

# CO-OP TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (CAFCE),  
Learning Objectives, Maximizing the Learning on a Work term<sup>1</sup>

## *Learning Objectives - Maximizing the Learning on a Work term*

Original Prepared by: Audrey McFarlane, University of Victoria; Adapted by NVIT.

If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? If students learn on a work term, but they don't know what they have learned, has learning occurred?

To ensure the learning that occurs on a student's work term is recognized by all the stakeholders, NVIT has incorporated student learning objectives in our Employer/Student Evaluation forms. This process provides a number of benefits:

- Employers who have worked with students who use learning objectives appreciate the organization and direction that it provides for the co-op student. It shows that students are serious about learning during the work term.
- Learning objectives can give direction to what students learn during their work term. They can help students get more out of their coop experience and allow students to focus on their career goals.
- Learning objectives provide students with a listing (a portfolio) of documented learning outcomes resulting from their work term experience. This also helps give their Co-op experience more academic integrity by providing documentation of learning outcomes.

### **What are learning objectives?**

A learning objective is a written statement describing measurable achievements students hope to accomplish during their work term experience. For example:

"By July 4th, I will devise, print and post a safety check sheet, following Federal Government guidelines, which will make safety information readily available to all staff members. I will have this safety check sheet evaluated by my supervisor for accuracy prior to posting."

### **Why use learning objectives?**

The student's goal for each work term should be to maximize the opportunity and then be able to document what they have learned as a result of their participation in the Co-op program. To assist students in accomplishing this goal, it is recommended that students develop specific and measurable learning objectives for each of their Co-op work terms. By preparing learning objectives students are declaring their intentions to document their learning outcomes for the work term and to accomplish these objectives in a satisfactory manner.

**Some work term assignments may lend themselves to easily written objectives, but learning objectives can be written for every work term. The major idea behind setting objectives is not to control every moment of the Co-op experience, but to set a direction or agenda for the work term.**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.cewilcanada.ca/coop-manual.html> accessed April 1, 2019  
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## How do you implement learning objectives?

The easiest way to incorporate learning objectives into the co-op work term is to incorporate them into the employer/student evaluation form. The Employer/Student Evaluation Form should have 3 sections:

**Section 1:** With the supervisor, during the first week of the work term, the student develops the learning objectives for the work term, following the model described later in this report.

The learning objectives which students develop should:

- relate directly to their job assignment, and
- represent the job functions and duties students will be performing during their co-op work term.

**Section 2:** With the supervisor, midway through the work term, the student evaluates the learning objectives, documenting any factors that may affect the achievement of the objectives. If needed, the objectives may be revised or updated. Coordinators normally review the objectives during the work site visit.

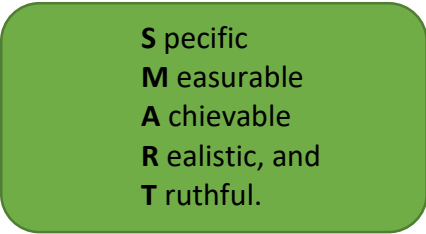
**Section 3:** With the supervisor, during the last week of the work term, the student evaluates the learning objectives against the set measurable goals. Again, any factors that affected the achievement of the objectives is documented.

These evaluations are returned to the Co-op office for review by the co-op coordinator.

The learning objectives that students develop for each Co-op work term should be **realistic** and **achievable** within the time frame of their work term assignment. Also, the objectives should be as specific as possible, so that they can be measured at the end of the work term experience. There is no magic number of learning objectives that should be developed for each work term, but a good guideline would be for students to develop from 5 to 8 objectives for each work term.

## How do you write learning objectives?

Writing SMART learning objectives is relatively easy. Smart objectives are:



**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**chievable  
**R**ealistic, and  
**T**ruthful.

For each learning objective students have, make sure it answers the following four questions:

- What is the task to be accomplished?
- How will it be accomplished?
- How will it be measured/evaluated and by whom?
- When will it be completed?

