

The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook

A Guide for the Helping Professions

Ninth Edition



Brian N. Baird and Debra Mollen



The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook

The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook offers the real-world knowledge and skills interns in the helping professions need through every phase of their internship, practicum, or field placement. The focus is on topics that may not have been addressed or fully developed through regular academic coursework: meeting clients, fees for service, supervision, ethics, legal issues, diversity, clinical writing, case notes and clinical records, personal safety, self-care, advocacy, technology, termination, and planning for the future.

Every phase of the internship is discussed sequentially, from finding and preparing for placements to concluding relationships with clients and supervisors. Drawing from the fields of psychology, counseling, social work, school counseling, and psychiatry, this edition has been thoroughly updated with the latest research and clinical literature, ethical codes of the leading professions, and legal and regulatory developments at federal and state levels. This edition also features up-to-date coverage of remote education, training, supervision, and practice as impacted by COVID-19 and technological changes. Diversity awareness and insights are woven through every element of the text, taking into account developments such as Black Lives Matter, the MeToo movement, and gender identity awareness. Other emerging issues are also addressed, including the impact of the opioid epidemic and substance abuse deaths and the ethical/legal issues that may arise relating to reproductive health and abortion related legislation. In-text exercises and thought problems are incorporated into each chapter for students to develop insights and skills. Eleven online and customizable appendices are also included, containing learning plans, supervision agreements, evaluation forms, and ethical guidelines that students will need in preparation for the next phase of their training.

The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook is an invaluable resource for students, faculty, and supervisors engaged in the challenging experience of transitioning from academia into clinical training in the field.

Brian N. Baird practiced clinically as a psychologist for two decades and chaired the department of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University. He was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1998 and served six terms in office. He consults on communication, ethics, and political strategy and is the founder and chair of the National Museum and Center for Service.

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Preface

Professionals and students in the helping professions consider internships, practicum, and field placements among the most influential experiences of their careers. At the same time, however, students also report that their normal coursework typically provides only indirect and, in many cases, insufficient preparation for their first real-world exposure. We have designed this book to bridge the gap between academic coursework and the knowledge, skills, and emotional challenges and rewards beyond the classroom.

As strong proponents of evidence-based practice and competency-based education, throughout this book we have drawn on the best *and most current* information available from psychology, counseling, social work, school counseling, psychiatry, and other helping professions. Based on this research and having worked with hundreds of students and trainees in beginning and advanced placements, our goal with every edition has been to write a book that will be valuable to all our readers who represent many academic disciplines and levels of training. Students in their first or second field experience will likely get the greatest benefit from this text, but even advanced graduate students and their instructors consistently say they find the book covers key areas and material that might otherwise not be addressed in their training.

As we prepared the current text, we were intentional about addressing major developments that occurred globally and nationally since the last edition was published. These developments, including widespread trends toward telehealth and virtual learning, were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ninth edition also addresses the most recent ethical codes of the leading professions, along with the latest legal and regulatory developments at federal and state levels. We have continued to consult with numerous faculty and supervisors in each discipline and who represent various types of academic institutions and internship settings. Equally important, we regularly seek and receive feedback from interns themselves about how to make the text the most meaningful and helpful to the most important people of all – those who are actually using it.

Based on feedback from students and faculty who use the text, we have implemented several changes in this latest edition. Overall, the text is more streamlined to make chapters easier and quicker for students to read while still addressing the most important information. We have added significant material that captures current trends and best practices, telepractice, and increased attention to diversity, particularly given major social and cultural events of the past five years, such as the #MeToo and #TimesUp phenomena and Black Lives Matters. Throughout the text, we have removed and replaced old references with more current sources. This is not to say that all older references have been supplanted. In a number of cases, we retained original source material as we believe it is important to honor those whose work has made indelible contributions to the helping professions.

We recognize the changing face of our field and have responded accordingly by expanding our discussion of the role of social media as a clinical, ethical, and personal

safety issue for interns. We have included detailed discussion about online service delivery and supervision as well as the importance of providing treatment to veterans and disaster victims. We revised [Chapter 6](#) to include the vital shifts in attention to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the helping professions as we continue the necessary work of dismantling the racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and cissexism that have been injurious to scores of people. We added unique challenges and strengths of first-generation college students and English-language learners in [Chapter 7](#), while we included specific material on coping with stress and self-care in [Chapter 8](#), given the tremendous impact COVID-19 has had on our lives in general and training in the helping professions specifically.

■ Making the Most of This Book

Overview of the Contents

A glance at the table of contents reveals that this text is organized along both chronological and thematic lines. The chapters have been organized sequentially to anticipate the stages interns pass through and the understanding and skills that will be required in those stages. Initial chapters deal with getting necessary paperwork and formal matters ironed out, meeting staff and clients, learning from peer groups and classes, and key ethical and legal issues. Middle chapters deal with supervision, working with individuals of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, clinical writing, self-care, and personal safety. Discussions of termination, finishing the internship, and lessons learned conclude the book. Finally, the appendices (A–K), which had been included as removable, perforated pages in prior editions, are now all available online in editable formats to allow supervisors, instructors, and interns to customize them to better meet your needs (see eResources). These files include examples of forms useful for establishing learning plans, supervision agreements, ethical guidelines, evaluations, and other procedures.

Although the book is organized chronologically, an important difference between this text and others is that the material in this book is heavily frontloaded. Compared to courses in which you may read a chapter each week or so during a quarter or semester, with this book you may want to read much or all of the content during the first few weeks of your placement, then refer to specific chapters again as you proceed through the internship. For example, many students find it helpful to review [Chapter 7](#) to help with clinical writing and case notes at the very start of their internships. It is also a good idea to give some consideration to the chapters managing stress and self-care ([Chapter 8](#)) and on personal safety issues ([Chapter 9](#)) at the outset of your experience rather than waiting until after some issue arises. Of course, some chapters, such as the one on termination and ending the internship, can wait until later, but even these topics are good to consider at the beginning because understanding how to close cases and conclude a placement successfully can help you better prepare for these events ahead of time.

Resources and References

A second difference between this book and other texts is our emphasis on practical skills and knowledge. In writing this book, we have tried to present information that will be immediately relevant to your internship and of practical use to you in

the field. We recognize, however, that entire books have been written about the topics of each of the chapters. If you are interested in more detail about a topic, we have provided references throughout the text and we hope you will refer to these as you read and while you train at your internship. The practice of going beyond a textbook to pursue additional resources is an essential part of how professionals pursue topics of interest. Throughout your internship and your future study and training, make it a practice to not simply accept a single source of information but to seek different sources and learn from different perspectives both within your own discipline and across professions.

Doing the Exercises

Part of the reason we enjoy working with interns is that we believe strongly in the value of experiential and discovery-based learning. Because internship training and clinical work involve a constant process of self-exploration and change, the textual material of each chapter is accompanied by self-exploration and experiential learning exercises. The more one works in this field, the more acutely one realizes the importance of self-examination and understanding. We encourage you to use these exercises and be open to the experiences. It can be extremely valuable to discuss your responses with your peers, trusted faculty members, and supervisors.

If your goal is simply to get through the book or if you are pressed for time, you may be tempted to skim over an exercise or suggested activity. We hope you will resist that temptation and devote some time to the exercises. A given exercise may seem unnecessary to you, but you will not really know unless you test your knowledge. It is one thing to tell yourself that you already know something, but it is another matter to really explore and reflect on an issue in a structured, systematic way. In our experience as instructors and supervisors, and as practicing clinicians, we have continually been surprised by how often we think we know something but then discover a completely new insight or understanding.

Keep This Book

Some students indiscriminately sell their textbooks the minute a class is over. In this case, that would be a mistake. If you plan to go on to work or further study in the field, this book as well as your other basic textbooks should begin to make up the core of your professional library; you should have them handy as references for future classes and as you work in the field. The truth is, we have done a lot of research for you and if you want or need to dive more deeply into a topic, the sources cited in this text are great resources to get you started. In every major topic area of this text, we have screened hundreds of journal articles, books, and other resources, selecting what we believe are the most significant, up to date, and informative sources to guide the content and include as references for your further study. The marginal return you might gain from a resale is far outweighed by the value of having your own resources to draw on and refer back to in the future. Developing a personal library is part of the process of becoming a professional, and you might as well begin that process with this book. If you do go on to work in the field or to future internships, you will have many occasions to refer back to the chapters on ethics, writing, supervision, diversity, stress, and other topics. Keep this book when the course is over and read it again in the future.

