business continuity.** A remote setup will allow me to continue working during inclement weather or other events that might prevent me from commuting to our office. By ensuring continuity of operations, our company will be better prepared for the future. The promise of consistency keeps us competitive in our industry.
- **Workforce loyalty.** My strong commitment to our company would not only continue but would be enhanced. By recognizing the importance of worker satisfaction, employers that offer flexible arrangements, such as telecommuting, are likely to retain workers who have already proven themselves to be loyal, independent, and conscientious.
- **Minimal cost.** Telecommuting involves no additional costs to our company.

## Trial period

I would like to suggest a 3- to 6-month trial period, after which we could meet to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangement and to determine whether it should be continued.

I am confident that the telecommuting arrangement I have proposed will benefit our company. Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have. Thank you for your consideration.



Cutting back on work hours frees up time for other activities.

Working less is not always voluntary. Some workers end up taking part-time or temporary positions when they can't find full-time or permanent ones.

Yet for workers who choose to log fewer hours, arrangements such as part-time jobs, job sharing, and on-call, temporary, contract, and seasonal work are invaluable.

### Part-time jobs

If the standard 40-hour, 9-to-5 schedule sounds like too much, then maybe you want a part-time arrangement.

As defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), working part time is working between 1 and 34 hours per week. BLS data show that in 2006, most people who usually worked part time did so for personal reasons, such as childcare, school, or retirement from a full-time job. Schedules of these part-timers varied, but they worked about 21 hours per week on average.

**Pros and cons.** With a part-time job, you can earn a regular, although reduced, paycheck and maintain ties to the workforce. Plus, part-timers like

that they have more time for the things that motivated them to seek flexibility in the first place. "Definitely," says Celarek, "the best part of my job is being there for my children."

But before reducing your work hours, consider how your financial situation will be affected by earning less. Calculate your monthly expenditures, taking into account any savings in work-related expenses, such as commuting or daycare, and compare them with your expected earnings. This will help you figure out if a part-time income is sufficient.

Also remember that part-time workers often receive reduced benefits, such as employer contributions to healthcare or retirement plans. Reduced benefits may be prorated, which means that the employee is required to

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And flexible options have disadvantages. Overall, jobs that allow greater flexibility require you to be more accommodating, too. Celarek's position, for example, involves a certain amount of give and take. Her workload—and earnings—can be unpredictable. And if she doesn't get everything done during regular business hours, she might need to stay awake until 1 or 2 a.m. to finish.

## Work less

One way to create scheduling flexibility is to work less. Working less can mean being on the job fewer hours each week or having more time off during the year.

**Table 1****Selected occupations that usually require short- or moderate-term on-the-job training in which at least 20 percent of workers were part time, May 2006\***

Animal trainers	Nonfarm animal caretakers
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	Office clerks, general
Building cleaning workers, including maids	Personal and home care aides
Bus drivers	Pharmacy aides
Cashiers	Pharmacy technicians
Childcare workers	Photographic process workers
Cooks	Physical therapist aides
Crossing guards	Psychiatric aides
Demonstrators and product promoters	Psychiatric technicians
Dental assistants	Receptionists and information clerks
Dietetic technicians	Recreation workers
File clerks	Retail salespersons
Helpers—Installation, maintenance, and repair workers	Stock clerks and order fillers
Home health aides	Switchboard operators, including answering service
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks	Tax preparers
Interviewers, except eligibility and loan	Teacher assistants
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	Telemarketers
Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	Tellers
Library assistants, clerical	Tour guides and escorts
Lifeguards, ski patrol, and other recreational protective service workers	Veterinary assistants and laboratory animal caretakers
Medical assistants	Waiters and waitresses
Medical equipment preparers	Word processors and typists

\* Part-time work is between 1 and 34 hours per week.

pay a greater percentage of the actual cost. If you can get benefits from another source, such as through a spouse's job, then this aspect of part-time work might not matter to you.

