

The Merrill Social Work and Human Services Series

8TH EDITION

THE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICUM

PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE

CYNTHIA L. GARTHWAIT



EIGHTH EDITION

The Social Work Practicum

Preparation for Practice

Cynthia L. Garthwait
University of Montana



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Foreword

The social work practicum lies at the heart of social work education. In practicum, social work students apply the concepts learned in the classroom; challenge the realities of injustice; bear witness to resiliency in action; struggle to resolve ethical dilemmas; collaborate with others to create change; and support wellness in individuals, families, and communities. It is here that students transition from being a theoretical social worker to assuming the mantle of a practicing social worker. In this transition, social work students uncover and identify their place in the profession. This learning process is an adventure, and this textbook provides a guide for that adventure.

Practicum is a unique time in the careers of social work students. They are positioned in both academia and practice, fully planted in neither of these worlds. Straddling the two worlds allows students the opportunity to be intentional and reflective; however, without support the distance between these two realms can seem vast. In my experience as director of field education with the responsibility of managing BSW and MSW practica, students who lack support struggle to make the connection between theory and practice. Translating the didactic experience to a practice environment takes supportive supervision and a structured approach from their field directors, faculty supervisors, and agency field instructors.

The Social Work Practicum: Preparation for Practice is an essential tool to help navigate and enhance learning in practicum. If the learning agreement is the roadmap for a student's practicum, Cynthia L. Garthwait's book serves as the guidebook helping students make connections and integrate learning in a practical and user-friendly way. It is the academic companion to the social work practicum experience. Much like a traveler's guidebook translates and highlights key features in a foreign country, this text helps students make meaning of their practicum experience by focusing in on key elements of social work practice. Garthwait highlights social work practice themes and Council on Social Work Education competencies and behaviors in a concise and usable way, viewing all of these topics through the lens of practicum. The book is structured in a way that challenges students to think critically and reflexively about their current social work practice—a process that is integral to learning. Garthwait brings the worlds of academia and social work practice together, and her text serves as a guide for students' practicum learning adventures.

This eighth edition builds on the strong foundation and approachable format that characterized previous editions. In this new edition, readers will find significant updates on the use of technology including social media, computer management, and the provision of computer-based services, informed by the best practices and standards of National Association of Social Worker, the Council on Social Work Education, and the Association

of Social Work Boards. In addition, the author has expanded and updated information on diversity and working across differences, including a critical analysis of power and privilege. Also included is expanded material on working with involuntary clients, new information on social work theories and models, and additional content on communication skills. Readers will also appreciate the expanded focus on the planned change process. The online version of the text includes links to videos and end-of-chapter questions and quizzes helpful for all students, and particularly relevant to those engaged in online seminars. Through all of these many assets, this eighth edition prepares social work students to practice in the complex and dynamic social, political, and cultural environment.

Thank you to Cynthia L. Garthwait for writing the perfect adventure companion and textbook for field education. This book enhances the social work practicum experience so that students can more easily bridge the worlds of academia and practice, actively learn, critically reflect, and ready themselves to become social work leaders and change makers.

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Preface

Social work education is a unique combination of classroom learning and applied experiences, making for an exciting professional journey for both faculty and students. Blending theory and practice is not automatic, however, and a guided structure for this process is needed. Each chapter of this textbook provides students with a method for doing just that. Divided into three major sections, each chapter intentionally moves students from the classroom to the practicum and then gives them tools to move them into professional practice. This structure can provide a rich teaching and learning resource with valuable opportunities for learning and growth.

To provide a developmental and sequential path of professional growth, each chapter focuses on an important area of social work and then leads students through the following three processes:

- **Integrate Your Knowledge: Classroom and Practicum.** This section provides a concise review of classroom content and builds upon that knowledge by offering higher-level content relevant to the practicum. This helps students link classroom and practicum in meaningful ways in vital arenas of practice.
- **Apply Your Knowledge: Building Competence.** This section requires students to put their knowledge into practice by using it in actual practicum experiences and seeing how actual practice is guided by knowledge and skill both.
- **Prepare for Practice: Professional Growth.** This section moves students beyond practicum and into professional practice by having them identify and analyze practice issues. It shows the need for autonomous professional growth in actual practice using career planning, continuing education, self-reflection, and use of supervision.

New to This Edition

This edition includes new content on the following topics:

- Legal and ethical guidelines for use of electronic communication (Chapters 7, 9, 10)
- The Grand Challenges of Social Work identified by the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (Chapter 8)
- Critical analysis model of social policy (Chapter 7)
- Social problem analysis model (Chapter 6)
- Community dynamics impacting clients and interventions (Chapter 5)
- Cultural humility and diversity in practice (Chapter 13)
- Orienting theories for practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Chapters 5, 12, Appendix A, Appendix B)
- Practice theories for practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Chapters 5, 12, Appendix A, Appendix B)

- Guidelines for practice with involuntary clients (Chapters 9, 12, 14, 15)
- Leadership development related to each chapter's content (Chapter 17)

Significantly revised content on the following topics is included:

- Blocking and building goals of community practice (Chapter 5)
- Professional development beyond the practicum (Chapters 8, 15)
- Strategies to address social problems (Chapter 6)
- Social justice in policy practice (Chapter 7)
- Personal safety (Chapter 14)
- Use of supervision (Chapter 3)
- Principles and guidelines for the planned change process (Chapter 12)

Pearson eText

The Pearson eText provides an extended, interactive learning environment using multimedia features that promote the building of social work competencies.

- Self-Check multiple-choice quizzes in each chapter give students the opportunity to check their understanding of the chapter.
- Video Application Exercises present topical videos accompanied by short-answer questions to encourage reflection and critical thinking.
- Chapter Review essay quizzes allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the major concepts in the chapter. Feedback for the correct answer is provided to help developmental and scaffolded learning.

Acknowledgments

The creation of this textbook is a result of many years of social work experience in varied settings as well as social work education with BSW and MSW students. The lives, struggles, accounts, and triumphs of my clients over time, combined with my teaching experience with students who want to address the needs of people seeking better lives, has resulted in what I consider to be a valuable resource. My hope is that you will use this book in a way that balances realism and hope, theory and practice, and the professional and personal lives of social workers. Your professional calling requires a commitment to enhancing social functioning with enthusiasm, commitment, knowledge, and skill. This book can accompany you on that career-long trajectory of competent service to which you have dedicated yourself.

Thanks to Gary, who appreciates and supports my calling to the education of students and the clients they will serve.

I would also like to thank the following reviewers for their input on revising this eighth edition: Carlene A. Quinn, Indiana University; Renee Michelsen, University of Southern California; Thomas A. Artelt, University of Georgia; and Erika Galyean, Indiana University.



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Purpose and Expectations for Practicum

STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

Your practicum, although organized according to your university's guidelines and requirements, will be unique and individual to you. In consequence, although the chapters in this book are numbered in the conventional manner, you do not necessarily need to move through the book sequentially, one chapter after another. Rather, the book is structured so that chapters build upon each other and at times can be reviewed in conjunction with each succeeding chapter. It is expected that you will move back and forth between sections and will revisit the same section several times as you gain experience in the practicum and begin to look at various questions and issues from new perspectives. The chapters may also be read in a different order to accommodate the structure and outline of your school's program.

Each chapter begins with a list of **Learning Outcomes** designed to help you focus on competencies and your efficacy as a social worker in specific practice areas. Each chapter contains a section titled **Chapter Preview**, which presents a short capsule of the chapter content and reasons why the focus of the chapter is essential. It also describes the relationship between this chapter and previous ones while also linking it to the chapters that follow. The first major section of each chapter, **Integrate Your Knowledge: Classroom and Practicum**, presents selected concepts and principles related to the topic addressed by the chapter. The concepts and definitions presented in this section are not a substitute for a textbook devoted to that topic, but rather review key ideas you have already learned that now set the stage for what follows. The ideas in the **Apply Your Knowledge: Building Competence** section of each chapter will stimulate creative thinking and raise important questions that need to be considered as you work your way through the practicum and develop competence in social work. These sections offer general suggestions, guidance, advice, and sometimes a few specific "dos and don'ts" intended to encourage and facilitate learning in relation to the chapter's objectives and particular focus.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand how student, university, agency, and client expectations for practicum will result in a positive practicum experience.
- Identify individual practice strengths that can be built upon during practicum.
- Assess oneself developmentally on a skill building continuum.
- Assume responsibility for preparing for social work practice.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Structure of Chapters 1

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Classroom and Practicum 3
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Several pages of each chapter have been cast into a format that requires you to complete an activity that is entitled **Prepare for Practice: Professional Growth**. These activities point you to practice beyond practicum and offer information and suggestions about professional development over time. You will be asked to integrate knowledge, skills, and values needed for the professional competencies of social work practice. A number of challenging **Critical Thinking Questions** in each chapter require you to analyze and synthesize what you learned. A section titled **Suggested Learning Activities** lists several specific potential tasks and activities that provide additional opportunities and experiences for learning.

The **References and Recommended Readings** section at the end of each chapter lists books, articles, and links related to the topics addressed in the book. These references and suggestions serve as resources for additional information and encourage a more in-depth examination of the topics presented. Using textbooks and readings from courses you have taken as reference guides will also help you understand how social workers continue to build on their previous knowledge and skills, as they are expected to develop more advanced practice over time.