Acknowledgments

This book reflects the influence and contributions of many people, and it would not be possible to list everyone to whom we owe a debt of thanks. Our many colleagues, friends, and students in recent years, as well as our instructors, supervisors, and mentors during undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate training have all shaped this book and its authors. We are grateful for all the positive, and even some of what at the time seemed to be negative, experiences they have given us.

■ Acknowledgments from Brian N. Baird

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In addition to the individuals acknowledged in prior editions, this eighth edition benefited significantly from the insightful reviews and many helpful suggestions provided by the editorial and production team including Abigail Stanley from Routledge, Ellie Jarvis from Swales & Willis, and copy-editor Kelly Derrick. I want to thank each of them for their time, professionalism, and ability to be direct with criticism and constructive in their suggestions. I also want to acknowledge and thank the reviewers who examined prior editions and made suggestions that helped us improve this edition. The reviewers who contributed their insights were Melissa Flint, Paul A. Miller, Simon Lowe, Roxanne Atterholt, Serena Wadhwa, Cindy Silitsky, Kathryn A. Steele, Mary Gay, Renee Kolecki, Lorna E. Segall, Tammy Shaffer, Bonita G. Cade, and Cheryl Almeida.

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Finally, I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to work with Dr. Debra Mollen on this latest edition. Her commitment to her students and the profession is exemplary, and her insights into the needs of interns and students and her knowledge of diversity issues are truly enlightening. It has been a sincere pleasure to work with her, learn from her, and share our collective experience, enthusiasm, and ideas through this book.

Acknowledgments from Debra Mollen

The irony of our educational system is that we are most typically assessed on an individual level when all of us are an amalgamation of those who educate, advise, support, mentor, guide, and inspire us. First, I'd like to offer my appreciation to Dr. Brian Baird for our continued collaboration on the ninth edition of this text. He remains invested in ensuring we serve each successive generation of students and interns with the most updated science to inform clinical practice.

I have been so fortunate to have had many outstanding professors, supervisors, and mentors whose belief in me was a vital component in allowing me to take each sequential step in my education and career. Special thanks to Drs. Charles R. Ridley, Maria T. Riva, Sally O. Ridgeway, and Freya Tumarkin.

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My current and previous students have been some of my greatest teachers, and I am forever grateful for their presence in my life. Each of you has taught me far more than I ever anticipated when I made the perilous, intrepid journey from student to professor: Drs. Kristin Harris-McDonald, Justine Kallaugher, Kathryn Keller, Nnenna Lindsay, Shelley Long, Ginny Maril, Jennifer Mootz, Noelany Pelc, Natalie Rochester, Bethany Rothamel, Erin Schrader, Melvin Varghese, Candice Vinson, Ally Wade, and Lauren Woolley. I consider myself extraordinarily fortunate that two of my former students have become my closest friends: Drs. Dena Abbott and Martha Bergen, you epitomize the best of our field and continue to teach and inspire me. I admire and love you both so much.

During the writing of this edition, when an internet outage threatened to stall my progress, our next-door neighbors, Karen and John Williams, graciously allowed us to run a cable between our houses so I could continue writing. To them, I offer my heartfelt appreciation.

Finally, and with my most abundant gratitude and love, thanks to my best friend whom I am deeply fortunate to call my husband, Frank Borecki, whose belief in me is unyielding, whose patience with me is boundless, and who makes every part of my life brighter, better, and rich with joy.



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Preparation

I've learned more in this experience than I have in any of my classes. Every student should have the opportunity to do a practicum.

Every day there was something new that I realized I didn't know. If for no other reason than that, I'm glad I did an internship.

(Comments from student evaluations of their practicum and internship experiences)

■ Theory into Practice

A young Peace Corps worker teaching overseas decided it would be fun to teach the children of his village how to play baseball. The children were enthusiastic and eager to learn, so he rounded up some equipment; drew pictures of the playing field; explained the rules of the game; and had everyone practice throwing, catching, and hitting the ball. He even gave them a test that included questions about the number of balls and strikes allowed, how many outs per inning, the distance between bases, and famous players of the past. With the basics mastered, the class improvised a field in a nearby pasture, divided up into two teams, and prepared to play ball.

As the villagers looked on, the excited children took their places on the field. The leadoff batter, a wiry young boy of 13, stepped up to the makeshift home plate with a broad smile. Their teacher, now coach, surveyed the field, took an exaggerated wind-up, and delivered the first baseball pitch the village had ever witnessed.

To everyone's astonishment, the batter smacked the ball into deep left field. The batter was so shocked by this that he just stood watching as the teacher shouted for him to "Run, Run, Run!" Turning to see how his team fared as fielders, the teacher found that all of his players in the field had left their positions and were running as fast as they could around the bases, tagging each one, screaming, laughing, and heading for home plate. The ball, meanwhile, rolled to a stop far out in the field with no one making any effort to chase it.

When the commotion subsided, the teacher was the only player left on the field. The whole team, even the batter, had raced from the field to home, thrilled with how many runs they believed they had just scored. "Somewhere," the teacher declared to himself, "we've got a gap between theory and practice." With that, he ran for first base and raced around the diamond just as his players had. When he crossed home plate, he made baseball history by scoring the tenth run from a single hit. His students loved it, and the village still talks about the game today.

Students beginning their first practicum or field placement can identify with the young players and perhaps with their new coach, who, as it happens, was a good

friend of one of this book's authors, Dr. Baird. Most interns report feeling a mixture of enthusiasm, nervousness, determination, and uncertainty, and regardless of all the coursework and study, there is no substitute for real experience. Only by taking the risk and trying things can we discover what we do or do not know.

This is why field placements are so valuable. They give you the chance to experience first-hand what you have been learning in your readings and classes. You will quickly discover that reading about schizophrenia, alcoholism, child abuse, or other issues is not the same as meeting and interacting with real people who experience the situations or conditions you have studied. Similarly, reading about, or role-playing, therapy and counseling techniques in a classroom, while helpful, often differs significantly from participating in actual therapy sessions.

You will also discover that many things you need to know when you begin to practice, such as ethical and legal issues, writing case notes, engaging in supervision, and a host of other topics, may be different in practice than when, or if, you studied them in class. Even when subjects have been studied in class, as the teacher-turned-coach learned from his base-running fielders, instructors too often erroneously assume that students will be able to transfer what they learn in the classroom directly to the field. Students recognize the error of this assumption the moment they enter their internship and ask themselves, "Now what do I do?"

Our goal in writing this book is to help you answer that question.

First the Paperwork – Then the Adventure

Think of this first chapter as taking care of all the details to manage before you start on an adventure. As with most things, especially when you'll be traveling and working with others, before you set off, it's important to have a plan and know something about where you're going. There are also inevitably a number of seemingly mundane but important procedural and paperwork matters to be addressed. We promise this will be relatively brief, so please be patient for a moment as we help you attend to some necessary details. Then we'll be set to start the adventure in the next chapter.

A Very Brief Word About Terminology

In this book, for convenience, we refer to field experiences as internships. We recognize that different disciplines use different terms for the experience – for example, social work programs often refer to "field placements" or "field experiences," while psychology and counseling use the term "practicum" to describe field experiences early in one's career and "internship" for more advanced training. With due respect for all professions, we intentionally chose the word internship as the standard for this text for the simple reason that it carries with it the convenient noun "intern" with which to describe you, the reader of this text and the individual participating in training. Therefore, throughout the text, except when referring to previous researchers' work that employs other terms, we refer to field experiences as internships and those receiving training as interns.

The other terms we will use to simplify things are "instructor" and "supervisor." We use instructor to refer to the faculty member from your educational institution who monitors your progress and interfaces with those employed by the field placement site. We use supervisor to designate those who directly monitor and oversee your work at the placement site.

From the outset, we also want to acknowledge that the landscape of practice has changed dramatically since the last edition of our book, with much more of our work transitioning to be predominantly or even exclusively online. One survey revealed that psychotherapists were more comfortable with teletherapy than the researchers expected, though they cautioned about the importance of therapists being intentional about setting clear boundaries about their availability to clients and the importance of seeking training for practice-specific technology issues (MacMullin et al., 2020). In a survey of recognized leaders in psychology, participants expected teletherapy to be a significant focus of the changing landscape of practice in the future (Neimeyer et al., 2022). Accordingly, throughout the text, we offer guidance for online, as well as face-to-face, mental health services.

■ Meeting with Your Instructor

Your first task is to meet with the academic instructor who will work with you during your internship. Some academic programs offer structured classes along with internships. Other programs leave internship support or supervision to be arranged individually between students and instructors (Hatcher et al., 2011). Either way, initial contact with an instructor is vital for several reasons.