Additionally, some part-timers say that it's difficult to do their jobs well in a limited amount of time. As a result, they sometimes end up working more hours than they are paid for.

**How to get it.** Part-time jobs are plentiful, according to BLS, which counted nearly 25 million workers who usually worked part time in 2006. And the Families and

Work Institute reports that some employers allow workers to switch between full- and part-time arrangements.

Table 1 lists some occupations that are relatively easy to enter and have a large percentage of part-time workers, according to BLS. Each of these occupations usually requires short- or moderate-term on-the-job training, which ranges from a brief demonstration of how to do the job to 1 year or less of on-the-job instruction or experience.

The highest paying occupations that have part-time work typically require more formal or extensive

preparation. Table 2 shows occupations in which part-time work was common and in which workers had median wages of more than \$20 an hour in May 2006. (Median wages are the point at which half of all workers in the occupation made more than the amount, and half made less.) These data are for both full- and part-time workers; hourly wages of part-timers can be higher or lower than those of their full-time counterparts.

## Job sharing

Job sharing allows you to cut back on work hours and still get tasks done—with the help of someone else.

Essentially a type of part-time work, job sharing is an arrangement in which two or more workers are responsible for the duties and tasks of one full-time position. Some job shares are set up so that each person handles specific duties; others involve less formal divisions of work.

Job sharers usually coordinate their schedules. Each works at times or on days that the other does not. The percentage of time worked by each might be 50-50 or any other agreed-upon combination. And job sharers often plan to overlap some hours so that they can fill each other in on what the other has missed.

**Pros and cons.** Job sharing allows part-time workers to fill positions that typically require full-time work. And sometimes, this arrangement allows workers to keep half the benefits of a full-time job.

If you enjoy working as part of a team and are open to letting someone else take over some of your job tasks, then you might be well suited to job sharing. Ideally, job-share

partners should work well together, which can include having similar work habits and complementary strengths and skills. Being able to communicate with your partner is also important.

Occupations with easily divisible tasks, such as dental hygienists, are usually more conducive to sharing. Still, some job sharers find that the arrangement creates added complexities. And like those considering other forms of part-time employment, you must decide if you're willing to live with less pay and fewer benefits.

**How to get it.** Job sharers don't always find their own partners. But for some workers, this is a critical

**Table 2**

**Selected high-paying occupations in which at least 20 percent of workers were part time\***

Occupation	Median hourly wages of full- and part-time workers, May 2006	Most significant source of postsecondary education or training
Dentists, general	\$63.53	First professional degree
Pharmacists	45.44	First professional degree
Art directors	32.74	Bachelor's degree, plus experience
Physical therapists	31.83	Master's degree
Chiropractors	31.36	First professional degree
Dental hygienists	30.19	Associate degree
Occupational therapists	29.07	Master's degree
Clinical, counseling, and school psychologists	28.58	Doctoral degree
Registered nurses	27.54	Associate degree
Postsecondary teachers	26.98	Doctoral degree
Multi-media artists and animators	24.69	Bachelor's degree
Librarians	23.59	Master's degree
Writers and authors	23.38	Bachelor's degree
Dietitians and nutritionists	22.59	Bachelor's degree

\* Occupations include only those with employment of at least 50,000 in which at least 20 percent worked part time and earned more than \$20 per hour. Part-time work is between 1 and 34 hours per week.

Sources: Occupational Employment Statistics survey (earnings), Current Population Survey (training category and percent of part-time workers)

step. You might partner with a current coworker or with almost anyone your employer is willing to hire, so long as he or she is qualified for your job. Networking with friends and colleagues can help you identify possible partners. Or use job-share advertisements in trade magazines or other publications that are read by workers in your field.

Because BLS doesn't collect data on job sharing, it is difficult to know just how many job sharers there are. Most of these workers would be counted among the BLS total for part-time workers.