The **Appendix** contains examples of the planned change process at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels to illustrate how the phases of the planned change process are interconnected, including engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation. They demonstrate the ways in which theories and models are utilized in actual social work practice situations. In addition, the Appendix contains a listing of orienting theories commonly used in the engagement and assessment phases, and a listing of practice theories commonly used in the intervention phase. Finally, a **Glossary of Terms** defines and clarifies terms related to the practice and profession of social work.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Congratulations on your entry into the practicum phase of your social work education. To maximize the challenging experiences ahead of you, this introductory chapter presents the concept of practicum as a unique learning experience. Before you jump into actions, assignments, and activities, it is vital that you learn how to think about your practicum. You will have a much more productive experience if your approach to learning is both thoughtful and as applied as you can make it. Key considerations include (1) **what you want and need to learn**, (2) **what your school needs you to experience**, and (3) **what your agency wants and needs**. Think about yourself moving from the status of student to professional, even if you have already practiced social work at the entry level. Another part of your thoughtful approach to practice is to understand the importance of planning your practicum and to recognize that you will no doubt have numerous unexpected learning experiences. Thinking hard about how to maximize your practicum time also includes developing a model and method for integrating theory and practice. To do so, you will have to review what you have learned and put it into practice. This book is designed to help you do just that. Your practicum will offer you the opportunity to review academic classroom **knowledge**, integrate this knowledge with the **skills** required in the social work profession, and support all your interventions with the **values** of the social work profession. This book will help you bring those three components of practice together.

Also covered in this chapter are the **expectations for practicum** held by the school, the practicum agency, your clients, and you as a student. You will learn how these expectations converge and how to clarify, understand, and meet them all. This chapter provides a tool entitled **Student Self-Assessment of Practice Strengths**, which you can use now and at the conclusion of your practicum to identify and build upon the strengths you bring to the social work practicum. Finally, content on the **skill building continuum** experienced by all social work students and social workers will assist you in placing yourself developmentally along this trajectory and planning for professional development throughout your career.

You are to be commended for embarking on the exciting social work practicum experience and applauded for reaching this stage in your professional education. You have been approved for a practicum based on your academic achievements and your professional readiness for this experience. The practicum is a unique opportunity to apply what you have learned in the classroom, expand your knowledge, develop your skills, and hone your use of professional values. It is time for you to move from the role of a student to that of a professional social worker. This book is designed to provide you with guidance and structure during the social work practicum. If used in a thoughtful manner throughout the practicum, it will help you make the best of whatever your practicum setting has to offer. It requires a real commitment and willingness to invest time in the learning process.

INTEGRATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE: CLASSROOM AND PRACTICUM

The practicum experience is almost universally described by bachelor of social work (BSW) and master of social work (MSW) social work students as the single most important, challenging, significant, and powerful learning experience of their formal social work education. It is during the practicum that the concepts, principles, theories, and models discussed in the classroom come to life as they are applied with real people in real-life situations. During the practicum, students have the opportunity and the responsibility to use and enhance the skills and techniques they previously rehearsed in classroom role-playing and simulations. It is also during the practicum that students make considerable progress in developing self-awareness and come to a better understanding of their individual strengths and limitations as well as the influence of their personal values, attitudes, and life experiences on their practice. The practicum can and should be a time when classroom theory is integrated with social work practice and when students apply the values and fundamental principles of their chosen profession. Integrating theory and practice is not automatic, however. It is up to you to bring your classroom learning to bear on real social work practice. This book is designed to help you do just that.

Video Application Exercise 1.1. This Interactive exercise will help you consider both the challenges and rewards of social work as you enter your practicum.

You may not have thought about all the different parties and stakeholders involved in your practicum, but you will quickly learn that a variety of **stakeholders have expectations for you and your practicum**. Both clients and professionals with a variety of points

of view, experiences, and roles to play will have a stake in your learning. This group includes you as the (1) **practicum student**, your (2) **university social work program**, your (3) **agency**, and your (4) **clients**. Even though you are still a student, it is helpful to understand what those expectations are. This combination of people and organizations that have a stake in your learning is similar to actual social work practice, in which there are also many stakeholders with an investment in the performance of social workers.

The specific objectives associated with a practicum can be found in your school practicum manual, in official descriptions of your social work curriculum, and in other documents issued by the social work program. In addition, your faculty supervisors will guide you through the process of meeting your program's expectations for the development of competency. Agencies will have their own expectations of students, and so will clients.

Given the fact that you are in the process of learning to become a social worker, you must consider how your lack of skill and experience might affect your clients and the quality of the services provided to them. Even though you are a student, you will have a great deal to offer your clients. When the work expected of you is beyond your level of knowledge and skill, however, you must be prepared to consult with your agency field instructor for guidance and suggestions. Review your classroom learning, drawing upon theory and any skill-building exercises in which you have participated. The clients served by a student social worker should be made aware that they are being served or assisted by a student. Even so, most clients will see you as a developing professional and will be cooperative and trusting of you, your knowledge, and your skills.

Compare the views of all the stakeholders regarding what your role should be, how you should be prepared and trained, how your work should be organized, what supervision will consist of, and how you will be evaluated. This insight can help you understand the varied perspectives on your learning and the services you will provide as a practicum student. As can be expected, you and your university will see your **primary role as a learner** and your **secondary role as a service provider**. In contrast, the agency and its clients will tend to view your primary role as a service provider and your secondary role as a student. Although these differing perspectives make sense to all parties involved, the multiple viewpoints may seem complex to you. Work hard to meet all the expectations for your practicum, and work to understand how this same set of varying perspectives is applied to the work of professional social workers.

As a **student**, you will expect to have a quality learning experience in your practicum. You have worked and studied a long time in preparation for this experience with real clients, and no doubt you have hopes that this experience will prepare you well for professional social work practice. Your **university social work program** has invested itself in developing curriculum, designing learning experiences, and building a partnership with your agency. The program has an obligation to ensure that its graduates are competent to practice social work and views the practicum as an opportunity to demonstrate this competency. The program's goals are in line with its overall goals in education, particularly social work education. Your **agency** also has goals for your time in practicum. In fact, it has much at stake in your experience because it serves real clients in real-life situations and with real-life challenges. Your agency field instructor has probably engaged in training offered by your university about social work supervision, which entails a significant commitment of the instructor's time. He or she expects you to engage in activities with those clients that are ethical, professional, and effective. Although your **clients** do not yet know that you will be working with them, they expect to receive high-quality professional

services from you and your agency, and anticipate that you will be prepared to help them address their needs and concerns ethically, under supervision, and with respect. In many ways, their expectations may be the most important of all, because their lives and concerns are at the center of your practicum. If you are working with a client system on a larger level, this family, group, organization, or community will have the same expectations.

Stakeholders’ Expectations for Practicum

Review this table regarding the various expectations for you and your practicum. Discuss the idea of varying expectations with your agency field instructor and ask him or her how to meet all of these expectations.

Stakeholder	View of Student Role	Supervision Process	Evaluation Process
Student	Primary role as student and learner	Integration of theory and practice supervised by university	Academic grade assigned by university
	Secondary role as professional providing services	Daily tasks supervised by agency field instructor	Ongoing evaluation done by agency field instructor
University	Primary role as student and learner	Integration of theory and practice supervised by university	Academic grade assigned by university
	Secondary role as professional providing services	Daily tasks supervised by agency field instructor	Ongoing evaluation done by agency field instructor
Agency	Primary role as professional providing services	Daily tasks supervised by agency field instructor	Ongoing evaluation done by agency field instructor
	Secondary role as student and learner	Integration of theory and practice supervised by university	Academic grade assigned by university
Client	Primary role as professional providing services	Not aware of supervision process but expects high-quality services	Not aware of evaluation process but expects accountability of agency
	Secondary role as student and learner	Not aware of supervision process but expects high-quality services	Not aware of evaluation process but expects accountability of agency

In addition to the expectations just listed for you as a new professional social worker, several other organizations outside your university and agency place great emphasis on the practicum as one of the highlights of social work education. Both the **Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)**, the accrediting body for all social work programs in the United States, and the **National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**, the professional organization of social workers in the United States, value the practicum as integral to quality social work practice and a hallmark of social work education. All parties to the practicum are expected to adhere to the NASW **Code of Ethics** as well as the expectations and requirements for social work programs accredited by the CSWE. Both organizations share a commitment to both students and their eventual clients and view the practicum as a way of ensuring the following:

- **Basic competency** for BSW graduates
- **Advanced competency** for MSW graduates
- **Quality services** to clients and client systems

- **Accountability to the profession** of social work
- **Accountability to the organizations** and institutions for whom graduates work
- Continual and ongoing **enhancement of social work knowledge and practice**

Most practicum students find the experience to be very positive and meaningful, but occasionally the practicum can fall short of expectations. The quality of every practicum experience can be enhanced if students are provided with guidance in identifying and making use of learning opportunities. A practicum structure that helps students to examine and analyze their settings in ways that build on their prior classroom learning is of critical importance. In addition, some of the most meaningful learning occurs as a result of having to deal with unexpected events and frustrations during the practicum. This book is designed to be a tool to structure, support, and maximize the time spent in practicum—because the next step is real-world social work.

As you work toward actual social work practice, you will come to recognize that professional experiences such as practicum require you to **strike a balance** in numerous areas by seeing the connections between them. To ensure a positive learning experience and minimize the chances of having negative experiences, you should think of the practicum as a bridge and a balance between the concepts described in Table 1.1. The ability

Table 1.1 Bridging Dimensions of Learning

Dimensions of Learning	Advantages of Each Dimension of Learning	
Academic knowledge versus real-life application	Academic preparation offers theoretical foundations for practice, social work identity, faculty supervision, and preparation for practicum.	Real-life application offers opportunities to apply academic learning, integrate theory with practice, and analyze the differences between classroom and real-life practicum experiences.
Structured and planned versus unplanned learning	University learning agreements and plans are based on their commitment to helping students acquire competencies, and to ensure a broad and comprehensive experience related to social work.	The realities of agency work bring unexpected learning experiences, both positive and negative, both of which enrich the practicum. Often, unplanned learning brings increases in self-awareness.
Student professional goals versus agency and university goals	Students enter practicum with specific professional goals for themselves as social workers and have ample opportunities to integrate them into their learning plan.	Agencies and universities have goals for student learning, and they provide the basis for generalist social work practice upon which students can build.
Responsibility to provide services versus role of a student	Students are expected to function as professional social workers, are given assignments tailored to their level of knowledge and skill, and are supervised by both the university and the agency.	Students are recognized as persons who are entering the profession, are not expected to function independently at a high level of competency, and are allowed to learn from their mistakes.
Generalist training versus specialization training	Generalist learning experiences are broad, varied, and targeted toward preparing students for working at multiple levels, playing a variety of social work roles, and utilizing an array of theories and models for practice.	Specialization training allows students to pursue their professional interests in one area in more depth while also focusing on generalist practice as a foundation.

to bring together and **bridge what might seem as conflicting learning experiences** is a sign of professional growth, because learning is multidimensional, sometimes planned and often unplanned. You are fortunate that you have varied, multifaceted, and interesting experiences ahead of you.

APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE: BUILDING COMPETENCE

The quality of your practicum will be based on your ability to maintain your focus and complete your learning plan. Think now about your practicum as an opportunity to accomplish the following goals:

- Identify and enhance the knowledge, skills, and values you already possess
- Gain experience in areas in which you have no previous experience
- Begin to develop a professional social work identity
- Gain basic-level competencies required for practice
- Practice ethical decision-making processes
- Secure exposure to diverse clients, programs, and methods
- Understand the various contexts of practice that influence your work, including organization, community, legal, and social policy arenas

Social workers acquire many skills needed to play various social work roles, develop competence at all levels of practice, and design interventions based on a broad range of perspectives, theories, and models. This is a very high professional expectation. You will not be expected to possess these skills at the outset of your practicum, but will be taught, trained, monitored, and supervised as you acquire them through the process described in the workbook activity at the end of this chapter. The table in the workbook section of this chapter follows the process of skill building through increasingly challenging levels of learning, including didactic classroom learning, rehearsal of skills, observations of others performing the skills, attempts to develop the skill under supervision, reflection on performance, successive attempts at performing the skill, ongoing skill development, and advanced skill performance. Not only do practicum students use this process as they develop skills, but professional social workers also go through a similar process each time they acquire a new skill. Refer to this table often throughout your practicum experience to help you see the progress you are making.

Video Application Exercise 1.2. This interactive exercise can help you think about how social workers think and act when clients ask them what to do.

Self-Assessment of Practice Strengths

Social workers are committed to taking a strengths perspective on their clients, helping them to address their problems and enhance their social functioning by building on their strengths. A strengths perspective can also

be invaluable to social workers when evaluating their own work. By applying the strengths perspective to your own abilities and professional growth, you can use your strengths and assets as building blocks for acquiring the

professional skills you will need. The following exercise will help you take a strengths perspective on yourself as you begin practicum and again when you have completed it.

In the Pre-Practicum Self-Assessment column, assess yourself and your strengths, checking whether you have these strengths now, believe they are in progress, or do not yet possess them. Take note of the most significant

strengths that you bring to the practicum. Identify the strengths needed for practice that you do not yet possess, and think about how you can acquire these strengths through practicum learning experiences. You will be prompted to assess yourself again at the completion of your practicum using this same tool. Ideally, you will recognize significant professional growth in all areas from the outset of your practicum to its completion.

	Pre-Practicum Self-Assessment			Post-Practicum Self-Assessment		
	Yes	In Progress	No	Yes	In Progress	No
Motivation to Learn						
1. Open to new learning experiences						
2. Willing to assume new responsibilities						
3. Open to developing self-awareness and professional competence						
4. Adequate time and energy to devote to the practicum						
5. A sense of calling to the profession						
6. Committed to using supervision						
Attitudes and Values						
7. Empathetic, caring, and concerned for clients						
8. Personal values, beliefs, and perspectives that are compatible with the agency's mission						
9. Personal values, beliefs, and perspectives that are compatible with the <i>NASW Code of Ethics</i>						
10. Committed to achieving social justice						
11. Respectful of diversity among clients and communities						
12. Nonjudgmental toward clients and colleagues						
General Work Skills						
13. Writing skills (reports, letters, professional records, using technological tools)						
14. Able to process information quickly, understand new concepts, and learn new skills						
15. Able to receive and utilize supervision and feedback for professional growth						
16. Able to organize, plan, and effectively manage time						
17. Able to meet deadlines and work under pressure						
18. Able to follow through and complete tasks						

	Pre-Practicum Self-Assessment			Post-Practicum Self-Assessment		
	Yes	In Progress	No	Yes	In Progress	No
Social Work Skills						
19. Able to listen, understand, and consider varied views, perspectives, and opinions						
20. Able to communicate verbally with a variety of people and groups						
21. Able to make thoughtful and ethical decisions under stressful conditions						
22. Assertive and self-confident in professional relationships with clients and colleagues						
23. Able to identify a need and formulate a plan to meet that need						
24. Able to solve problems creatively and effectively						
Knowledge						
25. Self-awareness of how one's values, beliefs, and experiences impact work and other persons						
26. Knowledge of how laws, rules, regulations, and policies of agency impact practice						
27. Knowledge of assessment tools, methods, and techniques						
28. Knowledge of theories and models of social work						
29. Understanding of the process and steps of planned change						
30. Knowledge of how the community context impacts agency function						
Prior Experience Related to Practicum						
31. Experience in a setting similar to the agency						
32. Experience with clients or client systems similar to those served by the agency						
33. Experience applying theory to practice						
34. Experience working with professional teams						
35. Experience playing social work roles						
36. Training in professional skills related to those needed in practicum						

PREPARE FOR PRACTICE: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

This chapter has guided you to **recall and integrate classroom knowledge about expectations** into your practicum experience. It has also asked you to **apply your knowledge of expectations in your practicum setting**. The next step is to use all this knowledge and experience to **prepare yourself for the expectations for professional practice**. Following is an exercise designed to help you take several more steps toward becoming a professional.

Skill Building Across Your Social Work Career

Examine this table, and consider how the professional levels of practice build upon each other over time. Think about how each domain of skill building evolves over time for social work students and practitioners alike. Make a plan for your social work career development, beginning now.

Skill-Building Domains	Levels of Practice			
	BSW Student	MSW Student	Entry-Level Practitioner	Advanced Practitioner
Learning context of professional development	Classroom and practicum as learning context	Classroom, practicum, and previous experience as learning context	Agency practice as context for professional development	Agency practice and leadership role as context for professional development
Theory base of professional development	Understanding and beginning application of orienting and practice theories	Understanding, critiquing, and application of orienting and practice theories	Application of orienting and practice theories and measuring the effectiveness of practice theories	Application of orienting and practice theories, measuring the effectiveness of practice theories, and theory building
Level of experience in using a skill or practice behavior	First attempt at using a skill	Building on previous experience in using a skill	Using a skill for entry-level practice, independently but with supervision	Using a skill for advanced practice, independently while teaching the skill to others
Value base of professional development	Identification and acquisition of professional and personal values	Deepening understanding and use of professional values	Ongoing examination, development, and use of professional values	Advanced development, use, and teaching of professional values
Evaluation of professional development	Supervisor and faculty evaluation with self-evaluation encouraged	Supervisor and faculty evaluation with self-evaluation encouraged	Supervisor evaluation with self-evaluation required	Self-evaluation, peer review, self-evaluation required, and expectation to evaluate others

Video Application Exercise 1.3. This interactive exercise will stimulate your thinking about how self-care will need to start now and continue throughout your career.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Although you are just beginning your practicum, it is important to develop the ability to engage in personal reflection. Using your skills of self-reflection, what can you do to acquire the strengths listed in the Self-Assessment of Practice Strengths feature?
 2. What is your plan for drawing on the knowledge you gained through classroom experience to use in real-life situations? How can you organize yourself in such a way as to bring the two together?
 3. Which questions can you ask of your agency field instructor to help you apply the NASW *Code of Ethics* to all practice situations, thereby making sure you understand how the code applies to practicum?
 4. What are the ethical implications of a student providing services to real clients?
-

Suggested Learning Activities

- Collect the textbooks you used in your social work courses and use them to help you integrate your classroom learning with your practicum experience.
- Conduct a cursory examination of each chapter in this book. Note the topics addressed and how the content is organized. Try to identify the links between chapters, since they are designed to build on each other.
- Read your school practicum manual. Pay special attention to the descriptions of what is expected of the practicum student.
- If there is a job description for social work practicum students, read it carefully to understand what your agency expects.
- Carefully examine the practicum evaluation form and specific criteria that will be used to evaluate your performance so that you can see what level of performance will be expected by your university social work program.
- Talk to former students who have completed a practicum in your agency. Ask them for advice and guidance on what to expect and about learning opportunities available. Also ask if they have any suggestions for you that will enhance your practicum.

Chapter Review 1.1. How does the variety of expectations for practicum resemble the various expectations of professional social workers? What can you learn from this comparison and how can you meet them all?

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Develop an individual learning plan designed to acquire generalist competencies.
- Describe the relationships among professional knowledge, skills, and values.
- Develop the ability to integrate academic theory with professional practice.
- Identify and build upon professional social work behaviors.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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Implementing a Learning Plan

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter offers a framework for understanding how a practicum **learning plan** can help to structure and enhance the **integrative learning experience** that practicum is designed to offer and, in so doing, begin the process of professionalization. It outlines a set of **generalist competencies** that serve as a template for a learning plan that shapes the practicum. It provides an introduction to **using supervision** and training for professional growth, and it allows for reflection on how your reaction to supervision parallels the reaction of clients to engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation. The chapter explains the process of **integration of theory and practice**, which is a fundamental goal of practicum experiences. Finally, it offers a **tool to monitor the development of professional skills and behaviors**.

Students who have good practicum learning experiences find that this success usually results from a carefully planned learning experience. For the most part, a good practicum experience is one that has been well conceived and outlined. However, you may also have some very valuable unplanned learning experiences, which will never appear in your learning plan in written form. You will increase your overall chances of success if you design a clear learning plan, but you will also do well if you watch for opportunities to participate in learning opportunities that present themselves along the way. You may also encounter some challenging and possibly even negative experiences. Although you might wish to avoid negative learning experiences, you should recognize that they may very well be some of your most powerful teachers.

INTEGRATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE: CLASSROOM AND PRACTICUM

Your practicum is a time of both excitement and uncertainty. In fact, it closely resembles starting a new job because there is much to learn, digest, understand, and respond to as a professional. There are many

new people to meet and much to learn, and the first few weeks can feel overwhelming. Entering an unfamiliar organization is akin to entering an unfamiliar culture where you encounter a set of norms, rules, and customs that you do not yet understand but will be required to learn. Practicum students commonly experience anxiety and a sense of wondering whether they are truly prepared, largely because they are not yet sure they have the necessary knowledge and skills. You may wonder if you will be able to perform competently. To address these initial thoughts and concerns, you can take a number of concrete steps now to make certain that your practicum gets off to a good start.

As you begin to plan your practicum, it is important to list your **desired outcomes for learning** and then identify and arrange activities and experiences that will help you reach those goals. It is important to include experiences that will help you acquire the professional behaviors identified by the profession. This chapter provides a guide for developing your learning plan, as do the **generalist social work competencies** identified in the next section of this chapter.

Your learning plan will incorporate educational goals and anticipated outcomes from three sources: the university school of social work, the practicum agency and its agency field instructor, and the student. The goals for each of these stakeholders will usually fall into three categories: **knowledge, skills, and values**—all of which contribute to your competency as a social worker.

Social work **knowledge** comprises an understanding of professional terminology, facts, principles, concepts, perspectives, and theories. No doubt you have spent many hours learning about individuals and families, communities, research, and social policy. All of this knowledge will be used in the practicum as you learn to apply it in real-life situations. In addition, you can gain much new knowledge about practice if you apply yourself to not only observing, but also working hard to understand what is being done in your agency and why.

Social work **skills** are the behaviors of practice. Social workers use these techniques and strategies to bring about desired change and enhance the social functioning of clients or the social systems with which clients interact. For the most part, skills are learned by watching and following the lead of skilled practitioners. Your practicum experience will afford you the opportunity to acquire and enhance your social work skills. You will have ample opportunity to practice these skills yourself, so take advantage of them.

A **value** is a strong preference that is rooted in your deepest beliefs and commitments, and that affects your choices, decisions, and actions. Social work values (e.g., service, commitment to social justice, and integrity) are usually combined with social workers' personal values and, ideally, will be consistent with them. Practicum will undoubtedly be a time for you to clearly understand what your values are, and you will also begin to see how your values may at times be in conflict with the values of others, including the values of your clients.

Acquiring, honing, and blending social work knowledge, skills, and values will help establish the three **foundations of practice** you need for professional practice. The relationships among these three foundations can be described as follows: Skill grows out of knowledge and professional values; in fact, the possession of social work knowledge and values is of little use unless both are expressed in the demonstration of skills. Knowledge and skills can, however, be used to harm or manipulate clients unless they are guided by an ethical value base of services to clients.

Curricula for BSW programs and the first year of MSW programs are built around the concept of **generalist social work practice**. Thus, the practicum is expected to reflect a broad range of experiences to prepare students for generalist practice. Both BSW and MSW students must learn the generalist skills of practice. After completing their education, they may engage in generalist social work, or they may move into practice that is specialized in a particular way. Either way, a sound generalist foundation provides the framework for a career in social work. The practicum can provide broad experiences in generalist social work as well as more focused experiences that prepare graduates for a practice specialization. The second year of MSW programs allows for additional emphases, sometimes going beyond generalist practice. Even if your program has specialties or emphases in the second year, generalist competencies form the basis for all social work practice. Thus, it is incumbent upon all students to make certain that they prepare themselves as generalists.

The **generalist perspective on social work** is a way of viewing and thinking about the process and activities of social work practice. This set of ideas and principles guides the process of planned change at all levels of practice, in a wide variety of settings, and in a number of social work roles. One unique characteristic of the generalist social worker is the ability to adapt his or her approach to the needs and circumstances of the client or client system, rather than expecting the client to conform to the methods of the professional or the agency. The generalist avoids selecting an intervention method or approach until he or she has collaborated with the client to complete a careful assessment of the client's concern or problem. The generalist designs interventions only after having considered various ways in which the client's problem or concern can be defined, conceptualized, and approached. Finally, the generalist is prepared to draw on and use a wide range of intervention techniques and procedures; that is, he or she is not bound to a single theory or model.

Keeping this description of generalist social work in mind, Table 2.1 lists seven generalist competencies common to all entry-level practitioners and most advanced practitioners. The table provides a rationale for the use of each generalist competency in social work and a list of specific skills required for the demonstration of that competency.

Video Application Exercise 2.1. This interactive exercise builds on your understanding of generalist competencies by focusing on external influences on you and your clients.

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education's Commission on Accreditation (2015, 3–7) also identify the following **professional behaviors** for social workers:

All social work schools must demonstrate that their students have acquired these behaviors, and your practicum evaluation will demonstrate to what degree you have achieved this goal.

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.
2. Engage diversity and difference in practice.
3. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice.
5. Engage in policy practice.
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
8. Intervene with individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.
9. Evaluate individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.

Table 2.1 Generalist Competencies for Social Work Practice

Generalist Competency 1 Practice at All Levels		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Practices at multiple levels (micro, mezzo, and macro) both separately and simultaneously and moves between systems and levels of practice based on client/client system needs, resources, and likelihood of success to enhance social functioning and facilitate social change.	Practices at multiple levels because of the complex nature of social problems, and because social functioning, social change, and social justice are supported by interventions at all levels of practice.	Uses interpersonal helping skills, communication skills, relationship building, and interviewing (micro). Engages in coordination, group facilitation, advocacy, education, consulting, and mediation (mezzo). Engages in planning, community development, program management, research, social policy formation, and administration (macro).
Generalist Competency 2 Play a Range of Social Work Roles		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Plays a broad range of professional roles individually and simultaneously to promote social justice, enhance social functioning, and promote social change. Generalist social workers may play several roles in any given situation and can move between these roles as needed.	Plays a broad range of professional roles because of the variety of client/client system needs and resources, as well as to enhance social functioning, promote social justice, and promote social change at multiple levels of practice. Sees the connections between professional roles and understand the importance of using them prescriptively, matching roles with need.	Selects the social work role based on the client/situation needs, conceptualization of the location of the problem being addressed, and targets for change. Plays roles at all levels of practice, including some roles specific to one level of practice as well as others that can be played at all levels of practice.
Generalist Competency 3 Use a Variety of Professional Perspectives		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Uses a variety of discrete yet interacting lenses, conceptual frameworks, and paradigms to guide practice, including the strengths, ecosystems, and diversity perspectives.	Understands that clients, groups, organizations, communities, and social systems cannot be understood in isolation, and that understanding the interaction between these entities is essential to effective interventions.	Incorporates a variety of professional perspectives into all phases of the helping process. Uses professional perspectives to identify targets for enhancing social functioning and improving the fit between clients and social systems.

(continued)

Table 2.1 *continued*

Generalist Competency 4 Use a Range of Orienting Theories		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Uses a variety of orienting (explanatory) theories to guide practice, including human development theory, group theory, social systems theory, organizational theory, community development theory, social movement theory, and social development theory.	Understands the development of individuals, families, social systems, groups, organizations, and societies as part of an effort to comprehend the social conditions faced by clients and to implement effective interventions.	Incorporates orienting (explanatory) theories into all phases of planned change (engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation at all levels).
Generalist Competency 5 Use a Variety of Practice Theories and Models		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Uses a variety of practice theories and models to guide practice and address client needs and resources, including task-centered casework, crisis intervention, client-centered casework, empowerment model, family systems model, mutual aid model, structural model, organizational development model, community organization model, and social change model.	Uses practice theories and models to design individualized interventions that are empirically based, grounded in best practices, methodologically sound, creative, and matched to the situation at hand. These theories and models provide practitioners with a versatile repertoire of techniques, help them avoid limiting themselves to a single approach, and afford the opportunity to combine approaches for effective interventions.	Incorporates practice theories and models into interventions at all levels of practice based on client need and resources. Combines practice theories and models creatively to address multiple social issues faced by clients and client systems.
Generalist Competency 6 Use the Planned Change Process at all Levels of Practice		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
In partnership with client systems, uses the planned change process of assessment, planning, intervention, termination, and evaluation at all levels of practice.	Uses the planned change process to enhance social functioning and promote social change, because a sound assessment creates the basis for an intervention plan that can be implemented and evaluated based on identified goals and objectives.	Engages clients, builds productive professional relationships, assesses client problems and strengths, designs sound intervention plans, implements effective intervention plans, and evaluates outcomes.
Generalist Competency 7 Use NASW's Code of Ethics		
Competency Description	Rationale for Competency	Skills Related to Competency
Is guided by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) <i>Code of Ethics</i> , incorporates social work values into interventions at all levels, and uses a process for ethical decision making and resolving ethical dilemmas.	Understands how personal and professional ethics and values underlie codes of conduct, client choices, community development, societal attitudes, definitions of social problems, development of social policy, and research.	Incorporates social work and client values into all interventions. Uses NASW <i>Code of Ethics</i> in ethical decision making and to resolve ethical dilemmas.

The list of generalist competencies in Table 2.1, in combination with the professional behaviors of the Council on Social Work Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (2015, 3–7), can guide the structure of your practicum. Work to identify ways in which you can acquire those competencies and behaviors considered vital to the practice of social work. A discussion of these competencies is woven into this book in multiple ways, showing you how they are acquired over time and in a variety of ways. Work to integrate them into your professional repertoire. Remember that **acquiring competencies is a process** that begins in practicum and continues throughout practice. Social workers are expected to continually learn new skills, refine their existing abilities, be innovative practitioners, commit to professional development, and engage in reflection, supervision, and evaluation. You may have heard professionals and educators talk about **mastery of skills and knowledge**. The term mastery also suggests ongoing professional development over a career, rather than something that can be definitively achieved in practicum. As a social worker in training, you now have the opportunity to begin that process.

