

Preparation for Practical Placement

Regardless of what degree you are studying, going on prac placement is an important part of a transition from study to work. Preparing adequately for this rewarding and challenging time is key.

Here are some strategies to assist you in managing some of the more common challenges of going on prac.

Managing stress using the “stress bucket” approach

Think of your capacity like a bucket. The stressors (being on prac, study pressures, work pressures, deadlines, relationship stress) are like rain from the sky that fill up your stress bucket. Unless there are some leaks in the bucket, it will overflow. So, what are these leaks? Things like time management strategies, rest and relaxation, talking to trusted people and doing things you enjoy. Remember, everyone’s stress bucket is different, so think about what works for you and try not to compare to others.

Planning and time management

Remember: One week = 7 days = 168 hours. How will you spend yours?

Choose your priorities carefully. To this end you can make a table where you categorise all your weekly TO DO activities under the following headings: MUST DO, SHOULD DO and COULD DO and then plan by adding these into your weekly schedule.

The MUST DO items are of course first priority, while the SHOULD DOs come second. This means you get to the COULD Dos only if there is remaining time. Make sure you include fun activities and relaxation in the MUST DO category to ensure your stress bucket does not overflow! You can [download a weekly schedule](#) from the ECU Counselling website.

Beware of perfectionism and burnout

Setting unrealistically high standards for yourself, judging your self-worth based on reaching these standards and doing it despite negative consequences is what we call perfectionism. Perfectionism is taking high standards too far and can lead to burnout, avoidance and procrastination. Instead of setting increasingly high standards, try to approach your prac with a growth mindset, which means focusing on learning (not on proving how good you are). Having a growth mindset is generally associated with lower anxiety and stress. It also promotes better relationships with supervisors and other staff.

Assertive communication skills

There are four basic styles of communication that exist on a continuum, with assertive in the middle of passive and aggressive.

Aggressive

Bossy, coercive, intolerant, intimidating or threatening.
Language: I win / you lose.

Assertive

Direct, honest, accepting, responsible. Shows respect for self and others.
Language: I win / you win.

Passive

Indecisive, helpless, passive, apologetic.
Language: I lose / you win.

Passive-aggressive

Sarcastic, deceiving, ambiguous, manipulative or guilt-inducing (this style is best avoided as it is very damaging for relationships).
Language: I lose / you lose.

As a prac student, you will be the least experienced person in the workplace. In that position, it can be challenging to express yourself or to think that your opinion matters. Practicing assertive communication can therefore be helpful.

Assertiveness tips:

- Take responsibility for ourselves without judging or blaming other people.
- Be open, honest and direct in a respectful way.
- Find a “win-win” solution where there is conflict.
- Use positive language to find solutions rather than emphasising problems.
- Be mindful of non-verbal aspects: Use appropriate eye contact, posture, tone of voice, timing, etc.
- Practice with and seek feedback on your communication style from friends or family members.

How to receive and grow from critical feedback

Feedback is crucial for learning and improvement. Here is a simple process to help you deal with critical feedback without becoming defensive:

Four step process to receiving critical feedback

1. Thank the other person for the feedback
2. Paraphrase what they said
3. Ask for clarification
4. Offer a solution and seek agreement

Here is an example of how Kelly responded to critical feedback from her supervisor:

Supervisor: "Kelly, I have heard from other staff that there are some issues with your notes in the patients' files."

Kelly: "Thank you for letting me know (*thank the other person*). I understand that my patient notes are not up to scratch (*paraphrasing*). Could you please let me know how I can improve them?" (*asking for clarification, using positive language*)

Supervisor: "Your handwriting is very difficult to read, and you have written very long notes, which makes it hard for other staff to quickly update themselves on the patient's progress."

Kelly: "I see. So, what I need to do is to write more clearly, and also include less detail, so that it is easier and quicker for the other staff to read." (*offer a solution*) "Would that be helpful?" (*seek agreement*).

Know the requirements

Finally, make sure you are aware of all the requirements, time, place and any preparation that is necessary before you start your prac. Contact your unit or placement coordinator if you have questions. It may also be good for you to visit your placement ahead of time to make sure you are on top of practical issues such as dress code, public transport or parking.

We hope you have a rewarding prac placement!

Scan to access
additional tip
sheets



Want to chat to someone?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact our ECU Psychologist, or the Psychological Counselling Support Team service to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.