### **On-call, temporary, contract, and seasonal work**

Maybe you would be willing to work as needed, provided it fits your schedule. Perhaps you want to work 2 days one week and 5 the next. Or you might like to work full-time but have summers off. To increase your time off, consider seeking jobs that involve on-call, temporary, contract, or seasonal work.

On-call arrangements involve working as needed—and, sometimes, at the last minute. For example, nurse Doris D'Errico works on call. When hospital administrators need someone to cover a shift, they contact her. "I usually know a couple of weeks ahead of time when I'm going to work," says D'Errico. "They can call on the day I'm needed, but I have the option of saying yes or no." Typically, she must work a certain number of hours each month to continue the arrangement.

Temporary arrangements are those in which workers are hired by an agency to provide short-term help. Because these workers decide whether to accept the assignments offered to them, they may have considerable flexibility over how much they work. And even though individual assignments may not be permanent, many temporary workers take these jobs regularly.

Contract arrangements can also give workers control over their assignments and hours. Some contract workers are hired by a contract firm to perform a job, often for a specified time or task. Others are independent contractors and sell their services to companies as freelancers or consultants. Some independent contractors might work in wage and salary positions, but many others are self-employed and find their own jobs. (Self-employed workers, more than half of whom are independent contractors, are discussed in more detail on page 24.)

Seasonal jobs offer blocks of time with less work.

If you choose to pursue seasonal employment, however, keep in mind the times or seasons that you would prefer to work. Tax preparers, for example, have more time off between May and December, whereas construction and landscape workers, especially those in colder climates, often have reduced workloads during the winter.

**Pros and cons.** On-call, temporary, and contract workers usually like that they can choose among the assignments offered. Plus, hourly earnings are sometimes higher for these workers than for permanent employees. And seasonal workers enjoy having periodic work that is fairly predictable.

But not having a consistent income is one obvious drawback to any job that allows time off. Some jobs, such as those in teaching, take this into account by apportioning salary over the entire year. Other workers take multiple seasonal jobs—perhaps working as a camp counselor during summer months and as a school field hockey coach during the academic year, for example.

Having a sporadic schedule is less problematic if you have another source of income or if you don't have other pressing commitments. D'Errico, for example, uses her earnings to supplement her retirement income and can usually change her plans on short notice, so the uncertainty is not a problem. "With my job, there's no guarantee that I'll have work," she says. "The hospital can call and tell me to stay home, and that's fine for me. But this would be a downside for someone who was counting on that money or who had already arranged for babysitting."

An additional consideration for these jobs is that the agency or firm that matches you to temporary or contract assignments takes a percentage of what you make. And although some of these arrangements might command higher hourly earnings, other employer-provided benefits are not always included.

**How to get it.** Jobs without long-term commitments are available in many fields. In some cases, their prevalence makes them easier to get.