The most important reason is to ensure you receive the best possible educational experience from your internship. Instructors can help you select placements or supervisors best suited to your needs, and they may assist in contacting placement sites or individual supervisors. If your department has established procedures governing internships, meeting with your instructor right at the outset will ensure that you follow those procedures. Programs typically require students to successfully meet several training and curricular milestones before beginning their first practicum or internship (Callahan & Watkins, 2018). You likely also need to complete some paperwork before you can start.

An additional concern that many interns do not consider is the liability risks that instructors and supervisors face when their students work in the field (National Association of Social Work Insurance Trust, 2004; Pollack & Marsh, 2004; Polychronis & Brown, 2016). Considering this shared liability, the faculty in your department must be involved in all aspects of your internship, from the very beginning until the conclusion.

We think it's important for students to be aware that it typically takes instructors and supervisors a great deal of effort to establish a relationship with internship sites (Cornish et al., 2005). Many programs have a predetermined set of placement sites and long-established relationships with their students' supervisors. Such arrangements ensure that the academic program will have placements for students and, simultaneously, that the treatment agencies can rely on interns to help them carry their workload.

■ Finding and Selecting a Placement

Academic institutions vary in how they select and assign students to internships. In many programs the school has prearranged sites and then either directly assigns students to specific sites or allows students to choose from or apply to different

established placements. If that is the approach of your school, much of the preliminary work has already been done for you, and you can simply proceed with the rest of this chapter, beginning with learning about institutional arrangements below.

On the other hand, some institutions either require or allow students to locate and make arrangements for their internship. Some programs have cultivated innovative approaches to training, inviting students to help establish agencies with specialized approaches like bilingual placements (see Delgado-Romero et al., 2021). If you need, or are allowed, to establish a placement on your own, or if you are given substantial choice in selecting a site from multiple options, we encourage you to first consult the advice we offer in the Appendix, then proceed to the rest of this chapter. In the Appendix, we discuss in detail how to decide what kind of placement to pursue, how to locate and arrange to work with a specific placement site, and other fundamental considerations about selecting or setting up a placement for your internship. We also offer a selection checklist in Appendix A (see eResources), designed to help students and supervisors assess what sort of internship placement and experiences will be most beneficial for each intern. We place that information separately from this chapter because for interns who need to select or choose their placement, it is very important, but for those who are directly assigned a placement by their program, there is no need to complete the checklist in Appendix A (see eResources) or review much of the material in the Appendix at the end of the book.

For all students, whether you are assigned a placement or must choose or arrange one, we strongly recommend you read the rest of this chapter, beginning with understanding the nature of the relationship between your academic institution and your internship site.

Institutional Agreements

Whether you must find your own placement or are assigned to one, before a student begins an internship, best practices call for a formal signed agreement to be established between the sponsoring academic institution and the host internship site. As society in general and health care more specifically have become increasingly litigious, the need for written internship agreements is clear. Wayne (2004) emphasized that for certain legal purposes, particularly for performance evaluations or disciplinary actions, field placements are treated by the courts like academic courses, making it essential that programs have “clearly defined learning objectives and evaluation criteria that are known to the student, the field instructor and the faculty liaison at the start of the course” (p. 409).

At the beginning of your internship, it is certainly reasonable to ask both your instructor and your field supervisor if a formal written arrangement exists and for you to have a chance to review it. You should not be responsible for drafting the agreement, but asking questions may help create or improve it if explicit components are lacking. If there are extant agreements, knowing with clarity from the outset what the expectations are between institutions can help prevent problems or misunderstandings down the road.

Because no two internship sites or academic programs are identical, there is no single model for such agreements. Generally, however, most institutions prefer agreements that begin by recognizing the importance, mutual benefits, and shared responsibilities of field learning opportunities for the academic institutions, students, and field placement sites. This initial recognition is then typically followed by

a description of the agreed-upon expectations for each of the parties involved. The expectations for the site include allowing the student to observe or participate in specified activities, providing certain kinds of learning opportunities, providing supervision by persons with specific qualifications and at specified intervals, and maintaining contact with the academic institution and instructor. Identifying the degree and other qualifications of the supervisor and specifying with clarity the number of hours spent on site and in supervision can be of particular importance as these may be required for formal credit or approval to be granted by professional associations and licensing boards (e.g., see CACREP, 2016).

For its part, the academic institution affirms in such agreements that the student is in good standing and has sufficient preparation to participate in the designated internship activities. The academic institution also agrees to provide a liaison instructor to work with the site. The agreement may also clarify the role of the instructor and address the evaluation process to be used. The student's responsibilities typically include adhering to the professional code of ethics, attending the internship as scheduled, carrying out any agreed-on responsibilities, and informing the supervisor and instructor should any problems or concerns arise. Guidelines for professional conduct and a description of evaluation procedures are sometimes included in the description of the student's responsibilities.

Two of the most common areas of legal concerns covered in agreements are (1) the possibility that the intern might be involved in activities that injure or otherwise harm a client or other person at the internship site and (2) the possibility that the intern might be injured or otherwise harmed while at the internship site. Portions of the agreement that deal with these issues specify how responsibilities will be shared in the event of such incidents, including clarification of liability insurance.

■ Liability Insurance

Liability insurance provides financial protection and legal support in case an individual professional or clinical setting is sued for damages alleged to have been caused by malpractice or negligence. You may not have considered the importance of such insurance to interns, but consider the research of Gelman et al. (1996), who found that 2.3% of programs surveyed reported that one of their students, and in five out of six cases the supervising faculty member as well, had been named in liability cases. Considering this finding, it is certainly wise for institutions to provide insurance for both students and supervisors. Many field agencies do, in fact, provide both liability and injury coverage for interns under their existing insurance for volunteers or employees. If so, it is essential for the intern and the school to complete any necessary paperwork officially designating the intern as a member of the class of individuals covered by the policy. The fact and extent of such coverage should also be specified in the field learning agreement. Lee (2017) offered some important points about the importance of students protecting themselves.

Even if you believe you are covered by your academic institutions or clinical placement, and whether individual coverage is formally required by your placement site, it is prudent to obtain a policy for yourself so you can be sure you are covered personally. Fortunately, most professional associations offer discounted policies for student members with most also providing liability insurance, either as a part of membership or for a reasonable fee, including the American Psychological Association

(<https://www.apa.org/members/your-membership/benefits/insurance>), The National Association of Social Workers (<https://naswassurance.org/>), the American Counseling Association (<https://www.counseling.org/membership/aca-and-you/students>), and the American School Counselor Association (<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Membership/Proof-of-Insurance>). We will have more to say about liability risks and insurance in [Chapter 4](#), but considering the reasonableness of the rates, the potential risks, and getting off to a good start in your professional development, we strongly encourage you to join your professional association and sign up for insurance as soon as possible if you have not already done so. In addition to the matter of insurance, we believe joining relevant professional associations is, for many other reasons, a fundamental element of your development and practice as a professional.

■ Individual Internship Agreements

Beyond the more general institutional-level agreement, you should also work with your instructor and supervisor to establish a plan specifically focused on what you will learn and do on the internship, expectations for supervision, what specific competencies will be developed and through what means, and how your performance will be evaluated. Somewhat surprisingly, Hatcher et al. (2011) found that only 37% of the psychology practicum programs they surveyed reported the use of an individualized training plan that included specific goals, competencies, and learning sequences.

We believe every intern should have such a plan and to help you develop one with your instructor and supervisor, we have provided a sample individual internship agreement form in Appendix C (see eResources). As you'll see, internship agreements should record the days and hours you will be expected to be training, what your responsibilities will be, and the nature of the supervision to be provided. The internship agreement should also provide space to identify your goals and plans to achieve them during the internship.

■ Evaluation

Because each internship offers different experiences and sets varying expectations, and because interns differ in their personal goals, we suggest being involved in planning the evaluation process from the beginning. To ensure the most effective and constructive learning experiences and avoid future misunderstandings, interns, instructors, and supervisors should agree on the evaluation and grading criteria and process before the internship begins (Wayne, 2004). Everyone can then work together to ensure that the evaluation process is predictable and productive and contributes to the overall learning experience of the intern (Bogo et al., 2002; Regehr et al., 2002).

Fundamental to evaluation in the helping professions are the principles of competency-based education and assessment. Competency assessment does not focus solely on knowledge-based acquisition but instead encompasses demonstrated performance in certain key areas of essential professional skills, personal conduct, character, and applied knowledge.

