

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION DURING A PLACEMENTⁱ

1. Tips for Communication During Remote/Virtual Placements

- Explicitly outline expectations and organizational norms around communication (e.g. use of video calls, level of 'formality')
- Set a regular check-in schedule, especially for the start of the placement (e.g. brief check-in each morning, 30 minute meeting every Monday)
- Identify appropriate use for different platforms/channels (e.g. text messages for emergencies only, e-mails for extensive discussions, platforms for collaboration)
- Identify appropriate contacts in the organization (e.g. contact for tech-related questions)
- Discuss how you will evaluate communication skills, particularly ones that are challenging to observe during virtual placements (e.g. verbal communication, interpersonal skills)

2. General Communication Tips for Supervisors

- Discuss your expectations for how and when the student should communicate with you
- Talk to the student about their comfort level with different methods of communication
- Provide frequent and varied communication opportunities
- Communicate with students in the manner that you expect them to communicate
- Explain the culture in your workplace, e.g., typically contact is via email, via telephone or in person
- Help the student understand the tone of communication required by different stakeholders
- Highlight to the student which styles of communication are effective in different situations
- Review important written documents so that the student knows where improvement is required
- Demand high standards from the student, particularly around external communication to clients
- Provide regular feedback to students on the progress they are making

3. Considerations for Providing Feedbackⁱⁱ

- Encourage the student to evaluate his/her progress
- Maintain confidentiality
- Be honest and constructive (beware of being destructive)
- Remain calm and objective
- Ask for feedback from others who have worked with the student

- Refer to specific actions, not personal traits
- Allow time for the student to process the information
- Check understanding and clarify meaning
- Assist the student in setting small achievable goals to reduce anxiety
- Use positive feedback to reinforce learned knowledge, values and skills
- The style of feedback may need to vary to suit individual students
- Contact the work-integrated learning programme coordinator (contact at the academic institution) if there are concerns
- Document feedback provided

4. Questions for the Supervisor to Consider Throughout the Placement

- Am I aware of the learning goals of the student?
- Have these changed over the course of the work experience?
- Do we have a plan in place to achieve these goals?
- Are we following the plan?
- Has the student learned new techniques or skills recently?
- Are there any topics or skills that I think the student needs to improve upon?
- Am I providing my mentee with ongoing constructive feedback on his/her performance?
- Am I approachable and available to the student?
- Should I encourage the student to ask more questions? Should I ask the student more questions?
- Does the student feel valued and safe in the work environment?
- Am I modelling the professional values and behaviours that would align with the student's learning goals?
- Is the student being challenged with a variety of tasks and increasing responsibilities over the work experience?
- What is the next level of learning opportunities I can provide to challenge my mentee?

ⁱ (With the exception of Section 1.) Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, (2016). A Practical Guide for Work-integrated Learning.