

the operation of a business if you are self-employed, this does not show that you are working at the substantial gainful activity level.

(c) *If your work is done under special conditions.* The work you are doing may be done under special conditions that take into account your impairment, such as work done in a sheltered workshop or as a patient in a hospital. If your work is done under special conditions, we may find that it does not show that you have the ability to do substantial gainful activity. Also, if you are forced to stop or reduce your work because of the removal of special conditions that were related to your impairment and essential to your work, we may find that your work does not show that you are able to do substantial gainful activity. However, work done under special conditions may show that you have the necessary skills and ability to work at the substantial gainful activity level. Examples of the special conditions that may relate to your impairment include, but are not limited to, situations in which—

(1) You required and received special assistance from other employees in performing your work;

(2) You were allowed to work irregular hours or take frequent rest periods;

(3) You were provided with special equipment or were assigned work especially suited to your impairment;

(4) You were able to work only because of specially arranged circumstances, for example, other persons helped you prepare for or get to and from your work;

(5) You were permitted to work at a lower standard of productivity or efficiency than other employees; or

(6) You were given the opportunity to work despite your impairment because of family relationship, past association with your employer, or your employer's concern for your welfare.

(d) *If you are self-employed.* Supervisory, managerial, advisory or other significant personal services that you perform as a self-employed individual may show that you are able to do substantial gainful activity.

(e) *Time spent in work.* While the time you spend in work is important, we

will not decide whether or not you are doing substantial gainful activity only on that basis. We will still evaluate the work to decide whether it is substantial and gainful regardless of whether you spend more time or less time at the job than workers who are not impaired and who are doing similar work as a regular means of their livelihood.

[45 FR 55584, Aug. 20, 1980, as amended at 65 FR 42783, July 11, 2000]

§ 404.1574 Evaluation guides if you are an employee.

(a) We use several guides to decide whether the work you have done shows that you are able to do substantial gainful activity. If you are working or have worked as an employee, we will use the provisions in paragraphs (a) through (d) of this section that are relevant to your work activity. We will use these provisions whenever they are appropriate, whether in connection with your application for disability benefits (when we make an initial determination on your application and throughout any appeals you may request), after you have become entitled to a period of disability or to disability benefits, or both.

(1) *Your earnings may show you have done substantial gainful activity.* Generally, in evaluating your work activity for substantial gainful activity purposes, our primary consideration will be the earnings you derive from the work activity. We will use your earnings to determine whether you have done substantial gainful activity unless we have information from you, your employer, or others that shows that we should not count all of your earnings. The amount of your earnings from work you have done (regardless of whether it is unsheltered or sheltered work) may show that you have engaged in substantial gainful activity. Generally, if you worked for substantial earnings, we will find that you are able to do substantial gainful activity. However, the fact that your earnings were not substantial will not necessarily show that you are not able to do substantial gainful activity. We generally consider work that you are forced to stop or to reduce below the substantial gainful activity level after a short time because of your impairment to be an

unsuccessful work attempt. Your earnings from an unsuccessful work attempt will not show that you are able to do substantial gainful activity. We will use the criteria in paragraph (c) of this section to determine if the work you did was an unsuccessful work attempt.

(2) *We consider only the amounts you earn.* When we decide whether your earnings show that you have done substantial gainful activity, we do not consider any income that is not directly related to your productivity. When your earnings exceed the reasonable value of the work you perform, we consider only that part of your pay which you actually earn. If your earnings are being subsidized, we do not consider the amount of the subsidy when we determine if your earnings show that you have done substantial gainful activity. We consider your work to be subsidized if the true value of your work, when compared with the same or similar work done by unimpaired persons, is less than the actual amount of earnings paid to you for your work. For example, when a person with a serious impairment does simple tasks under close and continuous supervision, our determination of whether that person has done substantial gainful activity will not be based only on the amount of the wages paid. We will first determine whether the person received a subsidy; that is, we will determine whether the person was being paid more than the reasonable value of the actual services performed. We will then subtract the value of the subsidy from the person's gross earnings to determine the earnings we will use to determine if he or she has done substantial gainful activity.

