

## B2-C1 Worksheet: Fired for Being Early?

### Spanish worker says she lost her job for clocking in early

*Read the article.*

On paper, Marta Ruiz did everything employers say they want. The receptionist in Seville would turn up 15 to 20 minutes early, partly to beat the traffic and partly to settle her nerves before the phones started ringing. Her contract said staff should begin at 9.00 on the dot, but the building opened earlier, so she let herself in and made coffee. Then she would clock in straight away, believing she was showing initiative. Last month, she says, she was warned that the repeated early entries broke a time-tracking policy, and a week later she did get the sack.

Co-workers describe Ruiz as the sort of person who will work her fingers to the bone without asking for applause. They say she followed procedures by the book, covered lunch breaks, and helped new starters find their feet. HR took a different view. Early clock-ins, they argued, could confuse payroll, trigger extra scrutiny, and make it harder to prove staff were not being pressured to start before their shift. Ruiz decided to push back, filing an appeal and saying the decision felt petty. The case then drew backlash online, with people arguing that goodwill had been treated as misconduct.

Workplace researchers say the argument is rarely about punctuality and more about control. A rigid rule can protect a business, but it can also damage morale and create ambiguity about what is really valued. Some firms now allow a short start window, letting people make up for time at the end of the day or on a slower afternoon. They argue that, in the long run, the best systems are clear but human. Managers still need to draw the line, but doing it with a conversation can stop a minor issue becoming a reputational problem.

### True/False

*Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).*

1. Marta Ruiz often arrived early to avoid traffic and to prepare for the day.
2. Her employer said she was repeatedly late for work.
3. The company claimed early time stamps could create payroll and compliance problems.
4. Colleagues accused her of doing the bare minimum and avoiding responsibility.
5. HR argued that early starts could look like pressure on staff, even if no one asked for extra pay.
6. Ruiz accepted the decision immediately and chose not to complain.
7. The story led to criticism online about strict workplace rules.
8. Researchers suggested that punishing punctuality can hurt morale.

## Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) with the definitions (A-J). Write the letter.

| Phrases (1-10)                  | Definitions (A-J)                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1. get the sack                 | A. follow rules exactly                    |
| 2. turn up                      | B. record your arrival time at work        |
| 3. clock in                     | C. over a long period of time; eventually  |
| 4. work her fingers to the bone | D. compensate for something                |
| 5. by the book                  | E. set a clear limit; refuse to go further |
| 6. in the long run              | F. be fired from a job                     |
| 7. on the dot                   | G. resist or challenge something           |
| 8. make up for                  | H. work extremely hard                     |
| 9. push back                    | I. exactly on time                         |
| 10. draw the line               | J. arrive or appear                        |

## Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) with the synonyms (A-J). Write the letter.

| Words (1-10)   | Synonyms (A-J)       |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. punctuality | A. inflexible        |
| 2. scrutiny    | B. uncertainty       |
| 3. rigid       | C. challenge         |
| 4. backlash    | D. timeliness        |
| 5. morale      | E. trivial           |
| 6. ambiguity   | F. confidence        |
| 7. misconduct  | G. rule              |
| 8. petty       | H. close examination |
| 9. appeal      | I. negative reaction |
| 10. policy     | J. wrongdoing        |

## Discussion Questions

### Student A

1. Do you usually turn up early or right on time?
2. What helps you arrive on the dot when you need to?
3. Have you ever had to clock in early or stay late without being asked?
4. Where would you draw the line between being helpful and being taken advantage of?
5. Do you prefer doing things by the book or using common sense?
6. When you feel tired or behind, how do you make up for it?
7. Have you ever had to push back against a rule at work or school?
8. What small thing boosts your morale on a busy day?

### Student B

1. Should companies pay employees for every minute, including early clock-ins?
2. Is it fair to get the sack for breaking a time-tracking policy if performance is strong?
3. How rigid should workplace rules be in customer-facing roles?
4. Does strict scrutiny improve fairness, or does it create distrust?
5. Can punctuality be a cultural issue in international teams?
6. What policies reduce misconduct without punishing goodwill?
7. In the long run, does flexibility increase productivity or reduce standards?
8. When managers draw the line, what communication is essential to avoid backlash?

### Answer Key

**True/False:** 1 T, 2 F, 3 T, 4 F, 5 T, 6 F, 7 T, 8 T

**Phrase Match:** 1 F, 2 J, 3 B, 4 H, 5 A, 6 C, 7 I, 8 D, 9 G, 10 E

**Synonym Match:** 1 D, 2 H, 3 A, 4 I, 5 F, 6 B, 7 J, 8 E, 9 C, 10 G