



INVESTMENT & TAX SERVICES

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Employee vs. Independent Contractors

[Contractors Checklist \(PDF\)](#)

There is often much confusion over whether an individual is an independent contractor or an employee while that person is performing services for which they are paid a wage. The following will provide guidance concerning the factors that are used to determine whether an employment relationship exists between the individual and the business for federal employment tax purposes. An individual is an employee for federal employment tax purposes if the individual has the status of an employee under the usual common law rules applicable in determining the employer-employee relationship. Generally the relationship of employer and employee exists when the person or persons for whom the services are performed have the right to control and direct the individual who performs the services, not only as to the result accomplished by the work but also the details and means by which that result is accomplished. It is not necessary that the employer actually direct or control the manner in which the services are performed, it is sufficient if the employer has the right to do so.

As an aid in determining whether an individual is an employee under common law rules, 20 factors have been identified by the Internal Revenue Service as indicating whether sufficient control is present to establish an employer-employee relationship.

1. **INSTRUCTIONS.** A worker who is required to comply with other persons' instructions about when, where, and how he or she is to work is ordinarily an employee. This control factor is present if the person or persons for whom the services are performed have the **RIGHT** to require compliance with instructions.
2. **TRAINING.** Training a worker by requiring an experienced employee to work with the worker, by corresponding with the worker, by requiring the worker to attend meetings, or by using other methods, indicates that the person or persons for whom the services are performed want the services performed in a particular method or manner.
3. **INTEGRATION.** Integration of the worker's services into the business operations generally shows that the worker is subject to direction and control. When the success or continuation of a business depends to an appreciable degree upon the performance of certain services, the workers who perform those services must necessarily be subject to a certain amount of control by the owner of the business.
4. **SERVICES RENDERED PERSONALLY.** If the services must be rendered personally, presumably the person or persons for whom the services are performed are interested in the methods used to accomplish the work as well as in the results.
5. **HIRING, SUPERVISING, AND PAYING ASSISTANTS.** If the person or persons for whom the services are performed hire, supervise, and pay assistants, that factor generally shows control over the workers on the job. However, if one worker hires, supervises, and pays the other assistants pursuant to a contract under which the worker agrees to provide materials and labor and under which the worker is responsible only for the attainment of a result, this factor indicates an independent contractor status.
6. **CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP.** A continuing relationship between the worker and the person or persons for whom the services are performed indicates that an employer-employee relationship exists. A continuing relationship may exist where work is performed at frequently recurring although irregular intervals.
7. **SET HOURS OF WORK.** The establishment of set hours of work by the person or persons for whom the services are performed is a factor indicating control.
8. **FULL TIME REQUIRED.** If the worker must devote substantially full time to the business of the person or persons for whom the services are performed, such person or persons have control over the amount of time the worker spends working and impliedly restrict the worker from doing other gainful work. An independent contractor on the other hand, is free to work when and for whom he or she chooses.
9. **DOING WORK ON EMPLOYER'S PREMISES.** If the work is performed on the premises of the person or persons for whom the services are performed, that factor suggests control over the worker, especially if the work could be done elsewhere. Work done

off the premises of the person or persons receiving the services, such as at the office of the worker, indicates some freedom from control. However, this fact by itself does not mean that the worker is not an employee. The importance of this factor depends on the nature of the service involved and the extent to which an employer generally would require that employees perform such services on the employer's premises. Control over the place of work is indicated when the person or persons for whom the services are performed have the right to compel the worker to travel a designated route, to canvass a territory within a certain time, or to work at specific places as required.

10. ORDER OR SEQUENCE SET. If a worker must perform services in the order or sequence set by the person or persons for whom the services are performed, that factor shows that the worker is not free to follow the worker's own pattern of work but must follow the established routines and schedules of the person or persons for whom the services are performed. Often, because of the nature of an occupation, the person or persons for whom the services are performed do not set the order of the services or set the order infrequently. It is sufficient to show control, however, if such person or persons retain the right to do so.

11. ORAL OR WRITTEN REPORTS. A requirement that the worker submit regular or written reports to the person or persons for whom the services are performed indicates a degree of control.

12. PAYMENT BY HOUR, WEEK, MONTH. Payment by the hour, week, or month generally points to an employer-employee relationship, provided that this method of payment is not just a convenient way of paying a lump sum agreed upon as the cost of a job. Payment made by the job or on straight commission generally indicates that the worker is an independent contractor.

13. PAYMENT OF BUSINESS AND/OR TRAVELING EXPENSES. If the person or persons for whom the services are performed ordinarily pay the worker's business and/or traveling expenses, the worker is ordinarily an employee. An employer, to be able to control expenses, generally retains the right to regulate and direct the worker's business activities.

14. FURNISHING OF TOOLS AND MATERIALS. The fact that the person or persons for whom the services are performed furnish significant tools, materials, and other equipment tends to show the existence of an employer-employee relationship.

15. SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT. If the worker invests in facilities that are used by the worker in performing services and are not typically maintained by employees (such as the maintenance of an office rented at fair value from an unrelated party), that factor tends to indicate that the worker is an independent contractor. On the other hand, lack of investment in facilities indicates dependence on the person or persons for whom the services are performed for such facilities and, accordingly, the existence of an employer-employee relationship.

16. REALIZATION OF PROFIT OR LOSS. A worker who can realize a profit or suffer a loss as a result of the worker's services (in addition to the profit or loss ordinarily realized by employees) is generally an independent contractor, but the worker who cannot is an employee. For example, if the worker is subject to a real risk of economic loss due to significant investments or a bona fide liability for expenses, such as salary payments to unrelated employees, that factor indicates that the worker is an independent contractor. The risk that a worker will not receive payment for his or her services, however, is common to both independent contractors and employees and thus does not constitute a sufficient economic risk to support treatment as an independent contractor.

17. WORKING FOR MORE THAN ONE FIRM AT A TIME. If a worker performs more than de minimis services for a multiple of unrelated persons or firms at the same time, that factor generally indicates that the worker is an independent contractor. However, a worker who performs services for more than one person may be an employee of each of the persons, especially where such persons are part of the same service arrangement.

18. MAKING SERVICE AVAILABLE TO GENERAL PUBLIC. The fact that a worker makes his or her services available to the general public on a regular and consistent basis indicates an independent contractor relationship.

19. RIGHT TO DISCHARGE. The right to discharge a worker is a factor indicating that the worker is an employee and the person possessing the right is an employer. An employer exercises control through the threat of dismissal, which causes the worker to obey the employer's instructions. An independent contractor, on the other hand, cannot be fired so long as the independent contractor produces a result that meets the contract specifications.

20. RIGHT TO TERMINATE. If the worker has the right to end his or her relationship with the person for whom the services are performed at any time he or she wishes without incurring liability, that factor indicates an employer-employee relationship.

Conclusion

If an individual is deemed an independent contractor, then the person or business paying the individual need only file a form 1099 (if over \$600) for the individual. The employer would not be liable for any payroll taxes or payroll tax filings. This is the main reason employers prefer independent contractor status over employee status. If the IRS reclassifies a worker as an employee, then the employer becomes liable for employment taxes that would have been withheld from the worker's pay, such as FICA, federal and state income taxes. The employer is also liable for the employer's share of FICA taxes for that employee, all state and local unemployment taxes, penalties and interest for failure to pay these taxes and all penalties and interest for failure to file payroll tax returns and could have a retirement plan retroactively disqualified which could cause all vested accrued benefits to become fully taxable for all employees enrolled in the plan.

Resources

Internal Revenue Code Sections 3121 and 3401, Internal Revenue Service Revenue Ruling 1987-41