(3) *If you are working in a sheltered or special environment.* If you are working in a sheltered workshop, you may or may not be earning the amounts you are being paid. The fact that the sheltered workshop or similar facility is operating at a loss or is receiving some charitable contributions or governmental aid does not establish that you are not earning all you are being paid. Since persons in military service being treated for severe impairments usually continue to receive full pay, we evaluate work activity in a therapy program

or while on limited duty by comparing it with similar work in the civilian work force or on the basis of reasonable worth of the work, rather than on the actual amount of the earnings.

(b) *Earnings guidelines.* (1) *General.* If you are an employee, we first consider the criteria in paragraph (a) of this section and § 404.1576, and then the guides in paragraphs (b)(2), (3), (4), (5), and (6) of this section. When we review your earnings to determine if you have been performing substantial gainful activity, we will subtract the value of any subsidized earnings (see paragraph (a)(2) of this section) and the reasonable cost of any impairment-related work expenses from your gross earnings (see § 404.1576). The resulting amount is the amount we use to determine if you have done substantial gainful activity. We will generally average your earnings for comparison with the earnings guidelines in paragraphs (b)(2), (3), (4), and (6) of this section. See § 404.1574a for our rules on averaging earnings.

(2) *Earnings that will ordinarily show that you have engaged in substantial gainful activity.* We will consider that your earnings from your work activity as an employee (including earnings from sheltered work, see paragraph (b)(4) of this section) show that you engaged in substantial gainful activity if:

(i) *Before January 1, 2001,* they averaged more than the amount(s) in Table 1 of this section for the time(s) in which you worked.

(ii) *Beginning January 1, 2001,* and each year thereafter, they average more than the larger of:

(A) The amount for the previous year, or

(B) An amount adjusted for national wage growth, calculated by multiplying \$700 by the ratio of the national average wage index for the year 2 calendar years before the year for which the amount is being calculated to the national average wage index for the year 1998. We will then round the resulting amount to the next higher multiple of \$10 where such amount is a multiple of \$5 but not of \$10 and to the nearest multiple of \$10 in any other case.

TABLE 1

For months:	Your monthly earnings averaged more than:
In calendar years before 1976	\$200
In calendar year 1976	230
In calendar year 1977	240
In calendar year 1978	260
In calendar year 1979	280
In calendar years 1980–1989	300
January 1990–June 1999	500
July 1999–December 2000	700

(3) *Earnings that will ordinarily show that you have not engaged in substantial gainful activity.* If your earnings for months beginning January, 2001, are equal to or less than the amount(s) determined under paragraph (b)(2)(ii) of this section for the year(s) in which you work, we will generally consider that the earnings from your work as an employee will show that you have not engaged in substantial gainful activity. If your earnings for months before January, 2001, were less than the amount(s) in Table 2 of this section for the year(s) in which you worked, we will generally consider that the earnings from your work as an employee will show that you have not engaged in substantial gainful activity.

TABLE 2

For months:	Your monthly earnings averaged less than:
In calendar years before 1976	\$130
In calendar year 1976	150
In calendar year 1977	160
In calendar year 1978	170
In calendar year 1979	180
In calendar years 1980–1989	190
In calendar years 1990–2000	300

(4) *Before January 1, 2001, if you worked in a sheltered workshop.* Before January 1, 2001, if you worked in a sheltered workshop or a comparable facility especially set up for severely impaired persons, we will ordinarily consider that your earnings from this work show that you have engaged in substantial gainful activity if your earnings averaged more than the amounts in table 1 of paragraph (b)(2) of this section. Average monthly earnings from a sheltered workshop or a comparable facility that are equal to or less than those amounts indicated in

table 1 of paragraph (b)(2) of this section will ordinarily show that you have not engaged in substantial gainful activity without the need to consider other information, as described in paragraph (b)(6) of this section, regardless of whether they are more or less than those indicated in paragraph (b)(3) of this section. When your earnings from a sheltered workshop or comparable facility are equal to or less than those amounts indicated in table 1 of paragraph (b)(2), we will consider the provisions of paragraph (b)(6) of this section only if there is evidence showing that you may have engaged in substantial gainful activity. For work performed in a sheltered workshop in months beginning January 2001, the rules of paragraph (b)(2), (3), and (6) apply the same as they do to any other work done by an employee.

