

Summer Flex & Flexible Work

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

1. What is Summer Flex?

Currently Mason has a flexible work policy in place that encompasses telework, flex time, compressed schedules, job sharing, and remote work. Summer Flex is designed to highlight and promote these flexible work options in a finite time frame to allow those members of the Mason community who are not utilizing flexible work options to “test drive” the concept of flexible work. It is hoped that Summer Flex will introduce supervisors and employees to the benefits and opportunities that flexible work offers.

Summer Flex runs from the third Sunday in May to the third Saturday in August. Departments have the flexibility to shorten the length of Summer Flex or not participate if it poses operational issues.

2. Can I be turned down if I want to participate in Summer Flex?

Yes. Summer Flex is designed to be a university-wide opportunity to try out a flexible work option. It is not mandatory, universal or an entitlement. In each case, there needs to be an understanding that the goal is to create a win-win situation. In other words, the employee can try out a flexible work option that may contribute positively to their work/life balance while not impacting their productivity and availability to their colleagues and departments. Supervisors can take the opportunity of Summer Flex to rethink how their team works, where it works, and when it works. This is important strategically in such things as continuity of operations, customer service, and departmental goals.

Everyone involved has to keep in mind that our first mission is to serve our students and our community. The question is whether a flexible work option can be used without compromising service and quality. In many cases, the mission of the university can be met using flexible work. But not in all cases.

For example, if your office is implementing a new system this summer, it may not be possible to have anyone on a flexible work schedule. Staffing issues, work flow, the kind of position you have, all impact your ability to utilize flexible work.

But take heart. Flexible work is, by definition, flexible. Don't think of it as an all or nothing proposition. Supervisors and employees alike might think of it in smaller steps.

Summer Flex is never going to be about everyone in the department working a compressed schedule of 4 10 hour days with everyone taking every Friday off! But, it could be about everyone rotating throughout Summer Flex so everyone gets a chance to take a Friday or two off.

3. What are flexible work options at Mason?

Flexible work options at Mason include:

Compressed Work Schedule: An acceptable schedule, agreed to by supervisor and employee, that enables completion of the traditional forty (40) hours per week in fewer than five (5) full workdays.

Flextime: A work option where an employee of George Mason University works an approved Alternate Work Schedule that enables completion of the traditional forty (40) hours per week in fewer or more than five (5) full workdays. Flextime may include varying the time of day an employee works, the days of the week an employee works, or both.

Job Sharing: Allows two staff members to share the responsibilities of one full-time position. Each staff member shares a specific proportion of a full-time position. Creative and innovative schedules can be designed to meet the needs of the job sharers and the office. The two employees would be considered regular part-time employees.

Remote Work: A work arrangement where an employee spends most or all of their working hours outside of the traditional place of work. Remote workers differ from teleworkers in that they work from their home or approved alternate work site located far enough away from a Mason campus that commuting on a daily basis is not possible or their position is designed for off-site work. Visits to the campus are infrequent but can be regularly scheduled.

Telework: A work option where an employee of George Mason University works at an approved alternate work site for an agreed period of time with most of the work week spent at a university work site.

4. What's the difference between a formal flexible work arrangement and an informal one?

A formal flexible work arrangement is negotiated in advance, initiated through the flexible work policies and procedures, documented using the approved forms, and is reviewed and assessed after 90 days. Additionally, if the flexible work agreement is approved to continue after the 90-day trial, the agreement is renewed at least annually. Individual departments can administer their own policies on flexible work but they should be reviewed by Human Resources & Payroll and must meet the minimum stipulations outlined in the university policy.

An informal flexible work arrangement is ideally discussed in advance and worked out between the department, the supervisor, and the employee on an as-needed basis. Informal flexible work arrangements are, by their very nature, temporary and of limited duration.

5. Can my supervisor change my flexible work agreement? Can I?

Yes. With reasonable notice, supervisors and employees can change or terminate a flexible work option. Reasonable notice may vary depending upon the department and the circumstance. The first priority for both supervisors and employees is that their departments and offices have

appropriate staffing. Should something happen – a colleague’s unexpected illness for example – a supervisor may have to alter a flexible work agreement and the notice could be quite short. This is why it is important to understand that flexibility has to be a two-way street. Everyone involved should try to be sensitive to each other’s needs and to the needs of the department and the university.

