

SWK 497: Senior Social Work Practicum: 10 Tips for Success

It's normal to be nervous and unsure of yourself. It simply means that you're aware that you don't know everything and are here to learn. This is the time to push yourself and take chances! Here are a few tips that can help you get the most out of your practicum experience!

1. **Ask questions.** Most of us really do learn best when we ask specific questions. Your supervisor doesn't know what you don't know. Let him/her know what is confusing or unclear.
2. **Stretch yourself.** Don't play it safe. Your internship is your opportunity to explore your career path, try new things, and observe different ways to doing things. Don't short change yourself by sticking to what you already know.
3. **Know your worth.** Don't go around thinking (or even worse, saying) "I'm just an intern." If you devalue yourself, so will everyone else. It's hard to build confidence and credibility and with your coworkers and clients when you're presenting yourself as lacking.
4. **Be willing to do some grunt work.** Being an intern doesn't mean you should be doing only grunt work, but it does mean you will be doing some. Good supervisors wouldn't ask an intern to do something that other social workers don't do in the organization.
5. **Advocate for yourself.** If something isn't right (you're not getting adequate supervision, being assigned to much or too little work, being mistreated), ask for a change. Again, you can't assume that your supervisor knows there is a problem. If asking politely at your intern site doesn't work, ask your university instructor for assistance.
6. **You will make mistakes.** If you are doing new things, mistakes come with the territory. Don't even try to be perfect. Most mistakes are fixable and usually you are the only one obsessing over them. Your supervisor should understand that mistakes are a natural part of the process and have realistic expectations.
7. **Ask for help and admit when you don't know something.** Again, your internship supervisor isn't expecting a pro. S/he is there to support you. S/he may not give you the answers, but will help you find them.
8. **Treat your internship like a real job.** An internship is an opportunity to start making connections in your field. Make a good impression. Be on time, keep a consistent schedule, and don't play on your phone during meetings. Your internship supervisor is probably someone you'll want to use as a reference.
9. **Set professional boundaries.** Social Workers learn a lot of setting boundaries with clients. But don't forget about boundaries with peers and supervisors. It's natural to make friends at your internship, but don't share too much too soon. Remember your focus is on building professional relationships.
10. **Don't compare yourself to other students or your internship to other field sites.** Comparison always leads to discontent. Focus on your learning and making the most of your internship experience. Don't waste time thinking about who has a "better" or "worse" internship.