When beginning a new experience such as a practicum, during which you will be expected to learn, grow, and demonstrate professionalism, remember that **initial experiences are pattern setting**. If the first days and weeks of contact with a new student are positive for an agency field instructor and other agency staff, these persons will likely conclude that the student can be trusted and given responsibilities. In contrast, if these first contacts give the agency field instructor cause to doubt whether the student is capable and responsible, he or she may hesitate to assign meaningful work to the student. It is good to anticipate how you as a student might be perceived by the agency field instructor and what that instructor might be thinking and feeling about your presence in the agency.

Supervisor Thoughts About Beginning Students

Agency field instructors are very busy with the demands of their work, so when they agree to supervise students, they hope that those students will be well-prepared, mature, and competent. They may also have concerns about the supervisees' performance. Read each of the following enthusiastic and cautious thoughts your agency

field instructor may have about you. Prepare yourself for practice by forming a response as if you and your agency field instructor were engaged in a conversation that includes these supervisor thoughts. What would you say to show your understanding, appreciation, commitment, and professionalism?

Enthusiasm About Supervising a Practicum Student

Your Response

"I look forward to having a student. Practicum students are enthusiastic, and they tend to look at the work of this agency from a fresh perspective."

"The student can help ease the workload of our staff, so we will give them tasks right away."

"I like student questions because they encourage me to think critically about what I do and why."

"I remember how important practicum supervision was to me, and I want to pass this good experience on to another student."

Reservations About Supervising a Practicum Student	Your Response
"This student better catch on quickly, because I don't have a great deal of time to supervise."	
"I hope this student is ready for a dose of reality, because real social work is different than the theories taught in the classroom."	
"I worry about students overstepping their bounds. I don't want to fix their mistakes."	
"I hope the student has the skills to start providing services right away."	

Practicum students have varied and sometimes ambivalent reactions to the challenges of the practicum. They feel both excited about learning from a mentor and anxious about being observed and evaluated. If these ambivalent reactions describe your emotional state as you begin your practicum, recognize that this uncertainty is normal. It is not easy to receive feedback and sometimes correction, but it is an integral part of growth. These ambivalent reactions are also very similar to the experiences of a client entering a professional relationship with a social worker. Clients are likely to be ambivalent as well, so be aware of this possibility when you experience varying emotions and reactions. Honestly identifying your own positive and negative reactions to supervision will help you become more empathetic to your clients. Understanding your own responses to supervision can help you understand what it is like for clients to be assessed, scrutinized, criticized, held accountable, and evaluated.

The practicum carries an expectation that students will shift from the university's focus on professional education to the agency's focus on professional training. Faculty members of social work programs provide **professional and academic education** that emphasizes the learning of general knowledge, theory, and broad principles that can be applied in many practice settings. Professional education encourages discussion, debate, and the consideration of alternative ways of assessing and responding to a problem or situation. It is related to the mission and purpose of the social work profession, and it focuses on learning outcomes rather than on providing actual services to clients.

By contrast, in actual social work practice, agency administrators and supervisors are concerned with training that emphasizes the learning of policies, procedures, and skills specific to their agency. They do not provide professional education, but rather offer **professional training** designed to teach what the agency has established as the standard or typical approaches to given practice situations. This training is agency-specific and related to the mission of the particular agency. Its effectiveness is measured through work outcomes, rather than through learning only. Because these approaches reflect agency purpose, policy, and procedures, students should generally follow them rather than challenge them. Respectful questions about agency practice and policy will be well received, however. Ideally, you will integrate the broad knowledge obtained from the academic world with the specific training provided within the agency.

All social services agencies have an **office culture**. This term refers to the general ways of operating that are based on the agency's history, values, theoretical underpinnings, mission, goals and objectives, policies and procedures, position descriptions, and staff interactions. In the best case, the office culture will be positive and effective, so that you can see an organization at its best and learn how a healthy, learning, and functional organization operates.

A related, but distinct term that is used to describe the more informal aspects of an organization is **office climate**. This refers to the quality of work life embodied in such areas as leadership, staff morale and satisfaction, positive communication, commitment to the agency's mission, desirability of the workplace, level of innovation and creativity, and acceptable salary and compensation. Watch for aspects of both the office culture and the office climate, and think about how positive culture and climate would positively impact both staff and the clients whom they serve.

All organizations, including human services agencies, have a political dimension that is referred to as **office politics**. This term refers to the undercurrent of power dynamics created by factors such as conflict between various factions within an organization, uneven distribution of power between those in various levels, personal ambition, individuals or groups jockeying for greater power, and efforts to lobby on behalf of a certain opinion. Larger organizations have more complex internal office politics than smaller organizations. Some disagreement, conflict, and power struggles are inevitable in organizational life, however, and these may become apparent to you. Be aware that aligning yourself with one side or another in these conflicts can undermine the success of your practicum.

Even though office politics is normal and difficult to avoid, if you become caught up in these power struggles and conflicts, learning opportunities may be closed to you, and some agency staff may withdraw their support. As a general rule, the larger and more political an organization, the more active is the office grapevine. Rumors, gossip, and speculations can occur within organizations with many bureaucratic layers and are especially prevalent during times of uncertainty, conflict, and rapid change. Participating in agency gossip can be another major pitfall for you.

Agencies have both formal and informal aspects to their structures and function. The official policies and procedures, the formal organizational chart, and the chain of command all serve to describe the work of your agency. They show who is responsible for what, and they provide written guidelines for employees. The informal workings of the agency, however, may differ greatly from what is shown in organizational charts or policy manuals. For example, you may discover that official titles and actual job descriptions do not match, that those persons with official power may not be the individuals to whom others look for guidance, and that exceptions may be made to official policies under certain circumstances.

APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE: BUILDING COMPETENCE

As you prepare your learning agreement in light of generalist competencies and professional behaviors of the social work profession, work hard to incorporate learning experiences that will help you develop these competencies. Your supervisors understand what you must learn to become a competent generalist social worker, which is why they are included in developing your learning plan. University social work programs include the competencies they want students to acquire in the learning agreements they develop. Learning agreements are **working documents** that are modified throughout the practicum as additional learning needs are identified and new learning opportunities arise. Your plan should be exciting and ambitious to stretch and expand your knowledge and skills. It must also be realistic given your practicum setting, your abilities, your prior experience, and the time available to you.

Your plan should include experiences and activities that will help you integrate theory with practice. The practicum is your opportunity to see how theory supports practice, and

in what ways it does so. Classroom concepts and ideas should come alive during the practicum, and you will be expected to integrate what you learned in the classroom with your real-life experiences in your practicum setting. Reflect on what you learned in the courses you have taken, and work to bring that knowledge to bear in your practicum experience. Develop an awareness of the beliefs, values, and theories behind your decisions and your selection of an intervention. Seek exposure to social work practices and programs based on various beliefs about how, when, and why people and social systems change. All of these learning goals will help you bring theory and practice together, and you will begin to see how classroom learning and actual skills are actually related.

Even though your practicum learning experience will be specific to your practicum agency, remember that you are developing knowledge and skills that can be generalized to other social work settings. Secure a breadth of experience by building a wide variety of experiences into your practicum, but also find ways to gain a detailed and in-depth experience in your particular area of interest. By doing so, you will prepare yourself for work in another setting while immersing yourself in practice issues about which you care deeply. Tell your agency field instructor that you want as full and broad an experience as possible to prepare yourself for practice.

When you put your goals for learning into words in your learning agreement, describe your desired outcomes for learning in ways that permit the monitoring and measurement of your progress. At the same times, recognize that many important learning outcomes are inherently difficult to quantify and measure, such as developing a commitment to social work values, growing in self-awareness, and acquiring self-confidence. Describe your desired outcomes as precisely as possible, but remember not everything will be fully measurable. It is better to describe outcomes in general and imperfect ways than to not mention them at all, even if you have a difficult time showing how you will measure them. Consider how your attempts to measure your learning could parallel your clients' attempts to demonstrate intangible growth to those with whom they are working. Your struggle to grow and to measure that growth should increase your sensitivity to your clients' hard work and their potential frustration with not being able to demonstrate their progress.

Once you have completed your plan and it has been approved by your agency field instructor and faculty supervisor, follow it. Review it often and modify it as needed, but also resist the temptation to abandon a part of the plan simply because it calls for a learning opportunity that is difficult to arrange. Do everything possible to arrange and obtain the experiences you need to advance your learning. Become assertive in asking for meaningful learning experiences. If you need help to arrange these opportunities because of agency reluctance to offer them to you, ask your faculty supervisor to advocate on your behalf.

As you formulate your learning plan, give careful thought to your individual professional plans for the next five years. For example, if you are a BSW student who hopes to go on to graduate school, what can you do during the practicum to prepare yourself for graduate study or to increase your chances of being accepted into graduate school? If you expect to enter the job market immediately after graduation, what can you build into your plan that will prepare you for the job you seek? Which specific licensing or certification may be required for you to practice social work in your state or to become certified in a specialty area? If you are a MSW student, what learning goals can you set for yourself that will adequately prepare you for advanced practice?

In addition to the formal learning plans you develop, consider using a **professional journal**, which is a tool that you use on your own and do not share with anyone. This exercise can help you in many ways. A journal can document your progress in learning, show your professional growth over time, allow you to express your doubts and questions without necessarily sharing them with your supervisors, and offer you the chance to reflect on the very personal nature of your work. Many students report that journal keeping is very useful because it serves as a written record of growth that is both encouraging and reinforcing, particularly when viewed over time and in retrospect. A journal can include a listing of what you have accomplished, a description of what you have learned, your questions about your experiences, and your personal reactions to what you have seen and done. Reviewing your journal over time will help you to see your own personal and professional growth. Such a journal is not part of the documentation required for practicum, but is intended only for your personal use and review.

In addition, be alert to learning experiences that become available to you unexpectedly during your practicum, and find ways to integrate these experiences into your learning plan. Do not be surprised if much of what you actually learn during your practicum was not anticipated and therefore could not have been written into your plan. Expect and learn to appreciate surprises. For example, if your agency's funding is drastically cut, you may end up working in a different unit or service area. Your agency field instructor may take another job, so you will have to adjust to a successor with a different supervisory style. Although such experiences can be stressful, they can also represent valuable learning opportunities. They will certainly teach you to be flexible and open to new experiences. You can also gain invaluable perspective on how agencies and the social workers in them cope with change and stress, capitalize on funding or policy shifts, and turn problems into opportunities.