In 2015, the Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology (APA/COA, 2015) were approved by the American Psychological Association and came into effect in 2017. These standards guide graduate health service psychology training programs, including internships and, among other things, specify that students must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- i. Research
- ii. Ethical and legal standards
- iii. Individual and cultural diversity
- iv. Professional values, attitudes, and behaviors
- v. Communication and interpersonal skills
- vi. Assessment
- vii. Intervention
- viii. Supervision
- ix. Consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills

(p. 12)

Regardless of whether you are an undergraduate or graduate student, knowing the general areas of competence considered important for your discipline and profession can give you a sense of key areas integral for developing your own competencies. Also, as you will discover, we will cover many of the topics identified in this list directly and indirectly throughout the book.

Given the focus on competency education, how do programs evaluate competencies among students and trainees? There are a number of ongoing efforts to systemize and streamline evaluations (Chen et al., 2020; Goodie et al., 2021). Grus et al. (2016) reviewed two leading competency-based tools and asked training programs which competencies were viewed as important and which were most often not achieved. They also asked how remediation for deficits were addressed. Included among the 19 competency areas they identified were components of professionalism such as integrity, deportment, accountability, concern for the welfare of others, and professional identity. Issues relating to diversity awareness, ethical knowledge and practice, self-care, and affective skills were also ranked highly.

We want to stress that although the process of ongoing evaluation during your training can be arduous, it is incumbent upon all those entrusted with your education and public welfare to monitor students' progress, provide consistent feedback, and ensure your readiness to join the helping profession. As you think about the evaluation process, we encourage you to understand that you are not doing yourself a service if you seek, expect, value, or accept only positive feedback from an evaluation. We say this for several reasons. First, it is unrealistic to believe that you will excel in everything you do regardless of your level of training. Rather, you should expect that in some areas your performance may be exemplary and in others it may need some improvement. That is what learning is all about. If you receive only positive feedback, you will not be able to identify or improve in those areas in which you are not strong or as skilled. Kadushin and Harkness (2002) emphasized that in many instances, student evaluations of supervisors reflect a desire for more – not less – critical feedback and for more specific constructive comments rather than general impressions.

Hoffman et al. (2005) made a similar observation and reported that supervisee attitudes toward feedback can influence the willingness of supervisors to address challenging issues. Furthermore, Hoffman et al. (2005) found that supervisors who avoid giving difficult or critical feedback often wished later that they had offered the feedback or critical evaluation for the sake of the student, their clients, and ultimately the profession. In our experience as supervisors and instructors, the students who eventually go on to be most successful are not only open to constructive criticism, but they also actually seek it out in a sincere and admirable quest to learn more about themselves and their work.

Along the same lines, we encourage you to keep in mind that one of the most difficult and important roles faculty and supervisors fill is that of gatekeeper for the profession (Busseri et al., 2005; DeCinco et al., 2020; Gower & Harris, 2020; Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007; Johnson & Campbell, 2004; Vacha-Haase et al., 2004; Wayne, 2004; Wilkerson, 2006). Not everyone who seeks to work in the helping professions is eligible or suitable, and your faculty and supervisors have the difficult yet essential responsibility of identifying those whose potential for improvement is irremediable and should not continue with their studies or training.

The importance of rigorous assessment for professional competency was well demonstrated by Furr and Brown-Rice (2018), who found in a survey that 77% of graduate psychology and counseling students reported they had worked with at least one peer who demonstrated significant problems of professional competency. The identified areas of concern included emotional regulation, unprofessional conduct, inadequate clinical skills, unethical behavior, and other psychological concerns. Students who observed peers with these problems reported feeling frustrated, resentful, stressed by their peers' actions, that their own learning was disrupted, and had concerns about the impact on the profession and on clients.

Of course, it is never easy or pleasant to have to address such problems with students or interns, but it remains a core responsibility of faculty and supervisors. Professions simply must insist on the highest standards of preparation and performance. You would want nothing less if you or a loved one were being treated by a professional, and you would certainly not want any students or trainees who lacked competence in critical areas to be cursorily passed through the school or internship without those matters being addressed and resolved.

Given the concerns we just mentioned, there is no single evaluation approach that works best, but some mechanism of reliable and valid assessment of competency must be in place. Hatcher and Lassiter (2007) described the "Practicum Competencies Outline," which grew out of a lengthy process involving the Directors of Psychology Training Clinics and the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (https://aptc.org/public_files/Practicum%20Competencies%20FINAL%20%28Oct%20%2706%20Version%29.pdf). The Practice Competencies Outline builds on a developmental approach to practicum training and then sets defined levels of competencies that should be achieved in various skill and knowledge areas by the end of the practicum. Also included are certain personality characteristics and skills deemed essential prerequisites to successful clinical performance.

Regehr et al. (2002) described comparable skill and knowledge areas for social work. These authors reviewed a variety of approaches to evaluation in field placements and emphasized the importance of obtaining a baseline of student competence at the beginning of an internship. Such assessments help identify the learning needs and opportunities to be addressed during the internship and serves as a foundation for subsequent evaluation. Regehr and colleagues recommended identifying specific

learning goals that meet the needs of the student and the agency and the expectations of the school and the supervisor.

Evaluation has also received increasing attention within training of school counselors. Murphy and Kaffenberger (2007) built on the American School Counselor Association's National Model¹ and emphasized the importance of coordinating field learning, supervisory activities, and evaluation with the elements of the model. This coordination of training and evaluation is part of the accountability component of the National Model¹. Murphy and Kaffenberger (2007) noted that accountability involves using data for three purposes – monitoring student progress, assessing counseling programs, and demonstrating counselor effectiveness.

We find this three-purpose approach to accountability particularly valuable, as it helps everyone involved keep in mind that evaluation is not simply a method for assessing the intern or trainee performance. Ideally, evaluation should be broader, providing valuable information about the training and the academic programs too. In turn, this should help specific institutions and professional disciplines as a whole demonstrate the adequacy and efficacy of their training and of the professionals who hold the relevant degrees.

If your instructor or supervisor has an established format for evaluation, review it carefully to be sure you understand it. If your instructor or supervisor does not have a fixed format, you may want to consider the sample evaluation forms provided in Appendices D and E (see eResources). We will revisit the evaluatory component of supervision in [Chapter 5](#).

Now, with the paperwork and details in place, it's time to get on to the internship and start the real and exciting work you have been training to do.

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2

The Adventure Begins

■ Anxiety and Excitement

Now that we've taken care of most of the paperwork in the first chapter, it's time to get started at the placement site and get to know your supervisor, staff, colleagues, and clients.

If this happens to be your very first field experience, or even if you have worked in another location before, it is normal to feel a combination of anxiety and excitement. Anxiety comes because we're not sure what lies ahead and may not be certain we can meet all the challenges. At the same time, we are excited because this, after all, is what we have trained for, and we now have a chance to try out what we learned from coursework. The key to dealing with these emotions is, first, to recognize that you are not alone and, second, to understand that with experience, time, and support, you will get comfortable more quickly than you might imagine.

In a study of MSW students entering their foundation-year practicum, Gelman and Lloyd (2008) found that 72% of their respondents rated themselves moderately anxious or more as they looked toward their internship. Prior experience, age, and specific coursework all contributed to lower anxiety scores than those reported by younger, less experienced students with less prior coursework. When asked to identify specific concerns, respondents identified lack of skill or knowledge, logistical details such as commuting, safety issues, questions about the workload and expectations, and concerns about the kind of relationship and support to be provided by the supervisor. Students surveyed mentioned several concerns related to work with clients. These included clients reacting to the intern's inexperience; concerns about linguistic, ethnic, or socioeconomic differences; and questions about becoming over-involved with clients. Trainees in a study by Hill and colleagues (2007) identified similar concerns.

On a brighter note, the concerns expressed by Gelman and Lloyd's (2008) participants were counterbalanced by a sense of excitement, with the average positive score on a 10-point scale registering at 7.3. To help students explore the strengths they would bring to their practica, Gelman and Lloyd asked the trainees to list the knowledge and skills they believed they already possessed. The most commonly identified strengths in this group included prior experience, knowledge, and basic listening and empathy skills. Students also identified strategies for managing anxiety, including relaxation, positive thinking, social support, and personal therapy. Several students suggested that schools and practicum settings could do more to help students adjust at the beginning of their placements. We have designed this chapter to do just that, to help make your entry into the internship a positive and successful experience.