(5) *If there is evidence showing that you may have done substantial gainful activity.* If there is evidence showing that you may have done substantial gainful activity, we will apply the criteria in paragraph (b)(6) of this section regarding comparability and value of services.

(6) *Earnings that are not high enough to ordinarily show that you engaged in substantial gainful activity.*

(i) *Before January 1, 2001,* if your average monthly earnings were between the amounts shown in paragraphs (b)(2) and (3) of this section, we will generally consider other information in addition to your earnings (see paragraph (b)(6)(iii) of this section). This rule generally applies to employees who did not work in a sheltered workshop or a comparable facility, although we may apply it to some people who work in sheltered workshops or comparable facilities (see paragraph (b)(4) of this section).

(ii) *Beginning January 1, 2001,* if your average monthly earnings are equal to or less than the amounts determined under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, we will generally not consider other information in addition to your earnings unless there is evidence indicating that you may be engaging in substantial gainful activity or that you are in a position to defer or suppress your earnings.

(iii) *Examples* of other information we may consider include, whether—

(A) Your work is comparable to that of unimpaired people in your community who are doing the same or similar occupations as their means of livelihood, taking into account the time, energy, skill, and responsibility involved in the work, and

(B) Your work, although significantly less than that done by unimpaired people, is clearly worth the amounts shown in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, according to pay scales in your community.

(c) *The unsuccessful work attempt*—(1) *General.* Ordinarily, work you have done will not show that you are able to do substantial gainful activity if, after working for a period of 6 months or less, your impairment forced you to stop working or to reduce the amount of work you do so that your earnings from such work fall below the substantial gainful activity earnings level in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, and you meet the conditions described in paragraphs (c)(2), (3), (4), and (5), of this section. We will use the provisions of this paragraph when we make an initial determination on your application for disability benefits and throughout any appeal you may request. Except as set forth in § 404.1592a(a), we will also apply the provisions of this paragraph if you are already entitled to disability benefits, when you work and we consider whether the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity or demonstrates the ability to do substantial gainful activity.

(2) *Event that must precede an unsuccessful work attempt.* There must be a significant break in the continuity of your work before we will consider that you began a work attempt that later proved unsuccessful. You must have stopped working or reduced your work and earnings below the substantial gainful activity earnings level because of your impairment or because of the removal of special conditions that were essential to the further performance of your work. We explain what we mean by special conditions in § 404.1573(c). We will consider your prior work to be “discontinued” for a significant period if you were out of work at least 30 consecutive days. We will also consider

your prior work to be “discontinued” if, because of your impairment, you were forced to change to another type of work or another employer.

(3) *If you worked 3 months or less.* We will consider work of 3 months or less to be an unsuccessful work attempt if you stopped working, or you reduced your work and earnings below the substantial gainful activity earnings level, because of your impairment or because of the removal of special conditions which took into account your impairment and permitted you to work.

(4) *If you worked between 3 and 6 months.* We will consider work that lasted longer than 3 months to be an unsuccessful work attempt if it ended, or was reduced below substantial gainful activity earnings level, within 6 months because of your impairment or because of the removal of special conditions which took into account your impairment and permitted you to work and—

(i) You were frequently absent from work because of your impairment;

(ii) Your work was unsatisfactory because of your impairment;

(iii) You worked during a period of temporary remission of your impairment; or

(iv) You worked under special conditions that were essential to your performance and these conditions were removed.