During your practicum, you may potentially learn some things that are surprising or even discouraging. For example, you will probably discover that not all clients are motivated, that some are difficult to like and respect, and that some will not make use of needed and available services. You will probably learn that client, agency, or social changes occur only slowly, that social problems are more complex than you realized, that you must be skillful in the art of politics, and that not all professionals are competent and ethical. Your faculty supervisor can help you gain perspective on such matters that might be disappointing to you, so be sure to share these experiences and observations with him or her.

Your agency field instructor will be paying attention to how you begin the practicum. First impressions have a powerful impact on personal and professional relationships, so it is vital that you make a favorable first impression on your agency field instructor and the other staff members in your practicum agency. Make a deliberate effort to get the practicum off to a good start. No doubt you want to be assigned tasks early in the practicum so that you will maximize your learning from the outset. The agency field instructor, however, will need to feel confident about assigning challenging responsibilities to you. To make these assignments, the agency field instructor must trust you and believe that you are capable of doing the work and not likely to make significant mistakes. Very often, the agency field supervisor makes this decision on the basis of early patterns observed in the student's behavior. Thus, you should display the desirable learning and work behaviors outlined in Table 2.2.

As you enter the office culture and observe the office politics of your agency, make thoughtful decisions about how you can respond in ways that will protect your practicum

Table 2.2 Learning and Work Behaviors for Practicum Success

Learning Behaviors	
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate enthusiasm for learning.• Show initiative and willingness to take responsibility.• Take all assignments seriously.• Volunteer to take on tasks.
Communication with supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform your supervisor of your previous experience.• Keep your supervisor informed of your work and plans.• Ask questions when you are uncertain or uninformed.• Consult with your supervisor when problems arise.
Building of relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show ability to accept and use guidance and feedback.• Seek opportunities to work with mentors.• Maintain professionalism in all interactions.• Maintain personal and professional boundaries.
Work Behaviors	
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare yourself well for all meetings, client sessions, and supervisory sessions.• Read all agency manuals, procedures, websites, and other material to understand what your agency does.
Timeliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete all assignments on time, allowing for time to do them well and not at the last minute.• Alert your agency field instructor of any necessary absence or change in schedule.
Assuming responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do your best to understand an assignment the first time and ask for any clarification you need.• Take responsibility for any mistakes you make.
Organizational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep your workspace organized and neat.• Abide by all requirements for appearance and grooming.
Ethical behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abide by the NASW <i>Code of Ethics</i> in all interactions.• Be extremely careful to guard client confidentiality.

experience and avoid offending others. Here are some general guidelines for you to consider when dealing with office culture and office politics:

- Carefully observe how staff members interact, maneuver, and use their power.
- Be cognizant of the official lines of authority and the power relationships inherent within the chain of command as described by the agency’s organizational chart.
- Do not assume that those individuals in certain positions are the most valued, powerful, and respected within the agency. Power relationships are often more subtle and complex than they appear at first. Consequently, your first impressions may be erroneous.
- Cultivate relationships with those persons in the agency who command the respect of most fellow professionals and the support staff and who are respected and valued by their administrative superiors.
- Do not align yourself with someone in the agency who has a reputation for being a complainer or a troublemaker, or who has little loyalty to the agency.

Every organization has unwritten rules, and it is likely that no one will think to tell you about them until after you ask about or break one. For example, you might be breaking a rule if you use your cell phone during a staff meeting, or if you submit a certain report

late even though it is permissible to be a little late on other types of reports. The best way to learn about these informal rules and procedures is to observe the work of others in the agency and ask why things are done a certain way.

Video Application Exercise 2.2. This interactive exercise offers the opportunity to reflect on what you might seek to learn about helping clients living in challenging situations.

As a student, it is important to know that the process of integrating academic content and actual practicum experiences works effectively at times and sometimes does not work as expected. You are likely to recall and use your academic learning, but you may also encounter situations that were never covered in classes. You may discover that what you learned in the classroom and what worked in theory and in rehearsal does not work as easily or effectively in real-life situations. Consider the numerous factors that influence whether a particular theory works in real people's lives. Real practice is more complicated than classroom examples, and it is important to learn how to respond to unexpected occurrences and to be open to learning things that sometimes seem contrary to what you have learned. These discrepancies may arise for many reasons, including your limited understanding from the classroom, great variation among social workers and clients alike, and the ineffective use of a technique that does not lead to successful outcomes.

Contributors to Intervention Outcomes

Prepare yourself to understand why interventions work sometimes, but not always. Using the information in this chapter and the accompanying figure showing the relationships among the client, the social worker, and the practice context, consult with your agency field

instructor about a particular case in which he or she was involved. Ask your instructor to use this figure to describe the interaction between the three factors that contributed to a successful or unsuccessful outcome in that case.



PREPARE FOR PRACTICE: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

This chapter has guided you to recall and integrate classroom knowledge into your practicum experience. It has also asked you to apply your knowledge in your practicum setting. The next step is to use all this knowledge and experience to prepare yourself for ongoing learning in professional practice. Following are two exercises designed to help you take several more steps toward becoming a professional.

Learning from Feedback

Learning is integrally related to the feedback you receive as you proceed through practicum. This feedback will come from your agency field instructor, your colleagues, your faculty supervisor, and your clients. Think about how you would respond to the following feedback comments made by agency field instructors and clients. What

can you learn from these statements, even though they may be challenging to hear and accept initially? Your responses should be genuine and modest because you are a learner, but also open and nondefensive because you need to hear what you do well and what you need to work on.

Agency Field Instructor Feedback	Your Professional Response
"I don't think you understand what we were asking you to do."	
"You will need to be more assertive if you want to be effective here."	
"What can I do to help you be more effective?"	
"I don't think you realize how you impact clients when you interview them."	

Client Feedback	Your Professional Response
"I'm not sure I want to work with a student."	
"You haven't experienced what I have. How could you possibly help me?"	
"You don't understand anything about me."	
"I thought you could help me more."	




Self-Monitoring of Competency Development

This tool highlights the stages of competency building for social workers. Micro, mezzo, and macro social work skills can all be monitored using this tool. It also shows the professional areas in which students can monitor themselves, including knowledge, skills, and values. Use this tool and its reflective questions to critically

analyze and discuss the ongoing process of your skill development, from your preparation to the refinement of your skills. Discuss the concepts presented in this tool with your agency field instructor, and ask him or her to help you through the stages of building your competency through observation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Think of several major competencies you hope to achieve, and use the reflective questions below to help you move from preparation of an intervention to refinement of a skill. For example, you might commit to

becoming competent in assessing clients for chemical dependency and make recommendations for an appropriate level of care or becoming competent in facilitating a support group for clients served by your agency.

Competency Building	Knowledge	Skills	Values
Preparing and designing an intervention 	Which orienting theories apply in this situation? How do I know what skills to use? What if I don't know what to do?	Which social work roles are indicated? How can I learn to use a practice model? How will I know if I am being effective?	Which ethical issues need to be addressed? How do I tell my clients I am a student? Is it ethical to practice on clients?
Initial attempt at an intervention 	Which practice theories apply? How can my client's goals be included in the intervention? What do my client's behaviors tell me?	Which helping skills are needed in this case? How can I use my assessment to guide my intervention? Do I have the skills needed for this practice model?	Is it ethical to be developing skills as I work with clients? How can I trust my judgment? Is it acceptable to adjust the model as the intervention proceeds?
Reflection on and adaptation of intervention 	What knowledge do I need that I do not possess now? How can I learn about evidence-based models? How can I prepare for the next client?	What should I do differently next time? How can I perform less mechanically? How can I evaluate my professional growth?	Am I able to focus on my client's issues rather than my own? How would my client define success? How can I get better at ethical decision making?
Refinement of intervention skills 	What is the best way to get feedback? What will I need to know to work in more challenging situations? What continuing education is required of social workers?	How can I individualize treatment plans? How can I enlist client involvement? How can I work with unmotivated and involuntary clients?	Will this work with diverse clients? What biases or stereotypes have I become aware of? What does the NASW <i>Code of Ethics</i> say about competency?

Video Application Exercise 2.3. This interactive exercise shows how to view situations when clients may not be able to make needed changes.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What personal values led you to choose social work as a profession, and what will you do if your values conflict with those of your clients?
 2. As you learn to assess clients and client systems, what might be the challenges of designing interventions based on multiple sources such as your assessment, client preferences, and research knowledge?
 3. Because it is important to learn how to work with diverse clients and coworkers, how can you structure your practicum so that you learn from clients very different from yourself?
 4. In what ways can you demonstrate your professionalism through your learning and work behaviors?
 5. How can you use your observations of intervention outcomes to conduct research about the effectiveness of your work?
-

Suggested Learning Activities

- If your agency cannot provide all the learning experiences you need, ask your agency field instructor to help you gain that experience by working several hours each week in another agency.
- Attend committee meetings, staff meetings, and any small group activities in your agency. Watch to see what interactional skills people have, and find a way to acquire them yourself.
- If you have a specific career goal such as chemical dependency certification, school social work certification, social work licensing, or a graduate degree, identify the requirements for this goal and seek practicum experiences related to that goal.
- Ask social workers in your agency what they wish they had known or were able to do when they started their social work position. Find ways to learn this information while in practicum.
- Attend meetings and trainings provided by agencies or the local branch of the National Association of Social Workers to see how social workers continue to acquire needed competency.

Chapter Review 2.1. Recall what you have learned from this chapter text by answering questions in this Chapter Review.