In this chapter, we address common questions and concerns that arise in the first few days and weeks of an internship. We also discuss the role of the intern, some of the opportunities you can expect, and the limitations inherent in internships. Typical areas of concern include working with other staff, meeting clients, fees for service, managing paperwork, and coping with other tasks that are part of professional life and that will probably be new to most interns. Finally, although there is a lot to learn on internship sites, there may also be lessons that are best left unlearned. Recognizing these can be just as important as discovering the positive things you want to retain from your experience.

■ First Impressions

One of the great things about aphorisms is that for every famous saying, there is an equal and opposite saying. Two mutually contradictory sayings relate particularly well to internships. The first is, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” The counterpoint advice is, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” As you begin your internship, keep in mind the importance of the first impressions you make on others. Remember also not to judge an internship setting or the people there solely based on your first impressions.

When you begin an internship, first impressions will go both ways. On the one hand, as you are introduced to the staff, clients, and internship facility, you will begin to form your impressions of them. At the same time, the staff and clients will begin to form their impressions of you. Because first impressions can leave lasting effects, you should think about what kind of first impression you want to give others.

Just as therapists must understand the needs of clients and adapt their interventions accordingly, interns should be sensitive to the institutional needs of their placement site. If that includes dressing, acting, or talking in a way different from the way one would outside the internship, so be it. We encourage you to consider yourself a guest at the internship site and to approach how you present yourself in ways that respect the internship customs and needs.

It would be ill-advised for us to tell interns exactly what they should wear or precisely how they should act on their first days on the job. Fortunately, expensive suits and the latest styles are not an expected part of the helping professional’s wardrobe. Nevertheless, we encourage you to consider the nature of your internship setting, the kinds of activities you will be involved in, and the institutional norms for attire and conduct. Most people have had the awkward experience of arriving at an event for which they were dressed either more formally or more informally than everyone else. One simple way to avoid this experience at internships is to ask your supervisor beforehand what the norms for clothing are and what will be happening on the first day.

As more internships are being conducted online – whether as a hybrid format, where some of your training occurs in-person, or even exclusively online, which became common during the COVID-19 pandemic – we want to stress the importance of being attentive to how you manage your virtual presence to ensure you are creating the most professional online presence you can with your available resources. Video conferencing offers many advantages but likewise introduces several challenges, such as managing the interference of background noises, considering the lighting and background of your video image, being attentive to your nonverbal communication like facial expressions, and dealing with the fatigue that can arise with so much online

activity. Lin and colleagues (2021) surveyed 440 therapists and interns and found that many participants reported poorer therapeutic skills when delivered online compared to in-person, including trouble speaking using a conversational tone and adequately expression emotion. Shklarski and colleagues (2021) likewise found that therapists who provided online services beginning with the pandemic struggled with Zoom fatigue, managing privacy and distractions, and navigating both physical and relational boundaries online. Receiving training in teletherapy is especially important, so if you will be providing some or all services online, it is prudent to request this specific modality instruction if it is not provided as part of your academic program or internship.

Whether the work is online or in person, some students, accustomed to dressing, talking, and acting how they want on campus, may insist on their right to *be themselves* at the internship. Dr. Baird has described his own rather humbling first day on a summer practicum at a community mental health center in a conservative rural Wyoming town:

During my graduate training at the University of Wyoming I arrived at my final practicum placement with my long hair and beard and dressed casually in blue jeans and a flannel shirt. As soon as I walked in the door and introduced myself, my assigned supervisor, the director of the clinic, called me into his office. He cut right to the chase, said he was not at all happy with how I presented myself on the first day of work and told me to go me home and return the next day looking more professional. I should note that before I left he offered, in a sincerely kind gesture, to lend me money to buy some different clothes in case I could not afford them on my very modest student stipend. That kindness was reassuring, but I was still a bit stunned by the rapid turn of events. With a degree of righteous indignation mixed with some embarrassment, but knowing I was required to complete and succeed at the placement, I went back to my rental, trimmed my beard and hair, traded my jeans for khakis, and put on the only sport jacket I owned. When I reluctantly returned the next day, the supervisor, also somewhat reluctantly, allowed me to continue the placement. Although this rough introduction took some time for both of us to work through, I ended up learning a great deal from my supervisor and somehow managed to demonstrate that even formerly long-haired, bearded guys can have something to offer. I also came to realize that lost in my defense of an intern's own individuality is the more important principle that in clinical work our focus needs to be on caring for clients in the most effective way possible. In that conservative town, a more professional appearance was necessary for the credibility of the clinic, and I needed to accommodate to that necessity.

While interns need to be thoughtful about the first impressions they make, they should not expect the same from the existing staff or patients. A recent example illustrates this point: One of our promising young interns returned from the first day at her internship site terribly distraught and convinced that the next three months were sure to be awful. When she went to visit her supervisor, at first he was too busy to meet with her. When they finally met later in the day, he asked a lot of questions about her approach to treatment, her experience, and what she was doing there. During the conversation, he corrected some of the things she said, swore a couple of times, and never asked her about who she was as a person. Almost in tears, she later said to

her instructor, “I’m sure there’s no way we’ll ever get along. It feels like he hates me already, and I just can’t work with someone like that.”

As it turned out, the instructor knew the supervisor well and was aware that his style was often perceived to be gruff. In fact, unknown to the student, the supervisor had survived several years as a prisoner of war before being rescued and returning home to earn his degree. The instructor also knew that at heart, the supervisor was extremely dedicated to his clients and the interns he trained. The gruffness was his natural style, partially because of his past, partially because he was overworked, and partially because it was his way of getting past the surface talk to see how interns performed in response to stress. The supervisor had worked with many interns and had come to believe that given the type of clients encountered and the nature of the work at that site, interns had to be able to cope with confrontation.

In response to a request from the intern, the instructor called the supervisor, who reported that contrary to the intern’s first impressions, he was quite impressed by her and thought she would work out just fine. The next day he apologized for any misunderstandings, complimented the intern on how she had responded, and then set to work providing her with the best training and supervision received by any student that semester. Not all supervisory relationships work out this well, but it demonstrates the importance of not making decisions solely on the basis of first impressions.

■ Enthusiasm Meets Experience

Interns should be aware that their own perspectives and experiences differ markedly from those of the staff and clients who are already at a placement site. Caught up as they are in their own feelings and in all there is to do and learn, interns often do not pause to think about this difference. For the intern, each placement is a new and potentially exciting experience, but each placement is also temporary. Throughout their time in the placement, interns will be on the steep upward slope of the learning curve, and every day can bring new discoveries and opportunities. By comparison, many of the staff at placement sites will have worked there for years and have varied perspectives. They already know the people, the system, and the clients. They likely have seen many interns come and go. As a result, although each intern’s experience is unique, having interns at the site may be a frequent occurrence for the staff members, and they may not share in the intern’s sense of novelty or enthusiasm. This does not mean the staff members are any less invested than the interns in the treatment of clients, just that their perspective is likely to differ from the interns.

EXERCISE

Take a moment to think about the role of an intern as viewed from several perspectives. For example, how might each of the following people view interns: supervisors, other professional staff, staff with less formal education, administrators, clients, and the interns themselves? As you consider these perspectives, ask what positive and negative ideas each group might hold about interns. Giving some thought to this beforehand will better prepare you for the different relationships and reactions you will encounter during your internship.

The Role of the Intern

The role of an intern occupies a gray area somewhere between student and professional. As an intern, you will still have many things to learn, but you may also be counted on to possess certain knowledge and skills. Friedman and Kaslow (1986) described how supervisees in the early stage of training are “frequently plagued by the self-doubts and ambivalent feelings which reflect both the inchoate nature of their professional identities and the minimal degree of skill they as yet have amassed with which to perform their work” (p. 36). Stoltenberg (2005) made similar observations regarding the developmental phases interns experience during their placements, while Deal and Clements (2006) reported that when supervisors received training in understanding such developmental issues, interns reported more positive experiences.

We offer two principles to help you deal with role ambiguity and with any precedents, good or bad, that other interns may have set: (1) be honest with yourself and with others and (2) do your best. Although these rules may sound simplistic, many interns have reported that heeding these basic principles helped guide them when things became confusing at their placements.

Being honest with yourself means you accept that your role is ambiguous, not only for yourself but for others as well. It also means that you are open about your relative strengths and limitations. If you have no experience doing something, let people know and be open to learning. If you have some experience or knowledge, feel free to share it. If situations arise in which you need clarification about your role or the expectations others have, avoid trying to read people’s minds. Ask for clarification and be willing to share your own thoughts and feelings about the matter. Your goal at an internship is not to impress everyone with how smart or skilled you are. If you want to impress someone, show how eager and open to learning you are, not how much you already know.