6. What happens if a meeting or event is scheduled when I am supposed to be off?

When arranging a flexible work schedule, a supervisor and employee should discuss how this is to be handled. In some cases, the employee may have to come in on a day or at a time when he/she would usually be off. In the telework/remote work Memorandum of Agreement and in the Flexible Work Agreement, it specifies that an employee must be on site as necessary to attend meetings, training session or events.

7. How long is a flexible work agreement in place?

Summer Flex runs from the third Sunday in May to the third Saturday in August. The Flexible Work Policy that underpins Summer Flex requires that all new flexible work agreements undergo a 90 day trial period. After the 90 day trial, the agreement is reviewed and it may be renewed annually.

8. Does a flexible work agreement need to be renewed?

Yes. After the 90 day trial period, the agreement can be renewed annually keeping in mind that a flexible work agreement can always be terminated by a supervisor or an employee with reasonable notice. Agreements should be reviewed at least annually but can be reviewed more frequently at the discretion of the department, the supervisor, and/or the employee.

9. How do I initiate a flexible work agreement?

Whether you are an employee or a supervisor, the first step is to review the policies, procedures, and agreements associated with flexible work. The next step is to develop a proposal and approach your supervisor or staff. It’s important to keep in mind that a supervisor can initiate a flexible work discussion if he/she feels that a flexible work option would add value to the department’s goals or mission, enhance an employee’s work/life balance, or act as a retention tool.

In any discussion of flexible work options, both the supervisor and employee should keep in mind their colleagues, the work flow, and the nature of the various positions within their team. During a discussion between a supervisor/employee, it’s important that each be sure to keep an open mind. The intended goal of the discussion is to ascertain whether a flexible work option is feasible and how it can be implemented with a neutral or positive impact on the department’s mission and work flow. Sometimes it can be best to start with modest changes and then assess the impact before moving into a significant change.

Once an agreement has been reached between the employee and supervisor, document the agreement by completing the appropriate paperwork (including necessary signatures) and send it to Human Resources & Payroll for recordkeeping purposes.

Compressed Schedules FAQ

1. Is a compressed schedule always 4 10* hour days?

No. Non-exempt employees (overtime eligible) do not have quite as many options as exempt employees (non overtime eligible) because they may not use a compressed schedule that will result in working overtime hours.

Exempt employees (not overtime eligible) have more flexibility. Some exempt employees work a 9 hour day for 5 days (45 hours total) and the following week, he/she works three 9 hour days and one 8 hour day (35 hours) for a two week total of 80 hours. This permits the employee to have one non-work day every two weeks.

It is also possible to only slightly compress a work schedule. For example, an exempt employee could work one 10 hour day and four 8 hour days with one non-work day per month.

There are alternate compressed schedules for non-exempt employees as well. A non-exempt employee could work four 9 hour days and one 4 hour day. Or work 4 10 hour days one week and a regular schedule the next. The only restriction is that the non-exempt employee may not work more than 40 hours in one week (without being eligible for overtime).

**Keep in mind that it is mandatory for any employee who works more than 6 hours per day to have a ½ hour unpaid lunch break. For example, the work day may be 10 hours but the half hour break must be included for a total day of 10 ½ hours.*

2. What happens if the university is closed (e.g. inclement weather) on my non-work day?

If an employee is working a compressed schedule and the university is closed (e.g. inclement weather) on his/her non-work day, the employee does not receive administrative leave for that day as it is the employee's non-work day.

3. Do I have to come in for meetings or other events that are scheduled on my non-work day?

Perhaps. Employees and supervisors should discuss this question during the development of the flexible work agreement. It is important to remember that the work of the university and the department must not suffer as a result of flexible work options. Flexibility is a two way street. There will be events, meetings, etc. that cannot be scheduled around your flexible work schedule. Both the telework/remote work Memorandum of Agreement and the Flexible Work Agreement have stipulations about the possibility of having to attend meetings, etc. on days when the employee might customarily be off.

4. How does leave work on a compressed schedule?

Employees working a compressed schedule must account for their individual workdays which may be extended for the purposes of recording leave. For example, if an employee working four 10 hour days is out sick, he/she will need to record 10 hours of sick leave.

5. How does holiday pay work on a compressed schedule?

Exempt and non-exempt (overtime eligible) employees are not eligible for more than 8 hours of holiday pay per holiday. If the holiday falls on the employee's regularly scheduled work day, the employee will be credited with 8 hours of holiday pay for that day. Employees may use annual leave (or any other appropriate leave) to maintain their hours of pay for that day or they may opt to work additional hours sometime during the work week.