References and Recommended Readings

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Learning from Supervision

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter provides information on the nature, functions, benefits, and context of **professional supervision**, including a variety of styles, perspectives, and approaches to supervisory activities. It describes how students can **intentionally seek and use supervision** when integrating theory and practice for the first time, as well as to ensure ongoing professional growth. The stages of practicum from both the student and the supervisor point of view are presented, accompanied by recommendations for supervision at each respective stage. The **forms and types of supervision** commonly used by agency field instructors are described. Additionally, the chapter highlights the **requirements and guidelines for supervision** provided by social work licensing boards and professional organizations.

Professional social workers routinely use supervision to ensure the quality of their work and to provide a structure for ongoing professional growth. The practicum provides this same experience for students. Because the quality of your practicum is closely tied to the nature and quality of the teacher–student relationship you develop with your agency field instructor, it is advisable that you approach that relationship from a professional point of view. Learning from a skilled and caring supervisor can enrich a practicum experience and provide a positive model of staff interaction. Learning about the roles, responsibilities, and approaches to supervision will be of great help as you plan your practicum.

INTEGRATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE: CLASSROOM AND PRACTICUM

A good understanding of the purpose and functions of supervision within an organization is necessary to make full use of professional supervision. Supervisors monitor the work of those students whom they supervise, but also go beyond that to educating, directing, and supporting their supervisees. All this supervisory effort is directed

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the purpose of administrative, educational, and supportive social work supervision.
- Utilize forms of supervision available within the practicum setting.
- Engage in supervision for professional development in the use of the planned change process.
- Understand legal and professional standards for social work supervision.

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toward the ultimate goal of providing the highest quality of services possible, with the additional task of preparing students for professional practice. The role of an agency field instructor in supervising students is an integral part of the educational process for professional programs such as social work, and students can benefit significantly from it.

Serving as a supervisor in a social services agency can be a very challenging responsibility—one that requires a diverse set of skills such as sensitivity, skill, common sense, commitment, good humor, and intelligence. Supervisors are mediators and conduits between line-level social workers and higher-level agency administrators. They frequently represent the agency in its interactions with other agencies and the community. In addition, they often face the challenging task of responding to the concerns and complaints of clients who are dissatisfied with the agency's programs or with the performance of a social worker or other staff member.

Although being a supervisor can be demanding, it can also be a satisfying job, especially for those who understand and appreciate the teaching aspect of supervision. Watching a new social worker or social work student learn and develop on the job can be a rewarding and inspiring experience. That is one reason why many busy social workers choose to serve as agency field instructors to social work students. Ideally, your agency field instructor will be highly motivated to teach you about social work practice because he or she wants to give back to the profession.

The responsibilities of supervisors to clients, staff, funding sources, and administrative officials create a broad and demanding set of expectations. During your practicum, you should remember that supervising students is only one aspect of this job, so you will not usually be able to spend a great deal of time with your supervisor. However, you can learn much by observing his or her work.

Kadushin and Harkness (2002) identify three distinct but complimentary functions of supervisory practice that illustrate the broad scope of supervision: the administrative function, the supportive function, and the educational function. The **administrative function of supervision** focuses on the assigning, monitoring, and evaluating of services. This includes recruiting, selecting, and orienting new staff; assigning and coordinating work; monitoring and evaluating staff performance for efficiency and effectiveness; facilitating communication up and down within the organization; advocating for staff; serving as a buffer between staff and administration; representing the agency to the public; and encouraging needed agency change. As part of the administrative function, supervisors also work between levels of staff and administrators and interface with the funding sources and other agencies that have influence over the way the agency works to benefit both employees and clients.

Self-Check 3.1

The **educational function of supervision** focuses on providing formal and informal orientation and training. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that staff members receive all the initial training needed to perform well in their positions. Supervisors must keep abreast of the professional development of their employees, review their work and the documentation of their work, and oversee the work of employees with specific clients and interventions (Kadushin and Harkness, 2002).

Self-Check 3.2

The **supportive function of supervision** focuses on sustaining staff morale, cultivating a sense of teamwork, building commitment to agency goals and mission, encouraging workers by providing support, and dealing with work-related problems of conflict and frustration. It also includes modeling excellence, building trust between supervisors and supervisees so that professional growth can occur, facilitating the professional reflection process, and helping supervisees develop self-awareness necessary for practice. The supervisor must strive to create a work environment that is conducive to the provision of quality services to clients while also supporting staff who may at times feel stressed (Kadushin and Harkness, 2002).

Your agency field instructor will be concerned with these three functions as they relate to practicum students. He or she will pay attention to whether you are performing the work of the agency in an appropriate manner and in keeping with agency policies and procedures. In addition, your supervisor will be sensitive to your fears and insecurities and to the fact that you have personal responsibilities along with those related to the practicum. Your agency field instructor will want to do everything possible to facilitate your learning, but, in the final analysis, his or her primary obligation must be to the agency's clients or consumers and to the agency that serves those clients rather than to your learning.

Types of Supervision

Many types of social work supervision exist, all of which serve an important purpose, and all of which are valuable in specific, unique ways. Each type of supervision addresses a certain need or situation, and it is recommended that you engage with as many forms of supervision as you can, as each one teaches differently, uses different approaches, and leads to skill building in distinct ways.

Determine which of the following types of supervision are available to you in your practicum and find out how to access them. Make a plan now to avail yourself of all types available to you so you can learn from a variety of people and in a variety of ways.

- **Individual supervision:** regular meetings between agency field instructor and student
- **Group supervision:** meetings between agency field instructor and a group of students or employees
- **Peer supervision:** meetings of a group of social workers who assume responsibility for providing guidance and suggestions to each other
- **Formal case presentations:** meetings at which social workers describe their work on a specific case and invite advice and guidance from peers and supervisors about how it should be handled
- **Ad hoc supervision:** brief, need-based, unscheduled meetings to discuss a specific question or issue
- **Virtual supervision:** computer, e-mail, or live web-based supervision
- **Observation:** watching social workers practice and discussing observations with supervisor
- **Role-playing:** rehearsal of skills in which student takes on client or social work role
- **Modeling:** demonstration of a technique during supervision or actual intervention
- **Clinical supervision:** discussion of and reflection on interventions, ethics, techniques, and professional use of self

Self-Check 3.3

Video Application Exercise 3.1. This interactive exercise focuses on how mentoring can benefit both social workers and their clients.

Social workers who assume the role of agency field instructor to students have specific **ethical obligations** because they assume responsibility for the quality of work and outcomes of those they supervise. Ethically, they must have knowledge and skill in the areas in which they provide supervision, and they are expected to evaluate the performance of those whom they supervise by using effective and fair methods of supervision. They must also take care to manage the supervisory relationship, while maintaining professional boundaries and avoiding dual relationships, both of which can complicate and undermine the supervisory relationship. Supervisors always take on the responsibility for the outcomes of those they supervise, and this role assumes increasing importance when they supervise students who are performing tasks for the first time.

Social workers have specific **legal obligations** when taking on the responsibility of agency field instructor. These responsibilities relate to the **gatekeeping function of social work supervisors**, which is based on the principle of competence for practice. Both supervisors and schools of social work have legal and ethical obligations to ensure that those students who enter social work are competent, suitable for the profession, and meet the basic requirements for practice. At times, this requirement means that students and social workers who do not meet the standard may not be able to continue in the profession.

Supervisors are subject to **direct liability** for any failures or negligence to properly supervise their employees or students. Negative outcomes for clients can be the basis for complaints and lawsuits against both staff and supervisors. Examples of direct liability include the following:

- Failure to train employees in new or specialty areas of work
- Provision of poor or inadequate instructions to employees
- Inadequate supervision of employees resulting in negative outcomes for staff or clients
- Negligence or failure to provide sufficient supervision
- Assigning work to unqualified staff
- Failure to document supervision
- Failure to properly evaluate work of supervisees
- Failure to provide guidance in ethical decision making and deal with ethical violations
- Violation of professional and personal boundaries between supervisor and supervisee

The principle of indirect or **vicarious liability** also applies to social work supervisors, which means that a supervisor may be held liable for the potentially ineffective, incompetent, or

unethical actions of those workers whom he or she supervises. In their role as trainers, mentors, and supervisors, agency field instructors must do whatever they can to ensure that students avoid making decisions and taking actions that could be considered unprofessional in some way. Supervisors are accountable not just to those whom they supervise, but ultimately to their clients, which makes supervision a highly important area of practice. Supervisees may perform in incompetent or unethical ways such as **malfeasance** (commission of an unlawful or wrongful act), **misfeasance** (commission of a proper act in a way that is injurious or wrongful), or **nonfeasance** (failure to act in accordance with one's responsibility).

As a social work student, because your ethical behavior and adherence to legal requirements of the profession will impact both you and your supervisor, make sure you understand and abide by all requirements so that you do not put yourself, your supervisor, or your agency in a position of defending your actions. Supervisors may also be held professionally and legally accountable for the work of their supervisees, which means that they will pay close attention to what you are learning and doing, sometimes for the first time.

Furthermore, agency field instructors and students are held accountable for complying with **standards of care** (the type, level, and specific type of treatment or intervention that is indicated and appropriate for a specific client with a particular condition) and **standards of practice** (professional expectations for individual social workers that are based on what has been termed a reasonableness standard, which is the manner in which an ordinary person who is reasonable and prudent would have acted under similar circumstances). Beyond this, supervisors seek to promote **evidence-based practice** (practice supported by research demonstrating its effectiveness) and **best practices** (practices deemed to be the highest quality and most suitable for a particular client base). Standards of care are the lowest level of acceptable services, whereas best practices are the highest. Supervisors always aspire to provide the highest level, but that is not always possible due to financial constraints or other significant barriers. These concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 15, Evaluating Your Practice.

Supervisors have a variety of **supervisory styles** or preferred ways of doing their jobs, all of which will affect student experiences in the agency. No style or approach is necessarily better than the others. In fact, varying styles are needed depending on the nature of the work to be done and the level of training and experience of those being supervised. Table 3.1 illustrates the various approaches to supervision to which the student will generally need to adapt to and use. It can be useful to understand your agency field instructor's individual style and approach to supervising your work. Although supervisors will do their best to help you learn and grow, their other obligations are also important, and they may not be able to supervise you exactly as you wish. Given this reality, it is important that you be able to adjust to various styles of supervision. Supervisors vary a great deal in terms of overseeing and controlling the work of their supervisees, as Table 3.1 indicates.