Precisely because interns are not expected to know everything, they can ask questions others might be afraid to raise. Similarly, interns who are new to settings may offer novel perspectives that people working in that setting for years have never noticed. By acknowledging what you do not yet know, you not only enhance your potential to learn, you also gain a unique kind of permission and influence not always accorded to professionals. We encourage you to cultivate this opportunity while it’s available.

The Role of the Professional

Because interns are exploring and beginning to establish their professional identity, it is important to consider how the role of the professional differs from that of the student (Elman et al., 2005). Grus and colleagues (2018) offered a useful perspective on professionalism, emphasizing qualities such as accountability, acting ethically, engaging in self-reflective practice, striving for excellence, espousing humanism, communicating with civility, practicing collaboration, aspiring for cultural humility, understanding the social contract we have with society, and embracing a sense of social responsibility.

A crucial difference between the role of student as contrasted with that of a professional has to do with how one understands the goal of what you are doing and learning. Students tend to have an implicit assumption from their academic experiences that learning about a subject has a start and an end point that concludes with each semester. For students, the goal is often to get the best possible grade or, sometimes, simply to do the minimum needed to pass a course. We encourage you to instead embrace tenets more consistent with the highest ideals of our profession – namely, that learning is ongoing, lifelong, and with an emphasis not on minimal effort but rather on mastering what you need to know and do to help your clients (Johnson et al., 2014).

To appreciate this distinction, ask yourself what you expect from other treatment professionals when you put your life in their hands in some way. Do you expect anything less than their full commitment to adhere to the highest standards of ethics and quality care? Do you expect them to pay full attention to your concerns and do whatever it takes to study and learn about your condition and treatment? We expect that, like us, you do, which is why it is important you set the same high standards for yourself.

One way to ensure your continuing personal and professional development is to develop the habit and activities associated with purposeful self-reflection. Knapp et al. (2017a) emphasized that “Competence is not a static state that is achieved at the point of licensure and requires no further attention: rather, continued competence requires ongoing self-reflection” (p. 167).

These authors and others distinguish between beneficial self-reflection – a deliberate, multimodal approach to professional development – versus either excessively self-congratulatory self-assessment or unproductive, excessively self-critical rumination. For effective and beneficial self-reflection to enhance professional development, Knapp and colleagues (2017a) recommended a multifaceted approach that includes the following elements: building a professional network of peers dedicated to increasing competence, participating in personal psychotherapy to enhance self-awareness, being part of and attending professional development activities, seeking and being open to feedback from clients, and receiving feedback via supervision and consultation. The authors (Knapp et al., 2017b) also offered excellent questions to help therapists enhance their self-awareness.

Other suggested activities include practicing expressive writing, learning mindfulness skills, and participation in Balint Groups, initially developed by a psychoanalyst who worked together with groups of colleagues to explore and understand their own reactions to patients and the work of therapy. Knapp and colleagues (2017a) emphasized that there is no *one size fits all* approach, and there are many other ways of practicing self-reflection for professional development, but what matters most is having a commitment to your development and practicing a systematic comprehensive way to enhance your growth through specific, sustained, and intentional actions. Cooper and Trubanova Wieckowski (2017) provided empirical support for an intervention that included didactic instruction, assigned readings, modeling by a supervisor, and completing worksheets designed to help enhance students’ capacity for reflective practice. Sicora (2019) offered a useful reflective writing exercise to help social work students learn from their clinical mistakes. In this exercise, students reflect on the nature of their mistakes, their own feelings that emerge in practice, and how these impact their clinical relationships. Students then develop an action plan for addressing these issues.

■ Making the Most of Your Internship

From the Classroom to Practice

One thing all interns discover is that internships require a different set of skills and knowledge than those required by academic classes. In an internship, the focus is not on what you *know*, but what you *do*. The usefulness of the information you acquired in your academic work now depends on what you do with what you know and how you relate your knowledge to the oftentimes-novel situations you encounter.

The other difference between internships and classroom study is that it is rarely clear beforehand just what you will have to know. One of the truest statements we know about life applies well to internships: “Life gives the test first, then the lesson.” At an internship, at any given moment, you may be called on to use any knowledge or skills you have and possibly some you do not have. Therefore, in addition to preparing you with the skills of understanding people and interactions in general, your education must also teach you to be flexible, think on your feet, expect the unexpected, and understand that the measure of success is much different from what you may be accustomed to.

Take Responsibility for Learning

In all aspects of learning, students need to take personal ownership for what and how they learn. Merely accepting passively what an instructor tells you to read or do is not a recipe for success as a student, and it is certainly not a recipe for success as a professional. Taking responsibility for your learning is particularly important in the context of internships because the nature of the learning setting and opportunity varies considerably from a typical classroom. Internships do not usually provide structured syllabi, reading assignments, exams, or any of the other methods used in more didactic settings. At the same time, it is possible that your supervisor will be busy and not able to give the time you might need or want unless you assert yourself in some way.

An especially useful resource for all students is *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College, Career, and Life* (9th edition) by Downing and Brennan (2019). Downing and Brennan’s book and its accompanying website (www.oncourseworkshop.com) helps students take control of their own learning by first assessing how they learn and then offering a host of tips and exercises to develop key principles of success, including accepting self-responsibility, discovering self-motivation, and mastering self-management. Students report that they find the text and the exercises tremendously helpful, and institutions that have adopted the program report substantial gains in student performance.

Whether you use this program or another strategy, the key point is to take ownership over your learning and be proactive in your education and training. Ultimately, your education is your responsibility, and it is in your own best interests to be as assertive and focused as you can be.

Remember That You Do Know Some Things

Along with the opportunity to develop and try out your skills, the internship should also give you a chance to bring together information you’ve been mastering during

your academic program. Courses in human development, multicultural and gender issues, community systems, theories of personality, assessment, abnormal psychology, and other subjects are all relevant to your internship.

For example, if you have had a course in human development, consider what you learned as you work with people across the lifespan. If you have taken a class on the theories of personality, ask yourself how different theorists might view the people in your clinical setting. If you are working in a community agency, think about ways in which knowledge from a community systems course helps you understand the agency and its clients. Such opportunities will strengthen your understanding and give you the chance to compare theory with reality. Again, the emphasis is not just on what you know; it is on how you can apply that knowledge in the context of your internship.

EXERCISE

To boost both your confidence and your humility, take a few moments to list the courses or learning experiences you have had that you think will help you on your internship site. For each course, try to identify specific concepts, theories, findings, or applications you can put into practice to understand the setting and the people you will work with as clients. For example, a course in human development might help you understand the challenges adolescent clients are facing. Similarly, a course in systems theory might give you insights into the family dynamics of your clients. When you have listed what you know that will help you, give some thought to identifying the areas in which you do not know something and wish you had further training. This list can highlight areas about which you should be cautious and may help you plan your studies to fill in any noticeable deficits.

Get Help When You Need It

Our final suggestion for making the most of an internship will be one we return to often in this text: If you have any problems or questions, be sure to get assistance. It is essential that you recognize when situations or assignments are beyond your abilities and you need help to deal with them. You may need help with anything from questions about ethics to how to write case notes. You may be working with a particularly challenging client, or perhaps you are not getting along well with a staff member or supervisor. Whatever the difficulty, when problems develop, get help, and do so early.

To help you get the support you need quickly in the event of an emergency, we urge you to complete the Emergency Contact and Procedures Information form provided in Appendix F (see eResources). The form lists the names, phone numbers, and other information needed to contact site supervisors, faculty instructors, or other individuals as backup if the immediate supervisors or instructors are not available. The form also lists step-by-step procedures and specific people to contact for dealing with crises and situations involving possible hospital commitment.

Completing this crisis contact form may not seem necessary now, but if a crisis occurs in the middle of the night on a weekend, and you cannot locate your primary supervisor or instructor for help, you will be very glad to have the numbers of other contacts readily available. Needing such support when we were interns, and having provided it to students in our roles as supervisors and instructors, we cannot

overemphasize this point. Complete the form when you start your internship, keep a copy at your site and at home, and use it whenever you need help. Any supervisors or faculty members worth their salt would much rather be called unnecessarily than find out later that they were not consulted about a serious problem.

Meeting Clients

When they first begin placements, interns are often concerned about how they will be received by clients.