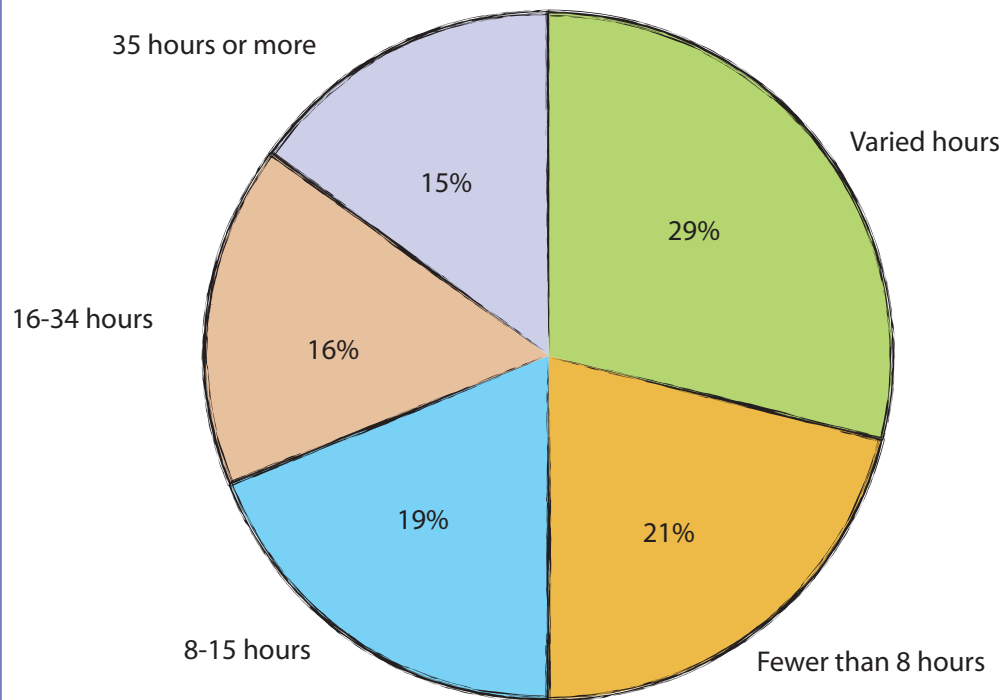
In February 2005, there were nearly 2.5 million on-call workers, according to BLS. On-call opportunities exist with employers such as construction firms, hospitals, schools, retail stores, and public and private utilities.

Temporary workers are hired across a variety of occupations and industries. Many temporary workers provide administrative support or do assembly work in factories. Government, construction and manufacturing



**Chart 1**

**Wage and salary workers who were paid for work at home, by usual hours at home, May 2004**



**Note:** Data refer to nonagricultural wage and salary workers who usually worked at home at least once a week on their primary job.

**Source:** Current Population Survey, May 2004 supplement

## Work at home

Working at home—sometimes called telecommuting, teleworking, and flexi-placing—offers many advantages to those who seek flexibility.

BLS data show that many people who worked at home reported doing so because of the nature of their job or because that was where they conducted a business. Smaller percentages worked at home to finish or catch up on work, or to coordinate their work schedule with personal or family needs.

The work that people do at home is either

firms, schools, and hospitals employ large numbers of contract company workers.

For seasonal jobs, employers also vary. Seasonal work is common in retail trade, educational services, and agriculture, recreation, and construction jobs.

Independent contractors are the largest segment of these types of arrangements. In February 2005, BLS data show that there were about 10.3 million independent contractors, a number which accounted for more than 7 percent of all workers. Independent contract jobs are especially common in construction, professional and business services, and financial activities firms.

BLS data also show that in February 2005, there were more than 1.2 million temporary-help agency workers and 813,000 contract company workers. These jobs can frequently be found in a specific type of firm: a temporary help agency or contract firm. Agencies and firms will match worker qualifications with available jobs and pay for the work that is done. To locate an agency or firm near you, contact the American Staffing Association.

for someone else—working at home either some or all of the time—or for themselves. These types of arrangements are often best suited to highly motivated workers who enjoy being on their own.

## Working at home for an employer

BLS data show that about 13.7 million people worked at home for an employer at least once a week in May 2004. Of these, however, only about 1 in 4 had a formal arrangement to be paid for at-home work. The rest regularly took work home with them but without a formal arrangement to be paid for doing so. While both can allow for some flexibility, this section focuses on those who reported being paid for home work.

Working at home doesn't have to mean staying away from the office completely. Many people paid to work at home spent 15 or fewer hours per week doing so, spending the rest of their time at their employer's place of business or elsewhere. (See chart 1.) Less than 1 percent of all wage and salary workers—or about 575,000 people—worked entirely at home.

This type of arrangement creates flexibility, but, says Jack Heacock, senior vice president of the Telework Coalition in Washington, D.C., working at home is still work. “You still have to do all the tasks you used to do, but you do them from a distance. The duties and requirements of the job are the same.” Not only are job qualifications the same, but at-home workers often need additional qualities—such as the ability to work reliably without supervision.