**Learning Objective - Bad Form:** "I will learn to use a word processor."

**Learning Objective - Good Form:** "By August 15th, I will be able to execute Microsoft Word on a Macintosh computer incorporating advanced editing capabilities. I will attend a 2-day seminar on Microsoft Word and complete my work term report using the program for evaluation by my coordinator."

## What are the types of learning objectives?

Learning objectives fall into two main categories:

**Personal** - include developing or improving interpersonal, communication or other social skills that allow students to work more effectively. For example:

"By the end of my work term (when), I will develop better listening skills (what) by practicing reflective questioning techniques (how) and I will submit a diary of these experiences to my supervisor for his/her evaluation (evaluation)."

**Professional** - include objectives aimed at practicing or improving a skill, learning a new task, solving a specific problem with measurable results or other professional objectives that would enable students to improve their work performance. For example:

"By July 1st (when), I will give a presentation to a group of at least ten people using a microphone and overheads (what). I will follow the guidelines outlined in the manual "Effective Presentations" (how) and will ask each participant to evaluate the presentation for clarity, style and message (evaluation)."

Some of the various topics that learning objectives may cover include:

- routine duties
- problem solving
- new skills and assignments
- personal improvement
- creative opportunities

### And in summary:

Because it may be difficult for students to know exactly what they will be doing in their work term and what their employer will expect of students, it may be hard to establish specific learning objectives prior to reporting to their work term assignment.

Therefore, during the first week of work, students should set some rather general objectives based on their job description and the preliminary knowledge that students have of the job and the employer. When their familiarity with their employer, supervisor and their job increases (usually after a few weeks), students should be able to set a more realistic number of learning objectives that students wish to accomplish during their work term. These may be the result of adapting their general objectives identified earlier, or defining new objectives.

The first set of learning objectives students develop may be too optimistic and students may have to postpone some of these until a future work term, or students may find that they haven't identified enough, or the right learning objectives at the beginning. Students need to feel free to add new objectives, and to modify existing ones.

***The above Co-op Tips & Techniques is brought to you by CAFCE's Accreditation Council in their effort to provide co-op practitioners with various topics relative to quality co-op programming.***

# CO-OP TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

## *Getting the Most out of Your Work term<sup>2</sup>*

Prepared By: Quentin O'Mahony, University College of the Fraser Valley

As we enter a new millennium the role of education and the work force is in the midst of great change. No longer is the primary function of post secondary education to challenge and expand our way of looking at the world around us. Today, the world of higher learning is preparing 'a ready-made employee' for the labour market. My own university experience has shown me this first hand.

Had it not been for that fateful day in the second year of my Bachelor of Arts degree at the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV) in Abbotsford, British Columbia, I may not be writing this article today. As a result of a classroom visit by the Co-operative Education Arts Coordinator, I was introduced to the world of Co-operative Education and have not looked back since.

Up and until that momentous day my time at university had been fairly enjoyable. My degree was well under way and I had a typical student life - student by day, waiter by night. However, I was beginning to worry about career options after graduation and felt my restaurant experience would not assist me in getting the most out of my degree. The Co-operative Education coordinator immediately struck a cord in me when it was mentioned during the class visit that co-operative education was all about gaining practical experience in a student's field of study.

Although I was earning a Bachelor Degree in History, my goal was not exactly to work in a museum. I had a life long dream of an international career, perhaps with the Foreign Service and I felt that enrolling in a co-operative education program might take me closer to my dreams. Although I quickly found out that the Co-operative Education Program at UCFV was very dynamic, as it presented me with a variety of first work term possibilities, I couldn't have imagined how far co-operative education was to take me.