EXERCISE

Before reading further, write down some of your hopes and concerns about meeting clients. Talk about these with your peers and, if possible, with students who have recently completed internship experiences. Also schedule some time to discuss your concerns with your supervisor and instructor. They will undoubtedly be familiar with these problems, but it can be useful for you to express any concerns openly.

In most cases, interns' anxieties about meeting clients are often quite different from the realities. In contrast to the common fears of interns, most clients readily accept interns and relate to them as they do to other staff members. Clients generally understand the need to train future professionals, and some are even solicitous, wanting to help ensure that the interns have a good experience. Other clients may be overly accepting of interns, and some may be extremely trusting of the intern's skills. Friedman and Kaslow (1986) contrasted the supervisee's anxieties with the client's trust by noting that client reactions "attest to the fact that at least one member of the trainee-patient dyad believes that the former is actually a therapist" (p. 34).

This does not mean that all clients will welcome all interns. There will be clients who reject working with interns and want to work with a "real" therapist. Clients who resist working with the intern can be intimidating and remarkably capable of making interns feel unwelcome or incompetent.

As you prepare for your first interactions with clients, remember that whether clients are extremely trusting or instantly hostile or reactive, your task is to understand these reactions within their clinical context. This means you should neither be overly flattered by clients who are immediately trusting, nor should you personalize responses from clients who are initially distant or hostile. Instead, your primary task is to understand the client's reaction from their perspective and be aware that each interaction is part of the overall clinical process. It also helps to beware of first impressions, both positive and negative, because first impressions can often be misleading.

Along with concerns about how clients will respond to them, interns also ask questions about how they should introduce themselves to clients. As we recommended earlier, the best practice is to be honest. When asked, interns should say they are interns, what their field of study is, and, if it is relevant, explain a bit about why they are at the internship. For example, "Hi, I'm Denzel Moreno. I'm an intern in counseling, and I'll be training here for the next three months." That is usually sufficient. If more information is requested, such as what experience you have, be honest

about that as well. If you have experience working with a certain treatment approach or setting, it is fine to say so. If you have no such experience, you might say, “I haven’t had any experience working in a setting of this kind. That’s why I’m here. I’ll be working closely with my supervisor and hope to learn some things.”

Zakutansky and Sirles (1993) asserted that whenever interns work directly with clients, the intern’s field supervisor should make it a point to meet directly with those clients at the start of treatment. In addition to ensuring that clients are aware that the intern is being supervised, meeting with the supervisor allows clients to know that there is someone they can speak with if they have concerns about their treatment. We discuss these issues more in [Chapter 4](#) in the context of the ethical obligation to provide informed consent. Before working directly with clients, be sure to read that chapter carefully and be well versed in your ethical obligations.

■ Age and Experience Issues with Clients and Supervisors

The age and experience of interns are issues that sometimes arise when interns meet with clients or supervisors. These issues are particularly likely with undergraduate or young graduate students, many of whom will be in their early 20s or perhaps even younger. For school counselors, especially those working in high school settings, this can prove especially difficult as some of the adolescents who will be receiving services may be just a few years younger than the intern. On the other hand, it can also happen, especially with older students, that the intern will be older than not only clients but also the field supervisor and perhaps the instructor (Fox, 2004; Hopkins et al., 2005).

Considering first the situation of interns who are younger than their clients or near their clients in age, two types of problem are most likely to arise. If you are young and working with clients near your age, clients may expect you to relate to them as a friend rather than as an intern. They may also test your limits, role, and authority, and they may ask you to let them do things that other staff would not. If this happens, you will need to set clear boundaries and clarify with the clients that you are, indeed, part of the staff and have the same responsibilities and authority as the staff.

A different sort of problem can arise if you are working with older clients, who may ask, “So how can somebody your age have anything to tell me?” We suggest you first try to understand what the question might mean to the client. Does it mean, for example, that the client is sincerely interested in the treatment program and wants to know whether they can rely on the intern for help? Or does it mean that the client is interested in taking power because that is how the client relates to most people? What else might a question of this type mean to clients?

Technology issues may also pose challenges for people of different age cohorts. For example, if you’ve grown up with consistent, early access to technology and have some mastery over it – you might be impatient with your clients, supervisors, and faculty instructors who learned how to navigate technology much later in their lives and may not be as comfortable or proficient (Wu & Sonne, 2021). To cope with these differences in technological prowess or comfort, we suggest exercising intentional patience, humility, and compassion when you encounter someone whose skills, exposure to, and awareness of technology may be notably different than yours.

How we understand the meaning of the client’s question can help form our response. As a general guideline, interns should avoid responding defensively about age, experience, or any other issues on which clients might challenge them. Instead,

the intern might acknowledge the importance of the question. Then, without being defensive, the intern may explore any specific concerns or issues with the client. Doing so displays genuine concern for the client's needs and shows that the intern is honest. We offer the following example to show one way this might occur in practice.

A male client has been court ordered to seek counseling because he has been abusing his wife and children. The following dialogue takes place when the client meets a new intern who will be working with his primary therapist. The intern will also be observing interactions between the client and his family members:

CLIENT (*rather gruffly*) So, you're an intern from the college, huh? How old are you?

INTERN I'm 21. And you?

CLIENT 42. Old enough to be your father. (*Pauses for a moment looking over the intern. Then, with some hostility, asks*), What the hell are you supposed to tell me that I don't already know?

INTERN (*calmly, but assertively and without being confrontational*) I'm not here to tell you anything. I'm here to observe and learn.

CLIENT Well, I don't need any know-it-all kid telling me how to raise my family. I've got enough of those already.

INTERN (*still calmly*) I don't think it's my job to tell you how to raise your family. But I might be able to listen to how things are going and maybe help you get things back together.

CLIENT Yeah. We'll see.

In this example, the client appears to want to diminish the intern's credibility, unnerve her, and/or provoke a conflict. This reaction may be based on legitimate concerns about the intern's qualifications, or it may be an attempt to shift the focus from the client's reason for being in treatment to why the intern is there. The intern's response is thoroughly professional. She neither attempts to elicit the client's approval nor does she become defensive, counterattack, or apologize. Instead, she remains present with the client and with the interaction. She acknowledges the presence and legitimacy of the client's concerns and offers to do what she can to be of help.

An interaction like this would probably not be very pleasant for the intern or the client, but not all clinical work is pleasant. It may also happen that, despite the intern's best efforts, a client will continue to be hostile and challenging. This can make the situation even more unpleasant, but it provides important clinical information that can help the intern understand the client. The intern should keep in mind that it is perfectly legitimate for clients to have questions about the intern's age and experience. At the same time, however, the real issue of importance is the one the client brings, not something personal about the intern. By remaining professional and hearing what the client is saying without becoming defensive, the intern can help keep the focus where it needs to be.

In contrast to scenarios that arise when interns are much younger than clients, a host of different, though not entirely unrelated, issues arise when an intern is older than supervisors or instructors, a situation increasingly common as more adults return to school or pursue new careers later in life. Two rather paradoxical challenges can be present in these situations.

Many older students describe feeling some anxiety as they interact with much younger peers and feel self-conscious or worry that they cannot keep up with the seemingly hypersonic speed of the younger students. On the other hand, older students may also become frustrated with younger classmates they perceive as naïve or overly confident. It can also be difficult for interns who are older than their instructors or clinical supervisors to really trust and respect the guidance of someone who is younger and, presumably, has less life experience.

We offer a couple of practical suggestions in these circumstances. First, in internship settings, one is not in competition with other students, or for that matter with supervisors, regardless of age differences. Rather, the task at hand is to develop your skills to the greatest extent possible. To achieve that goal, openness to and valuing learning will be a much more beneficial perspective than competition or anxiety. An attitude of openness can also help make it easier for older students to take instruction or guidance from younger faculty or supervisors. The mere fact that one person has logged more time on the planet than another does not mean they know more than the other person does about all subjects. Before concluding that younger faculty or supervisors do not have all that much to offer, older students may wish to give some thought to how much time and experience their instructors and supervisors have had, not simply on the planet, but in mastering their craft. For their part, instructors can also benefit by recognizing that older or nontraditional students bring valuable experiences and knowledge that can be assets to the class and from which the instructor can help build new learning opportunities.

