

# Podcast 19 – Working Life in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,  
with Rob McCormack

*Podcast Number 19 – Working Life in Australia*

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast19.mp3>

Hi,

We spend a lot of time at work during our life. I spent 38 years in full time work before I retired. During my working life, I had periods where I was very happy in my work, but I also had periods where I didn't enjoy my work much at all. But overall, I can say that I was well paid and had good working conditions. In this podcast, I will tell you a little about the conditions that Australians have when they go to work. I think many Australians don't appreciate just how good our working conditions are. When you write it all down, as I have here, it makes you realize how fortunate we are.

Our current working conditions in Australia are described in a law passed by the Australian Federal Parliament in Canberra (our capital city). The law is called *The Fair Work Act 2009*. This is a law which describes the minimum conditions which must be provided by Australian employers for all their workers. Many employers provide better conditions than these, however every company must provide these conditions as a minimum. For example, my last company before I retired, Australia Post, provides much better conditions than these minimums in some aspects. That's one of the main reasons it was (and still is) a great company to work for.



The Fair Work Act lists a number of standards which must be met by Australian companies. These are called the National Employment Standards (or NES). More details can be found at <http://www.fairwork.gov.au>. I will provide a brief summary only in this podcast.

The first standard is about hours of work. It states that the maximum hours is 38 hours per week, although the employer can ask you to work additional hours if it is reasonable. I know when I was working, there were some weeks when I worked more than 38 hours. It was usually because there was a project which had to be finished by a certain date. Working the additional hours was always discussed first with the worker. For example, people with children may not be able to work additional hours, and this must be taken into account by employers.

The second standard is about asking for flexible working arrangements. This standard means that a worker can ask for a change in their working arrangements, such as a reduction in their working hours, or perhaps changing their start and

finish times. This standard is for parents of young children not yet going to school, or for those parents who have a disabled child under 18 years. The worker can only make the request after they have been working for 12 months at that company. The employer can say no, but there must be good business reasons. For example, a parent of a 3 year old child might ask if he can start work later, at say 10.00am, so that he can leave his child at a local child care centre by 9.30am. The thing I like about this standard is that the request is made in writing by the worker and the employer must reply in writing within 21 days. Sometimes a compromise can be agreed. Maybe the worker can work from home for the first hour, making work phone calls and using the computer, drop his child off at the child care centre and then come to work by 10.00am. That might be suitable for both the worker and the employer.

The third standard is about parental leave. This standard means that every parent is able to take up to 12 months leave for the birth or adoption of a child. The leave is unpaid (that means, without pay) but the person's job will still be there for them when they return to work. For pregnant mothers to be, they can start their leave 6 weeks before the birth of their child. A parent taking this leave can also take a second 12 months of parental leave if they want to. I think this standard is an excellent one, as it means that mothers (and fathers) can look after their child at the time when the child needs them most, when they are very young.

The fourth standard is about annual leave. We all love and need our yearly holidays. In Australia, every worker is given four weeks of paid annual leave, as long as they have worked for at least 12 months with that company. Four weeks is just right in order to have a trip or go on a cruise.



I always felt well rested after four weeks away from work.

The fifth standard is about sick leave or carer's leave. Sometimes we are just too sick to go to work, or perhaps you need to care for your child who is sick. This standard gives up to 10 days paid leave each year. Usually, a medical certificate from a doctor is required. One great thing about this leave is that it accumulates from year to year if you don't use it. That means after 2 years, you will have 20 days sick leave if you need it, and so on. I remember one of my co-workers at Australia Post who got seriously ill and, because his sick leave had accumulated over many years of working, he could take many months off work on full pay in order to get well again. That's a great thing to have.

Another standard is about long service leave. This is something I used when I was working. The amount of long service leave varies from one Australian State to the next, and from one employer to the next, but in Victoria it is around 8 weeks fully paid leave after 10 years of working for

the same employer. What a fantastic benefit. In my case, I worked for 10 years for Australia Post and then I was able to take 3 months long service leave. I really enjoyed this time and I used it well. For example, I got my guitar out of its case, practiced a lot and learned how to record my own songs. I love playing guitar now and you can hear my playing at the start and end of this audio podcast.

The last standard I would like to talk about is what happens when you lose your job, in particular when it is not your fault. Firstly, you will receive at least 4 weeks' notice, or payment in lieu. This means that the employer must tell you four weeks before you are due to finish. If they can't give you 4 weeks' notice, then they must give you 4 weeks' pay instead of, or in lieu of, the notice. As well as that, they must also give you what's called redundancy pay. The amount of the redundancy pay will depend on how long you have worked for the company. If you have worked for 1 year, you will get at least 4 weeks redundancy pay. If you have worked for 10 years, you will get at least 12 weeks redundancy pay. Many companies, especially large ones, have much better redundancy pay than this minimum amount. This helps you to pay your bills while you look for another job. It's a great benefit. Overall, I think Australians are fortunate to have such good minimum working conditions while they earn a living to support their families. Personally, I'm glad that I am retired. That's the best job of all.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it by clicking the comments link at the top of this story. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at [rob@slowenglish.info](mailto:rob@slowenglish.info). I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

# Podcast 19 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

## Vocabulary

accumulates = when something gets bigger every year.

additional = when there is something more, another one.

adoption = when it is agreed that a child can become a member of another family

annual = every year.

appreciate = when you understand that something is good.

arrangements = the things that are agreed to by everyone.

aspect = one part of something.

Australian Federal Parliament = where the government of Australia meets to make laws, in Canberra.

benefit = when something is good for you.

bills = the amounts you must pay in order to live your life. For example, your rent, your food.

carer = the person who looks after someone. They care for them.

company = a group of people working together in business. The employer owns the company

compromise = when two people agree on something. They get some of the things they want, but not all.

cruise = to go for a trip on a ship.

described = to talk or write about something.

disabled = when someone is not able to do the things other people can do. For example, when they are blind or deaf.

discussed = when you talk something over with someone.

earn = when you are paid for doing something. For example, doing a job in a company.

employers = the people who give you a job. They are the boss.

fantastic = when something is really, really good.

flexible = when things can change and are not fixed all the time.

fortunate = when good things have happened to you.

holidays = when you don't need to be at work. You can rest at home or take a trip.

leave = when you don't need to be at work. For example, when you are on holidays.

maximum = the largest amount. It cannot be larger than this.

medical certificate = a piece of paper you get from a doctor to say you are sick.

minimum = the smallest amount. It cannot be smaller than this.

not your fault = when you did not make something happen.

notice = when you are told that something will happen in the future.

overall = when you include everything.

paid = when money has been given in exchange for something.  
For example, for work.

parental = to do with being a parent.

period = an amount of time. For example, 2 months.

project = when you have a job to do which has a start and a finish

provided = when something is given.

reasonable = when you think something is okay and you agree with it.

reduction = when something is made smaller or a smaller amount.

redundancy pay = a special pay you get when you lose your job and it is not your fault.

reply = to give an answer to a question.

request = when you ask for something.

seriously ill = when someone is very sick and they may die.

standard = you can compare things to a standard.

suitable = when something meets your needs.

taken into account = when something is understood and is thought about.

working conditions = how things are at work. For example, hours of work, pay, holidays.