My first work term in April 1996 was with the British Columbia provincial government as a Student Administrator for the Student Summer Works '96 employment program. I was responsible, along with two other co-op students, to allocate almost half a million dollars to find summer employment opportunities for over 250 students in the Fraser Valley region. This work term put me in contact with a number of employers in the region and taught me valuable administrative and office skills. I ended up staying on for a second four-month co-op term in September, in order to wrap up the employment program. During this time, I compiled and submitted a comprehensive report on the program outcomes to the then Provincial Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. This report later won UCFV's 1997 Co-operative Education Writing Award for the Faculty of Arts.

Before my next co-op term the following summer, a unique opportunity presented itself to me through a contact I made on my first work term. I had worked with the International Education Department at UCFV when they hired a couple of students through the summer employment program. The department was now looking for applicants to go to Japan for a semester to study at UCFV's sister institution in Hokkaido. I jumped at the opportunity to apply, and was successful in representing UCFV in Japan for an academic semester during the spring of 1997. This opportunity was absolutely amazing as I saw my international goals beginning to become a reality.

When I returned to Abbotsford I set about looking for my third co-op term when a truly outstanding opportunity presented itself. The Centre for Co-operative Education and Employment Services was looking to fill a new position - Program Administrator for a Youth International Internship Program. My previous co-op

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.cewilcanada.ca/coop-manual.html> accessed April 1, 2019

experience coupled with my Japanese experience gave me a competitive advantage and helped me secure a position for my third and fourth co-op terms.

This was a dream opportunity - and I was ready for it. I needed to put all of my previous skills and experiences to work to allocate a program budget of over \$300,000. When all was said and done, the program was successful: 26 interns working in 12 different countries on every continent, except Antarctica. This included two interns going to work in the Japanese city where I had studied the previous year. The position required that I visit countries from Mexico to South Africa and many points in between. The places and events of my history, political science and economic textbooks came to life each and every time I explored a potential country for a potential internship. I spent a total of six weeks of my two work terms literally "on the road", traveling and meeting with international companies, embassies and some of the interns at their work sites.

The eight months I spent administering the Youth International Internship Program gave me experiences beyond my imagination. I explored ancient ruins in Korea, caught the subway between meetings in Singapore and arranged for the safe departure of two interns from Indonesia when that country experienced political instability in the spring of 1998. It was a fast-paced, exciting position that had me communicating all over the globe through faxes, e-mails and telephone calls at all hours of the day. I was sorry to say goodbye to the international program when my co-op term ended and I graduated with my bachelor degree in June of 1998.

So as a new graduate what was I to do? How could I put my co-op experience to use to find meaningful employment? Well I explored internship opportunities for recent grads and came across a great opportunity through UCFV's Employment Services office.

The British Columbia Legislative Assembly hired seven graduates each year to be legislative interns in Victoria. The process was competitive and many of the top graduates from B.C.'s universities applied. I was successful and became UCFV's first grad to have the opportunity. When I met with the other new interns and discussed with the internship organizers what made for a successful candidate, it came down to one large factor in my case B my co-operative education experience.

As an intern I spent some time with the Ministry of the Attorney General and put my office and networking skills to use to secure a meeting with the attorney general himself. I rubbed shoulders regularly with leading politicians, including the premier. It was another fast-paced and exciting work environment that enhanced the skills I had acquired throughout my degree.

With the current political climate in British Columbia being very divided and confrontational, I soon found myself exploring other career options. It was not long before I returned to my roots, so to speak, and was hired on by the Centre for Co-operative Education and Employment Services at UCFV to run the day-to-day operations in Employment Services. I was now working for my Alma Mater, assisting students to find employment opportunities and sharing the many employment tips I had picked up along the way. This was the latest development in a great relationship with the University College of the Fraser Valley's Centre for Co-operative Education and Employment Services.

Earning a university degree is no longer a guarantee of a job. So, for today's post-secondary students gaining the skills to make yourself more employable has become all the more important. Co-operative education and graduate internship programs provide post-secondary students the opportunity to follow their dreams while turning them into the skilled and sought after graduate labour force of the next millennium. Explore the co-operative education opportunities at your institution – you can only imagine where it might take you.