**Pros and cons.** Being able to spend more time at home can be advantageous for some workers. For many, a home office or the living room coffee table is more comfortable than an employer’s office environment. Workers can also save time or money—or both—by not having to commute and not having to dress formally for an office setting. And jobs that let you work at home for an employer often come with the standard benefits, such as paid vacation and health insurance.

Not all workers are cut out to spend their days at home, though. Some people report feeling isolated from their peers and missing office interactions. Workers usually have an easier time with this arrangement if they are self-disciplined and enjoy working alone for long periods of time.

In addition, some work-at-home arrangements don’t always provide consistent pay. For example, you might be paid only for time you spend on the phone or for the work that’s available.

**How to get it.** People in every major occupational group worked at home, including about 9 percent of workers in computer and mathematical occupations, BLS data show. (See table 3.)

When deciding whether your job is the type that could be done at home, consider the tasks you do. And trust your instincts. “Use your intuition as to the specific kinds of jobs you can do at home,” says Heacock.

Jobs that require a mix of personal interaction and independent work might be good candidates for some at-home work. A school social worker, for example, might go into the workplace to meet with students, administrators, and others. The rest of his or her time

might be spent at home on reports and paperwork.

Technology has led to an increase in the number of jobs that can be done at home. As a result, many of these arrangements require that workers have a familiarity with and competency in the use of computers, the Internet, or other communications technologies.

This technology allows some people to work at home all or most of the time. Jobs involving primarily solo work or extensive time on the phone or computer might be possible candidates for all-the-time work at home. Occupations that are conducive to working at home all the time include customer service representatives, data entry keyers, and medical transcriptionists. But, says Heacock, not all jobs are eligible for this kind of arrangement, despite an increase in companies that are interested in telework.

**Table 3**

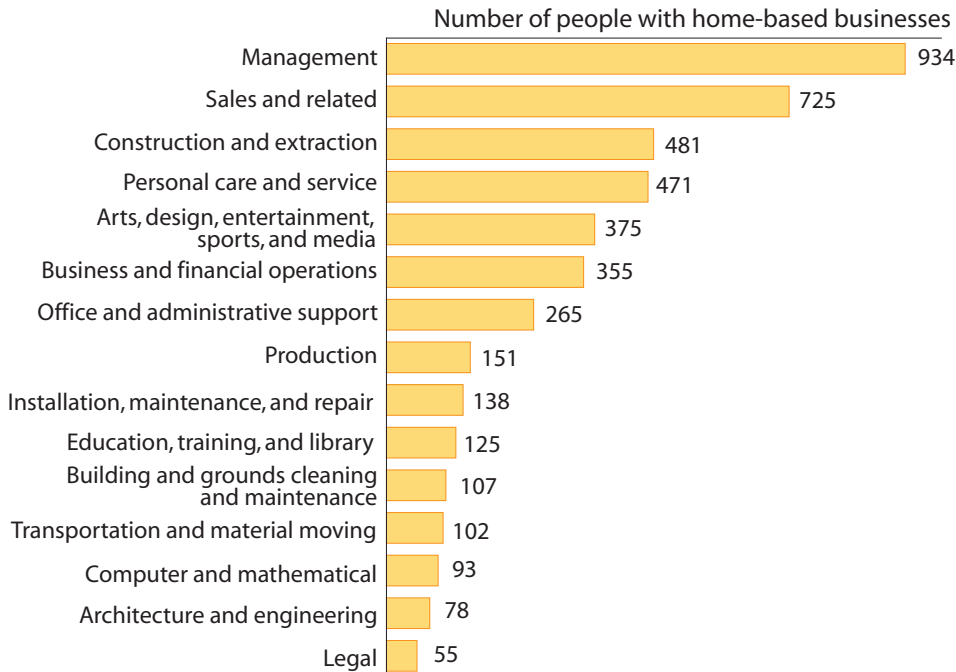
**Wage and salary workers who were paid for work at home by occupational group, May 2004**