Diversity Issues with Clients and Supervisors

Another set of issues interns often need to address has to do with diversity, especially relating to race and ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and other identity variables that are often the target of prejudice and discrimination. In our work with students and trainees from marginalized groups, one of the more common experiences can be a perception of people reacting with either a spoken or unspoken sense of “What are you doing here?” or “*You’re* my therapist?” This reaction may be legitimate surprise or it may constitute a microaggression that reflects a distinct sense of unwelcomeness can come from staff, clients, or others. Whether conscious or unconscious, for the intern on the receiving end, the effect is often one of initial surprise combined with an implicit question of abilities to relate or even core competencies and qualifications. These and related reactions can undermine the intern’s sense of belonging at their internship site. They may also raise questions of competence in the minds of colleagues or clients, and, in turn, cause or contribute to self-doubts on the part of interns. As one of our interns put it, “I sense all that and it makes it harder for me to just be myself and focus on the work.”

Pedrotti and Burnes (2016) discussed some of these and other challenges facing early-career psychologists who come from diverse backgrounds. In academic settings, there can be an assumption that people of color or sexual minorities will be expected to be experts in diversity and spokespeople for the groups with which they identify. Simultaneously, this expectation can carry with it a prejudice that if a person does study these issues, they are somehow being selfish or pursuing the topic exclusively out of self-interest or bias. On the other hand, if a person of color or sexual minority does not focus on diversity issues in their scholarship or clinical practice, that can,

paradoxically, be interpreted with a different sort of prejudice as in “Why don’t you study this; aren’t your own issues important?” This competing series of challenges to one’s credibility creates quite an untenable situation for people from marginalized groups. To add to this unfair situation, professionals from marginalized groups are often expected to engage in additional service, emotional labor, and clinical responsibilities related to multiculturalism.

In practice settings, interns and clinicians may have to deal with clients who hold antagonistic views toward the race, gender, sexual orientation, or other qualities of the therapist, which complicates the therapeutic relationship and process. These issues, as Pedrotti and Burnes (2016) noted, are often not addressed effectively by supervisors, at least some if not many of whom may themselves be insensitive to or unaware of the unique challenges their trainees or colleagues face. This can be particularly difficult if an intern or therapist’s marginalized identities are not visible, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity, faith identity, and some disabilities.

To help interns, supervisors, academic institutions, and placements manage these issues, we offer several recommendations from our own experience and the clinical and scholarly literature. First, note that we dedicate a later chapter of this book to diversity ([Chapter 6](#)) and another chapter to supervision ([Chapter 5](#)). We encourage students and supervisors to read those chapters as they may help inform how interns and supervisors understand and work with these topics. Second, within our academic institutions and across internship placement sites, there need to be organizational/cultural commitments to recognizing how diversity matters are addressed and, where necessary, making changes to handle these issues and support trainees, staff, and clients alike more effectively and constructively. For a useful discussion about addressing racism with clients, see Drustrup (2019).

Third, as Pedrotti and Burnes (2016) noted, and as Mangione et al. (2018) emphasized, mentors can be especially beneficial to students of diverse identities. The most important takeaway from this is that if you find that these issues are relevant to and impacting you personally and your training, you are not alone, and there are ways of addressing them constructively and effectively. Moreover, if you identify with one or more marginalized identities, you bring much-needed diversity to our profession and can serve an invaluable role with the people you help.

Time Limits

Along with the issues we have addressed so far, a factor common to all internship is the inherent time limitations that characterize all internships. Interns know from the first day that their placement is time limited and termination with clients typically occurs within just a few months. Under such circumstances, is it therapeutic, or even fair, to encourage interns and clients to build strong relationships that must end in a relatively short time?

This question has no easy answer, but we must address it. First, interns must be clear about the time limits of their placements when dealing with staff, clients, and, most importantly, with themselves. This means that when you begin your training with individual clients, in groups, or on projects, you should inform those involved of the time constraints. This is part of the informed-consent process.

Interns must also remember their own time constraints; avoid creating unrealistic fantasies about what you can accomplish or should attempt within the time

available. It is misleading, for example, to tell clients that you will always be there for them if in another two months you will be gone. Similarly, taking on a project that will require a year to complete is unwise if the internship lasts only six months. It may be difficult to limit a relationship with a client or decline involvement in an interesting project, but it is better to be realistic than to create false hopes that will invariably lead to disappointment.

When interns hear this advice, they sometimes wonder if they should avoid working with any clients or volunteer to help with any projects at all. That would be going too far. Rather than avoiding all involvement or contact, the wise response is to be selective and intentional about your involvement. This is the second element of working within limited time. Not all cases or projects require extended periods. Many clients can be helped within a few weeks or months, and many projects can likewise be completed quickly. One of your responsibilities is to select cases and activities wisely. Supervisors should play a role in these choices and be aware of time constraints when they assign interns to clients or duties. An intern assigned a case or project for which time limitations will pose a problem should discuss this with the supervisor.

A third element to working within time constraints is to consider the approaches used. You don't need to limit involvement to short-term cases or activities if the treatment selected takes the time factor into account and includes provisions for continuing the treatment or other work after you leave. An intern can also deal with time constraints by working with clients in the presence of another professional who will continue the case after the intern leaves. Arrangements of this type often involve interns seeing clients jointly with their supervisor. The supervisor can then maintain the case after the internship concludes. A comparable situation also holds when the intern is involved in treatment groups. Because the group provides the continuity for clients, there is a less dramatic change when an intern leaves.

However limits are addressed, interns need to consider termination issues even before they accept a case. By thinking about termination as part of selecting cases and choosing intervention techniques, interns can prevent many potential difficulties of termination from the outset. We discuss more about concluding treatment in [Chapter 10](#).

■ Fees for Service

Most interns who are just starting out do not have to deal with setting and charging fees for their individual services, but the agencies where they work will very likely have at least some fees and those must be addressed with clients. Whether this is part of your internship, the idea of charging for helping people is an awkward issue for many interns as it often carries with it important clinical, ethical, and social class issues. Regrettably, research suggests fee-related issues are often given little if any direct attention in many training programs (Thompson et al., 2017).

As a model example of how fee-related clinical and social issues can be incorporated into training, Thompson et al. (2017) described a psychology training clinic that reaches out to low-income clients and offers a sliding fee schedule. In their practice, fee considerations are purposefully incorporated into the clinic's mission statement, client paperwork, and the marketing information about the clinic. All staff and trainees are given orientation into the principles and applications of their fee schedule and the accompanying social/clinical issues related to fees. This training includes

role-play exercises so trainees can practice and become comfortable with how to raise and discuss the levels and purpose of fees. An additional exercise engages trainees in self-reflection and discussion of issues regarding money, social class, and access to health care. Throughout the training process, and once a trainee is providing services to clients, a developmental approach to supervision is practiced with continued support and guidance on these issues provided throughout the trainee's experience in the clinic.

■ Clinical and Ethical Issues Pertaining to Fees

One of the reasons it is so important to address fee issues thoughtfully is because in psychotherapy, how clients and therapists deal with fees is not just a social issue or business arrangement; it is also part of the material and process of therapy. Some research evidence suggests that charging fees may enhance the effectiveness of therapy (Conoley & Bonner, 1991; Wong, 1994). A matter of pride is involved for many clients who sincerely need help but do not want to accept what they perceive as charity. For these clients, it is important to respect both their need and their pride and allow them to pay for services to the best of their ability. It may also be the case that clients with different clinical diagnoses may react in unique ways to fees, and this reaction can become part of the therapeutically useful material therapists address in treatment (Rabkin, 1994). Although it may seem less likely to occur, Cummings (2019) offered a case example of a client who wished to pay more than the therapist's rate for services.

Along with clinical considerations, interns need to be aware of issues concerning fee setting, third-party payers, discussing fees with clients, fee disputes (Koocher & Soibatian, 2017), and ethical concerns that can arise regarding fees. As an intern, you are unlikely to deal with the matter directly, but you should realize that having fees collected when clients fail to pay could raise delicate and ambiguous ethical issues (Goodman, 1994). Consider that, for example, in some agencies, unpaid client bills are given to a collection agency, which raises questions about compromises to confidentiality.

Again, all these issues will be more relevant to you when you have completed your training, but even in your role as intern, you need to know your agency's policy concerning fees and how to address this matter with clients.

For more information about managing fees, particularly in a private practice setting, we recommend the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) guide, *Clinical Social Workers in Private Practice: A Reference Manual* (2022), which has a chapter on reimbursement and covers topics such as income distribution, setting fees using a sliding scale, the practice of bartering, offering pro bono services, accepting private payments, providing a superbill, working with insurance companies and in- and out-of-network providers, third-party payers, and billing practices.

Adding to the challenging social, clinical, and legal issues that go with fees, charging for services also raises significant personal questions for interns. For many, there is an implicit conflict between charging money for services and the altruistic