(5) *If you worked more than 6 months.* We will not consider work you performed at the substantial gainful activity earnings level for more than 6 months to be an unsuccessful work attempt regardless of why it ended or was reduced below the substantial gainful activity earnings level.

(d) *Work activity in certain volunteer programs.* If you work as a volunteer in certain programs administered by the Federal government under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 or the Small Business Act, we will not count any payments you receive from these programs as earnings when we determine whether you are engaging in substantial gainful activity. These payments may include a minimal stipend, payments for supportive services such as housing, supplies and equipment, an expense allowance, or reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses. We will also

disregard the services you perform as a volunteer in applying any of the substantial gainful activity tests discussed in paragraph (b)(6) of this section. This exclusion from the substantial gainful activity provisions will apply only if you are a volunteer in a program explicitly mentioned in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 or the Small Business Act. Programs explicitly mentioned in those Acts include Volunteers in Service to America, University Year for ACTION, Special Volunteer Programs, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Foster Grandparent Program, Service Corps of Retired Executives, and Active Corps of Executives. We will not exclude under this paragraph, volunteer work you perform in other programs or any nonvolunteer work you may perform, including nonvolunteer work under one of the specified programs. For civilians in certain government-sponsored job training and employment programs, we evaluate the work activity on a case-by-case basis under the substantial gainful activity earnings test. In programs such as these, subsidies often occur. We will subtract the value of any subsidy and use the remainder to determine if you have done substantial gainful activity. See paragraphs (a)(2)-(3) of this section.

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§ 404.1574a When and how we will average your earnings.

(a) If your work as an employee or as a self-employed person was continuous without significant change in work patterns or earnings, and there has been no change in the substantial gainful activity earnings levels, we will average your earnings over the entire period of work requiring evaluation to determine if you have done substantial gainful activity. See § 404.1592a for information on the reentitlement period.

(b) If you work over a period of time during which the substantial gainful activity earnings levels change, we will average your earnings separately for each period in which a different substantial gainful activity earnings level applies.

(c) If there is a significant change in your work pattern or earnings during the period of work requiring evaluation, we will average your earnings over each separate period of work to determine if any of your work efforts were substantial gainful activity.

(d) We will not average your earnings in determining whether benefits should be paid for any month(s) during or after the reentitlement period that occurs after the month disability has been determined to have ceased because of the performance of substantial gainful activity. See § 404.1592a for information on the reentitlement period. The following examples illustrate what we mean by a significant change in the work pattern of an employee and when we will average and will not average earnings.

Example 1: Mrs. H. began receiving disability insurance benefits in March 1993. In January 1995 she began selling magazines by telephone solicitation, expending a minimum of time, for which she received \$225 monthly. As a result, Mrs. H. used up her trial work period during the months of January 1995 through September 1995. After the trial work period ended, we determined that Mrs. H. had not engaged in substantial gainful activity during her trial work period. Her reentitlement period began October 1995. In December 1995, Mrs. H. discontinued her telephone solicitation work to take a course in secretarial skills. In January 1997, she began work as a part-time temporary secretary in a banking firm. Mrs. H. worked 20 hours a week, without any subsidy or impairment-related work expenses, at beginner rates. She earned \$285 per month in January 1997 and February 1997. In March 1997 she had increased her secretarial skills to journeyman level and was assigned as a part-time private secretary to one of the vice presidents of the banking firm. Mrs. H.'s earnings increased to \$525 per month effective March 1997. We determined that Mrs. H. was engaging in substantial gainful activity beginning March 1997 and that her disability ceased that month, the first month of substantial gainful activity after the end of the trial work period. Mrs. H. is due payment for March 1997, the month of cessation, and the following 2 months (April 1997 and May 1997) because disability benefits terminate the third month following the earliest month in which she performed substantial gainful activity. We did not average earnings for the period January 1997 and February 1997 with the period beginning March 1997 because there was a