<b>Occupational group</b>	<b>Percent of wage and salary workers who worked at home for pay</b>
Computer and mathematical	8.9
Life, physical, and social science	6.6
Business and financial operations	6.4
Community and social services	6.1
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	6.0
Legal	5.7
Management	5.6
Sales and related	5.1
Personal care and service	4.6
Architecture and engineering	3.4
Healthcare support	2.3
Office and administrative support	1.9
Education, training, and library	1.9
Protective service	1.6
Installation, maintenance, and repair	1.3

**Note:** Data refer to nonagricultural wage and salary workers who usually worked at home at least once a week on their primary job.

**Source:** Current Population Survey, May 2004 supplement

**Chart 2**  
**People with home-based businesses by occupational group, May 2004**  
**(thousands)**



**Note:** Data refer to self-employed people in nonagricultural industries who usually worked at home at least once a week on their primary job and who run a business at home.  
**Source:** Current Population Survey, May 2004 supplement

If you are looking for a job in which you can work exclusively at home, you will likely encounter lots of advertisements for opportunities, many of which sound too good to be true. These ads promise that you'll earn a substantial income working part time, for example, or require that you pay a small fee for materials. In reality, the "substantial income" might refer to earning a commission based on achieving an impossible quota, and the "small fee" might be thousands of dollars for equipment that does not include instruction in its use. Avoid being duped. Carefully research a company before agreeing to perform any work for it.

## Work at home for yourself

Many people say that self-employment provides the ultimate flexibility, because when you're your own boss, you set your own schedule. And about half of the self-employed—or around 7 million people—worked at home each week in May 2004, according to BLS.

Self-employed workers operate all types of businesses, including stores and restaurants. Two-thirds of the self-employed who worked at home had home-based businesses.

**Pros and cons.** Many people who are self-employed at home say that they are happy to work for themselves.

Self-employed workers' degree of independence is, in ways, unparalleled. And the feeling of accomplishment that comes with success is hard to beat.

But self-employment usually involves considerable work, especially in starting up, without a guaranteed return. And, depending on the field or business, self-employed workers may not be able to do their jobs at home. In addition, these workers don't enjoy many of the standard benefits that other workers receive, such as paid sick leave. A day not worked is usually a day not paid. Moreover, they might have to invest in equipment or other necessities and can experience sporadic earnings.

Self-employment might be best for you if you are comfortable with

financial risk and with promoting yourself and your services. Many people who hope to work for themselves reduce the risk by starting a business while they still have a full-time job. They wait to quit their full-time job until after they are more confident they can be successful on their own.

**How to get it.** To work for yourself at home, look into businesses and occupations that involve at-home tasks.

For example, almost a million workers with home-based businesses were in management occupations. (See chart 2.) Workers in these occupations might include chief executives or marketing and public relations consultants. Personal care and service—another occupational group with many home-based businesses—includes occupations such as childcare worker and hairdresser, hairstylist, and cosmetologist.

To start a business, think about the types of products or services you'd like to offer, and look into the local laws and regulations that affect self-employment. Lynn Lee, of Austin, Texas, decided to transfer her expertise as a teacher to providing in-home childcare. She consulted local resources to find out the requirements for starting her own business.

Lee's glad she made the change. "It was really pretty easy to get started," she says. "With my own in-home

childcare business, I can be at home—which I love—and still work with kids.”

## Work alternative hours

Another way to fit a job around personal schedules is to work outside the standard Monday-through-Friday, 9-to-5 timetable. Sometimes, alternative work schedules vary slightly from traditional ones. Other times, the differences are broader.

Depending on your preferences, it’s often possible to break out of the norm. Shift work, flexible scheduling, compressed workweeks, and compensatory time off are ways to do it.

