

Developing an Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Manual

Student interns must acclimate to a new environment, people, tasks, routines, schedules, and expectations at the start of a fieldwork experience. It is most helpful to present interns with a fieldwork manual on the very first day to guide them through the initial unfamiliarity and discomfort often associated with the beginning of fieldwork. Many common questions can be easily addressed through a printed manual, thereby alleviating initial disorientation an intern may experience during the first week. Simply knowing what to expect around the corner, or at the start of the next week can eliminate much anxiety and apprehension, thereby enabling a more pleasant occasion for both intern and fieldwork educator.

Developing a manual can also help you to better understand all that the intern must learn during the fieldwork experience. It can help you to become more sensitive to the needs, questions, and concerns that interns often have. It can also help you to establish or adjust expectations to be reasonable, yet challenging.

Material for the manual can be gathered from many sources within your facility (e.g., employee handbooks, Human Resources Department, etc.). You don't necessarily have to "reinvent the wheel". Many of the items that could be included already exist within your organization.

Feel free to call your Academic Fieldwork Coordinator to get the names of nearby facilities that are similar to your site. Call those facilities and see if they are willing to share their fieldwork manual with you. Don't feel that you need to have separate manuals for OT and OTA interns as well as fieldwork educators (supervisors). The manuals can be the same. In fact, the advantage of having one combined manual is that all parties can understand the similarities and distinctions of roles.

The following content is recommended:

1. ORIENTATION OUTLINE

A schedule and description of what the student will be seeing and doing during the first day or several days of orientation. The first day is always the most overwhelming. Knowing, at first, what is expected hour-by-hour is always appreciated by students.

2. WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Describe what is expected of the intern each week including roles and responsibilities, and assignment due dates.

Specify whether student should be observing, assisting, participating, initiating, etc.

Objectives should describe the actions, duties, and skills the intern should display by the completion of fieldwork.

Just like patient/consumer treatment goals and objectives, they should be behavioral, measurable, and realistic.

Indicate a timeline (week-by-week schedule) by which objectives should be met.

Employee job descriptions may be helpful resources when determining objectives