Flex Time FAQ

1. When does a flex agreement need to be formalized?

Flexible work is a part of the Mason culture. As such, an employee and supervisor do not need to complete a flexible work agreement if the employee's flex schedule start time is within 1 hour of his/her regular schedule start time. For example, if an employee's customary start time is 8:30am, a flexible work agreement only needs to be completed if the flex schedule start time is before 7:30 am or after 9:30 am.

Job Sharing FAQ

1. Does a job sharing agreement have to be 50-50 with each person working half-time?

Maybe. In order for two classified employees to remain classified and share a position, it must be 50-50 because a position cannot remain classified if it is less than .5 FTE.

2. How does job sharing impact my benefits?

When considering a job sharing arrangement, it is important to understand the full and complete impact it may have on your benefits. It is strongly recommended that you schedule an appointment with a Benefits Administrator in Human Resources & Payroll before you initiate any discussion with your supervisor about a job sharing flexible work option.

3. How does job sharing impact my retirement?

A classified employee at .5 FTE or greater will earn service credit for each month of service but at the salary and rate of a .5 classified employee.

4. What happens if my job sharing partner changes jobs, leaves my department or leaves Mason?

As with any classified employee, a supervisor may change the job responsibilities of a position at

any time. In the case of job sharing, should your job sharing partner leave his/her position, you will still be at the FTE level you were before your colleague left. You may discuss with your supervisor and your department as to whether the agreement will continue and the open position advertised as a job sharing role.

Telework/Remote Work FAQ

1. How do I get started?

Whether you are an employee or a supervisor, the first step is to review the policies, procedures, and agreements associated with flexible work. The next step is to develop a proposal and approach your supervisor or staff. It's important to keep in mind that a supervisor can initiate a flexible work discussion if he/she feels that a flexible work option would add value to the department's goals or mission, enhance an employee's work/life balance, act as a retention tool, and, in the case of telework and remote work act as a continuity of operation function.

In any discussion of flexible work options, both the supervisor and employee should keep in mind their colleagues, the work flow, and the nature of the various positions within their team. During a discussion between a supervisor/employee, it's important that each be sure to keep an open mind. The intended goal of the discussion is to ascertain whether a flexible work option is feasible and how it can be implemented with a neutral or positive impact on the department's mission and work flow. Sometimes it can be best to start with modest changes and then assess the impact before moving into a significant change.

Telework/remote work have unique attributes not found in the other flexible work options because both of these require that the employee be located off site for part or all of the work week. In these cases, it is very important to establish what, if any, costs will be covered by the department and to work with ITU to establish what technology and software the employee will need to work from an alternate location.

Once an agreement has been reached between the employee and supervisor, document the agreement by completing the appropriate paperwork (including necessary signatures) and send it to Human Resources & Payroll for recordkeeping purposes.

2. What do I have to supply in the way of equipment and technology?

If you and your supervisor have agreed that remote work or telework is an option for you, part of the Telework/Remote Work Memorandum of Agreement includes a section on equipment and assets. You and your supervisor will work out the details of whether Mason equipment can be used or whether you will use your own computer, etc.

3. Will it cost anything?

Mason is not responsible for operating costs, home maintenance or other incidental costs. Reimbursable expenses such as long distance phone or ISP costs are discussed by the employee and the employee's department. Additionally, Accounts Payable will not reimburse an employee

for costs associated with teleworking/remote working unless there is a Telework/Remote Work Memorandum of Agreement on file with Human Resources & Payroll.

10. I work with sensitive data. Is teleworking out of the question for me?

No. ITU has the technology to ensure a secure connection from a remote location. For information on Virtual Private Network (VPN) and other teleworking tools please see <http://telecomadmin.gmu.edu/Telework/telework.htm>

11. How do I communicate with colleagues at work?

It is important that communications not suffer because an employee is utilizing a flexible work agreement. Everyone has to strive to include remote workers and teleworkers in the day-to-day communications of the department. Instant messaging, listservs, telephone conference calls can all be used to keep people informed. For some tips on how to stay connected when you are working off-site, please see the Work/Life website at <http://hr.gmu.edu/worklife/flex>

12. Do I have to telework on a day when the university is closed for inclement weather?

Yes. One of the business-case reasons to encourage telework and remote work is the continuity of operations. Additionally, the University's policy on Flexible Work requires that "employees working from home during a university closing are expected to continue working unless it is not possible due to power outages or other conditions that prevent them from working. Employees teleworking/remote working from home during an authorized closing do not receive compensatory time off."