### Shift work

Night owls, early risers, or almost anyone else who wants more daytime hours free might consider working a nonstandard shift. Work shifts can start and end at any time. This section discusses night, evening, and weekend shifts, which are most conducive to schedule flexibility.

As defined by BLS, night shifts encompass any time between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. Evening shifts fall between 2 p.m. and midnight. According to a May 2004 BLS survey, most night and evening shift workers reported that they worked their shift because of the nature of the job. Others—almost 27 percent—worked these shifts primarily because of personal preference or family or childcare reasons. Still others did so to earn higher pay or to attend school.

Weekend work is another option that can make your usual weekday schedule easier to manage.

**Pros and cons.** Some people feel most productive at odd hours, which makes it easier for them to work early mornings, evenings, or nights. And full-time shift workers often receive employer-paid benefits.

Workers often prefer shift work because it helps them to coordinate with other family members’ schedules or to co-

ordinate work and other responsibilities. For example, a parent who works at night can be available for his or her children during the day.

But these workers typically have to be on the job at a very specific time to start their shifts or to take over for someone else. Also, some people can’t choose their shift—and for most people, weekend work alone doesn’t provide enough income to meet expenses.

**How to get it.** In May 2004, about 22 million wage and salary workers—or about 18 percent of all wage and salary workers—usually worked a shift other than a daytime one, according to BLS. About 8.4 million worked evening hours, and another 3.8 million worked at night. And although many jobs have work hours only from Monday through Friday, more than 6.6 million wage and salary workers were on the job both Saturday and Sunday. Another 12.9 million usually worked either Saturday or Sunday.

Some occupations are more likely than others to have nonstandard shifts. But there are still choices.

Food preparation and serving occupations topped the list when it came to evening shifts, mirroring the hours that most restaurants are open for business. Protective service occupations, which include security guards, police, and firefighters, were among those with the highest rates of night and evening shift employment, reflecting the need for security at all hours. (See table 4, next page.)



**Table 4****Wage and salary workers in occupations with high concentrations of shift schedules, by occupational group, May 2004**

<b>Occupational group</b>	<b>Workers on evening shift</b>	<b>Workers on night shift</b>
Food preparation and serving	27%	3%
Protective service	14	13
Healthcare support	13	7
Production	10	7
Healthcare practitioner and technical	6	8
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	9	5
Transportation and material moving	9	5
Personal care and service	9	3
Sales and related	9	2
Office and administrative support	5	3

**Source:** Current Population Survey, May 2004 supplement

## Flexible scheduling, compressed workweeks, and compensatory time off

If you don't want a drastic change but still want more leeway in your work schedule, your best options might include flexible scheduling, compressed workweeks, or compensatory time off.

Workers who have flexible schedules—commonly called flexitime arrangements, or “flex-time”—can alter their start and stop times to fit their needs. In some arrangements, a worker's schedule might vary daily. Alternatively, workers change their hours only periodically. But in either case, they usually must be present during certain core hours, such as between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Another distinction is often made between formal and informal flexitime programs, with most workers falling into the second category.

A compressed workweek arrangement involves working more hours on some days and having other days off. For example, a person might work 1 extra hour each of 9 days in a 10-day work period, and then take every other Friday off.

Still another possibility is compensatory time off, often called “comp time.” With this arrangement, people who work more than the required number of hours are able to accumulate the extra hours, up to a specified limit, and take time off later.

**Pros and cons.** Variable work schedules are an inexpensive way for employers to offer their workers greater flexibility. And for many people, minor changes in schedules are all they need to help manage work and life. Plus, these arrangements usually don't affect earnings or benefits.

Being able to arrive and leave earlier or later allows workers to avoid peak commuting times—and to work when they're most productive. However, they might need to consider the impact of not being in the office at certain times or on the days they have off. As with other types of flexible arrangements that involve time off, people can miss important office events if they aren't there when everyone else is.

