



**Inland Revenue**  
Te Tari Taake

# **Self-employed or an employee?**

How to work out your tax status

# Introduction

It is important to know if you're employed or self-employed, because the tax and Accident Compensation laws treat the two groups differently. This leaflet will help you decide if you're employed or self-employed. It also explains the tax differences between the two.

There is no single test for deciding between them. You can decide whether you're employed or self-employed by looking at the work you do and the way you do it. The decision can't be made just because you or your employer call your job "employment" or "self-employment".

A contract with a person who pays you might describe you as an "independent contractor", or as "self-employed", or similar. This doesn't mean you will automatically be self-employed. The working conditions set out in the contract (or agreed verbally) will determine your status, not the way you're described.

## Guidelines

Most of the time, deciding whether you're employed or self-employed will be easy. For example, if you're working for a company on a factory production line, doing a job set by your boss, you're employed. If you're in business for yourself, such as running your own dairy, you are self-employed.

If you have several jobs, you'll need to apply the guidelines to each job. Being employed or self-employed in one job does not automatically mean the same will apply to your other job(s). Consider the main conditions of each job that controls the way you work.

# Self-employment guidelines

If you answer “yes” to most of these questions, it usually means you are **self-employed**.

- Do you decide or control how you do the work? For example:
  - when you take holidays
  - when, where and what hours you work
  - the standard or quality of work
  - how much you get paid and how.
- Do you invest or risk your own money in the activity in any way? For example:
  - Could you sell the business?
  - Do you support the business with your own money? For example, lending money, or providing working capital. (Excluding shares obtained from any employee share purchase plan).
  - Are you responsible for losses or your own mismanagement?
  - Are you responsible for management and investment decisions for the business?
- Do you provide the major assets or working equipment needed for your job, (not just small tools, work clothing and/or vehicle to get to and from work)?
- Do you provide or pay for your own training?
- Are you responsible for getting the work done?
  - Can you get other people to work with or for you, without needing to get permission from anyone else?
  - Do you pay these people from your own funds?
  - Are you free to do work for other people?
  - Do you advertise on your own account?
  - Do you arrange for someone else to do the job if you can't (for example, if you're sick)?
  - Does your work contract say you'll be penalised if you stopped work, or left without completing a project?
  - Do you have to correct unsatisfactory work in your own time and at your own expense?

# Employee guidelines

If you can answer “yes” to most of the following questions, you’re probably an **employee**.

- Do you have to do the work yourself, rather than hiring someone else to do it for you?
- Can someone tell you at any time what to do on the job, or when and how to do it?
- Are you paid at a set rate (for example, hourly, weekly, monthly, or per unit of production)?
- Can you get overtime pay or penal rates? (Please note that even if you’re paid by commission or on a piecework basis you may still be an employee, especially if there are other people at your job who work on the same basis.)
- Do you work set hours, or a given number of hours a week or month?
- Does someone else set the standards for the amount and quality of your sales or output?
- Do you work at the premises of the person you’re working for, or somewhere that person decides?
- Are other people who do the same sort of job as you treated as employees?
- Are you under an employment contract (either individual or collective), or any law that says how your relationship with your “employer” should be run?
- Are you prevented from doing work for anyone else?
- Do you have to follow the rules or procedures of the person you’re working for?

If you answered yes to most or all these questions, but PAYE is not being deducted from your pay, you’ll need to contact us. We will help you sort things out with your employer, so your income is taxed correctly.

## Note

The questions listed above are only guidelines, and your job might not fit completely into either set. If you’re still unsure, phone us on 0800 227 774.

## Casual, short-term, temporary or part-time work

If you have one or more part-time jobs, or work for several different people, you need to go through the questions for each of your jobs. Being self-employed in one job does not automatically mean you will be self-employed in your other jobs.

You can be employed and self-employed at the same time. For example, you could be employed as a part-time shop assistant and spend the rest of your time running a business from home.

If you work part-time or for a short period, you may have more freedom to choose your hours of work. But unless you can answer “yes” to the self-employed questions, you will normally still be an employee.

## Tax for self-employed people

If you're self-employed, you're responsible for your own tax. This means that you must:

- tell us, if you haven't already done so, that you're in business.
- complete an **Individual tax return - IR3** each year, showing all your income and expenses, and complete your return.
- budget to make regular payments of provisional tax and end-of-year income tax. To assist with this the person paying you might agree to deduct tax from the payments they make to you.
- register for goods and services tax (GST) if your turnover was over \$60,000 in the last 12 months or will be over \$60,000 in the next 12-months.

If you meet the tests for being self-employed, tax may still have to be deducted from schedular payments you receive.

On the **Tax rate notification for contractors - IR330C** is a list of the occupations that are subject to tax, and the standard rate that will be deducted from each dollar you earn if you don't choose your own rate.

If the type of work you do is listed there, you can claim work-related expenses against your income from that job.

You'll find more information about tax for self-employed people in our **Smart business - IR320** guide. Get a copy on our website at [ird.govt.nz](http://ird.govt.nz) or order a copy by phoning INFOexpress on 0800 257 773.

## Tax for employees

If you're an employee, your employer will normally be responsible for deducting PAYE from your wages or salary and paying it to Inland Revenue.

At the end of the tax year, if we are satisfied we have all your income details we'll send you an income tax assessment showing:

- your income earned for the year,
- PAYE deductions, and
- if you have had the right amount of tax deducted.

Otherwise we will send you the details we hold and ask you to add anything we have missed.

To find out more go to [ird.govt.nz/income-tax-assessments](http://ird.govt.nz/income-tax-assessments)

## Inland Revenue audits

Our auditors routinely go over the tax records of individuals and businesses. If a person has others working for them, we will check whether the workers are employees or self-employed. This may involve interviews with both the employer and the workers.

We may want to discuss your job with you, to work out whether you're self-employed or an employee, and who is responsible for your tax.

Overall, we look at who has control over what, how and when work is done. If the answer is the employer then the worker is almost certainly an employee. Our auditors use tests based on the guidelines set out in this leaflet.

## For more information

If you're still not sure whether you're employed or self-employed, please phone us on 0800 227 774.

If you do not agree with our decision you can dispute it, but only when you receive an assessment based on the decision.