13. I have young children or another family member who is at home. Is this a reason to telework?

No. Telework and Remote Work must be treated similarly to being at work in the office. The Telework/Remote Work Memorandum of Agreement stipulates that telework can not be a substitute for child or other dependent care.

14. May I telework if the public schools are closed?

Perhaps. It's best to work out these questions in advance with your supervisor so that if a family or personal situation arises, a conversation has already occurred. If you would like to flex or telework due to a family or personal situation for a very limited time frame, you would be using an "informal" flexible work option. These do not need to be documented but they do need to be approved by your supervisor and be limited in duration.

Supervisor FAQ

1. Are all employees eligible to use a flexible work option?

No. Some positions may not be well suited to telework or remote work. And, there may be offices where flex time or compressed scheduling are not feasible. The telework scorecard can be an invaluable tool in assessing a position's suitability for telework. Supervisors may also consider a range of factors when determining whether a position is suited to flexible work including, but not limited to, environmental considerations (reduced car emissions), campus construction, productivity, work/life balance, retention, continuity of operations, and strategic business needs.

2. How will I interact with an employee who is on a flexible work option?

Interaction with an employee that a supervisor may not always see is quite similar to one who is in the office with the supervisor. Email, instant messaging, and the telephone are widely utilized in offices where people are physically nearby. They can be used effectively if the employee is in a remote location, at a telework site, or has a flexible schedule and may not be in the office some of the time that the supervisor is working. Communication becomes very important as does clearly laying out work assignments and due dates. These are all supervisory tools that work whether one is physically in the office or not.

3. How does one manage an employee who is not in the office?

Outcome based management is effective with employees who are not in the office. Discussing goals, assignments, due dates and then reviewing projects on an ongoing basis can keep both the employee and the supervisor on track. For some tips on how to manage employees on a flexible work schedule, please see the Work/Life website at <http://hr.gmu.edu/worklife/flex>

4. I'm uncomfortable with the thought that I may be pressured by my staff to utilize flexible work options. How can I put this in perspective?

As the supervisor, you are the ultimate arbiter of whether a flexible work option is appropriate for your staff. It is important that you consider an employee's proposal or request but supervisors are under no pressure to always approve a flexible work option. The reasons for not approving however must be consistently applied. The flexible work policy, procedures, and agreement can be of assistance in the discussion surrounding an employee's request as there are clear guidelines and considerations that must be taken into account.

For example, employees must have a performance evaluation of a solid achiever or above and they should be able to work well with a minimum of supervision.

5. How do I make the case for allowing an employee to utilize a flexible work option?

When assessing whether the positions in your area could use flexible work, please keep these things in mind:

- Will the department/office work flow be either neutrally or positively impacted by flexible work? With so many of us already separated by campus, building, or office, the use of Instant Messaging, email, telephone and video conferencing are all currently in use throughout the university. Can flexible work be added to this technological mix?
- Can the positions under consideration be managed on an outcome-based assessment by setting clear expectations, goals, and frequent measurements?
- Are the positions under consideration currently being held by people who are solid performers?
- Could the work/life balance of these individuals be improved through flexible work, particularly considering construction underway, summer time caregiving schedule changes (e.g. using flex time so that a parent may drop off or pick up a child a camp without having to use both before/after camp or someone who would like to work out in the mornings without having to do so at 6:00am)?
- Could the flexibility offered be a management tool to retain a valued employee?
- Can flexible work contribute to the overall effectiveness of your department and/or the flow of work (e.g. using flex time to extend your office's availability to your customers)?

Please see <http://hr.gmu.edu/worklife/flex> for additional helpful information from a supervisory perspective.

6. I have an employee who wants to telework but I need them physically in the office. What can I do?

As in Question 4 above, a supervisor does not have to approve every flexible work request. If there is a business need for the employee to be physically in the office, then the supervisor can deny the flexible work request. It is hoped that all supervisors will take into consideration whether an employee who may not be eligible for telework, could be eligible for another flexible work option such as a compressed schedule or flextime.

May 2009