And some workers find it exhausting, or nearly impossible, to put in the longer days required for compressed workweeks or compensatory time off.

**How to get it.** According to BLS, more than 36 million wage and salary workers—about 30 percent of them—were able to vary the times that they started or ended work in May 2004. Almost 29 percent of Federal Government workers, for example, had flexible schedules.

Computer and mathematical occupations had the highest percentage of workers able to vary their schedules, with more than half of these workers reporting flexible schedules. Workers in other management, professional, and related occupations—with the exception of those in education and healthcare related occupations—were also highly likely to have control over their start and stop times. Production workers, who often work on shifts, were the least likely to have flexible schedules: Only 12 percent of them had a say over the times their work began or ended.

BLS doesn't collect data on compressed workweeks or compensatory time off. But the Families and Work Institute suggests that employers are more likely to offer compressed workweeks to some of their employees than to all of them.

## For more information

This article describes some common arrangements that put you in control over how much, where, or when you work. Sometimes, these conditions overlap; for example, an at-home worker often may have greater freedom over when the workday begins and ends—and how long it lasts.

The more you know about your options, the better your chances of finding flexibility that works for you. For more information about types of flexible work arrangements, visit your local library or Career One Stop. Search online for One-Stop Career Center locations at [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org).

The May 2004 and February 2005 data in this article come from special supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The 2006 data on part-time employment are CPS annual averages. For more information about the survey and its data, write to:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Division of Labor Force Statistics  
2 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Suite 4675  
Washington, DC 20212  
(202) 691-6378

[www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm)

Other data in the article, including those on earnings and on education and training requirements, come from the BLS Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections program. Publications issued by this program—including the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, *Occupational Projections and Training Data*, and *Career Guide to Industries*—may be helpful in learning more about the occupations and employer types discussed in the article. Hard copies of these publications are available in many libraries and career-counselor offices. They are also available online via [www.bls.gov/bls/occupation.htm](http://www.bls.gov/bls/occupation.htm).

Past issues of the *Quarterly* provide job-search and career-choice information that you might find helpful in seeking flexible work. Relevant topics include:

- “Getting back to work: Returning to the labor force after an absence,” in the winter 2004-05 issue and online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/winter/art03.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/winter/art03.pdf)
- “Matching yourself with the world of work: 2004,” in the fall 2004 issue and online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/fall/art01.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/fall/art01.pdf)

- “How to get a job in the Federal Government,” in the summer 2004 issue and online at

[www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/summer/art01.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2004/summer/art01.pdf)

- “Job search in the age of Internet: Six jobseekers in search of employers,” in the summer 2003 issue and online at

[www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2003/summer/art01.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2003/summer/art01.pdf)

- “Telecommuters,” in the fall 2000 issue and online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/fall/art02.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/fall/art02.pdf)

The Families and Work Institute collects additional data on flexible work arrangements. For access to these resources, write to:

Families and Work Institute  
267 Fifth Ave., Floor 2  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 465-2044

[www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)

If your plan for creating a flexible work schedule includes starting your own business, the Small Business Administration and SCORE can help. The Small Business Administration provides information about starting a business, including how to write a business plan and what issues to consider.

Small Business Administration  
409 E. 3rd St. SW.  
Washington, DC 20416  
Toll-free: 1 (800) 827-5722

[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

SCORE is an association of former entrepreneurs offering free advice to small business owners. Contact: SCORE

175 Herndon Pkwy., Suite 900  
Herndon, VA 20170  
Toll-free: 1 (800) 634-0245

[www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

To learn more about avoiding work-at-home scams, contact the Federal Trade Commission. When writing or calling, request the publication “Ads for Business Opportunities: How to Detect Deception.” Online, click on links to the press room for that and other information related to consumer fraud.

Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW.  
Washington, DC 20580  
(202) 326-2222

[www.ftc.gov/bizopps](http://www.ftc.gov/bizopps)