Self-Check 3.4

Table 3.1 Supervisory Tasks and Styles

Supervisory Tasks	Supervisory Styles
Functions of supervision	Fulfills the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision Fulfills one or two functions of supervision more than other functions Fulfills the function of supervision required by the situation
Balance of process and outcome	Emphasizes the processes of interventions Emphasizes the outcomes of interventions Emphasizes both processes and outcomes
Attention to detail	Focuses on details of work Focuses on the broad mission and leaves the details to others Focuses on both details and the broad mission
Delegation of work	Delegates work when necessary Delegates work easily and generously Delegates work depending on the situation
Monitoring and evaluation of work	Monitors work closely to avoid mistakes and problems Allows the supervisee autonomy and assumes success Monitors work depending on the situation
Use of power	Retains power over supervisees and their work Shares power with supervisees and empowers them Uses power depending on the situation

APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE: BUILDING COMPETENCE

Social work is challenging and sometimes stressful, and because your work directly affects clients’ lives, you will need guidance, direction, support, and feedback from your agency field instructor. Both students and experienced social workers use supervision to help them deal with challenging situations, provide performance feedback, and give support. **Learning to seek and use supervision for professional development** is an important part of your practicum that can teach you the immense value of professional supervision to you, the agency, and your clients. Students experience tremendous professional growth while in practicum, and the use of supervision will facilitate this professional growth significantly.

Self-Check 3.5

Self-Check 3.6

Learn to use supervision in a purposeful, intentional, and responsible manner. Arranging a regularly scheduled supervisory meeting time each week will help you avoid the difficulties of struggling to arrange a different meeting time each week. Prepare for each meeting and do not expect your agency field instructor to do all of the talking. Bring

questions, observations, and requests for input and feedback to the meeting. Use this time to examine your performance and explore new ideas. Do everything you can to develop a positive working relationship with your supervisor, because this person will teach you, support you, guide you, correct you, evaluate your performance, and—you hope—will recommend you for a professional position when you complete your practicum.

The conscious building of professional social work skills and competencies is directly related to the conscious use of professional supervision. That is why social work programs and practicum agencies collaborate so closely in the design and implementation of practicum programs. Schools and agencies understand the developmental stages of professional growth, and consequently they choose to have other experienced social workers lead students through the process of integrating theory and practice. Both programs and agencies assist students to engage in self-reflective practice that enhances the acquisition of professional skills and practice behaviors. Seeking, thinking about, and making use of supervisory feedback are all parts of the reflective process, as is the necessity of responding to both positive feedback and changing one's practice based on suggestions for improvement.

You and your agency field instructor will discuss many things during your scheduled time together, and you should prepare for each of these meetings to maximize the time and benefits of your interactions. Look forward to these sessions, as you will be provided with much knowledge and guidance that you can use to enhance your knowledge and skills. Your meetings with your supervisor offer unique opportunities to learn how to integrate theory and practice, so take advantage of them. Following is a list of questions that you can bring to these discussions that demonstrate your willingness to learn and grow as a professional. Take these questions with you to supervisory sessions with your agency field instructor and engage in professional conversations about them over time. This will demonstrate your initiative and commitment to professional development.

Student Questions for Supervisory Sessions

- What professional social work roles will be expected of me?
- How can I determine the most appropriate level of intervention, including micro, mezzo, and macro interventions?
- Which theories and models of practice are commonly used in this agency?
- How do I individualize intervention plans to address client needs?
- What is the role of practice wisdom in interventions?
- What is the role of intuition in interventions?
- How can I keep abreast of social work research?
- How can I serve diverse clients in a culturally competent manner?
- How can I learn from my mistakes?
- How can I learn from my clients?
- How can academic information be applied and adapted in real-life situations?
- How can I determine if I am being effective?

Video Application Exercise 3.2. This interactive exercise will give you insights into how a supervisor can help you see the importance of basing your work on the client's values, rather than your own values.

During your practicum, you need to learn how to proactively utilize supervision both for consultation on interventions and for professional growth while you are a student. Continuing to use and give supervision to others is an element of sound social work practice. Expect your agency field instructor to ask some very pointed, thorough, and thoughtful questions to learn about and monitor your work in the agency. Supervisors ask these questions both to be of support to you and to ensure that clients are well served. They will help you analyze your performance, understand why an intervention was or was not successful, and develop your critical thinking skills. In regard to specific cases you have been assigned, the following questions may be addressed to help you reflect and purposefully grow professionally.

Supervisory Questions

To apply what you are learning about the importance and uses of professional supervision, choose a situation in which you have or will be involved in your practicum. It can be a short- or long-term intervention, and it can be at the micro, mezzo, or macro level of practice. For example, you may have finished your first home visit with a family considering becoming foster parents, you may have just facilitated an advisory council of an assisted living facility, or you may have completed an assessment of a community’s capacity to welcome immigrants.

Preparing yourself for this intervention probably required you to engage in a number of activities. You likely observed a social worker do this task before you became involved; read reports, descriptions, agendas,

or documentation of similar interventions; rehearsed the skills necessary for this intervention; and discussed any concerns with your agency field instructor. You may have had the chance to discuss each phase of the planned change process with your agency field instructor, who undoubtedly had a list of questions to help you process and learn from your intervention. Although you may not have completed the four phases of the planned change process (engagement, assessment, intervention, and termination/evaluation), think about how you would answer these questions posed by your agency field instructor. He or she will use questions such as these to help you reflect on your work, integrate theory and practice, and evaluate yourself.

Phases of the Planned Change Process	Supervisory Questions Related to the Phase
Engagement	How did you prepare for the first meeting with your client(s) or client system? Was your client voluntary or involuntary? How did you explain that you are a student? Did you fully understand what your task and goals were? Which interviewing skills did you use to engage your client? What was your client’s level of motivation? Did you experience any challenges in engaging the client?
Assessment	Which client problems and issues were identified? Which client strengths were identified that can be used in interventions? What were your client’s goals and desires? Which knowledge and skills did you draw upon as you assessed your client?

Phases of the Planned Change Process	Supervisory Questions Related to the Phase
Intervention	<p>How did you decide upon the intervention plan?</p> <p>Which responsibilities did you and your client assume?</p> <p>Which theories and models guided your intervention?</p> <p>Which evidence or research guided you?</p> <p>Which ethical standards or issues were at play, and how did you handle them?</p>
Termination and Evaluation	<p>To what degree was the intervention a success?</p> <p>What did you use to measure outcomes?</p> <p>Did your client view the intervention as successful?</p> <p>How was termination handled?</p> <p>What did you learn from this intervention?</p> <p>What would you do differently next time and why?</p>

A supervisor is expected to give both instruction and feedback, and you will increase your chances of success if you seek out and are open to input about yourself and your work. You may be anxious because your agency field instructor will be evaluating your performance in an ongoing way and at the end of your practicum. This reaction is certainly understandable, and in many ways parallels what clients feel when they are being monitored by social workers. However, to help you develop your knowledge and skills over time, your agency field instructor should evaluate your performance in an ongoing and continuous manner, and you should accept this monitoring and evaluation in an open and nondefensive manner.

You will receive feedback, suggestions, and constructive criticism during all phases of your practicum so that you can continue to grow professionally. If this is not happening, discuss the matter with your agency field instructor and ask for an ongoing critique of your performance in the use of the planned change process at any level of practice in which you are engaged. As you receive more feedback and ongoing training, you will be expected to demonstrate that you have taken this instruction to heart and have grown as a result.

As you begin your practicum and take on new responsibilities, you may be afraid of making a serious mistake or in some way hurting your clients. Such worries are to be expected. In fact, your agency field instructor will become concerned if you do not have these fears, because that could mean that you are overconfident or that you do not understand the seriousness of your situation. Do not hesitate to express your fears. Your agency field instructor can help you address these concerns and prepare you for any tasks assigned to you. You may be worried about making mistakes that negatively impact your clients, but you can take heart in the knowledge that most beginning student errors tend to be those related to being tentative and not doing enough, rather than actually harming clients. Over time, your growing competence will allow you to practice confidently and, at necessary points in time, with boldness.

Your agency field instructor will likely view any errors or omissions that you make not only as mistakes, but also as ways to learn and grow in your work with future clients and in more challenging future situations. He or she will help you gain the confidence needed to act when appropriate and overcome any hesitance you have based on lack of

knowledge or confidence. Failing to act is not potentially as harmful as doing the wrong thing, so discuss your hesitance with your agency field instructor to help you learn how to take action even if you are not fully certain of what should be done. Over time, you will learn to observe, critique, evaluate, instruct, and affirm your own practice based on the constructive feedback given by your agency field instructor. This will teach you the value of ongoing self-monitoring of the effectiveness of your work in addition to the value of supervision.

Supervision is an **interactional process** that in many ways parallels the social worker–client relationship and the helping process (Shulman, 1992). To help you improve your performance, your agency field instructor will employ many of the techniques with you that other social workers use when working with clients. This includes offering guidance and support, providing feedback, recognizing strengths, and confronting when necessary. If you have the opportunity, watch your supervisor model the supervisory techniques with you that are also effective with clients, focusing on how they help you grow by being open to teaching and feedback.

Students tend to move through several stages during their practicum experience, including (1) **orientation**, (2) **exploration and skill building**, and (3) **beginning competency**. Your agency field instructor will provide specific and varying types of help at each stage, helping you move forward as a professional. As you become more knowledgeable and competent, your agency field instructor will apply different strategies of supervision with you because your growth and the situations require them. As you move through the practicum, be conscious of the shifts in your experiences outlined in Table 3.2. These experiences of both students and supervisors, combined with the stage of practicum, dictate the ways in which supervision will change over the course of your practicum.

Although unlikely, it is possible that tensions and conflicts may arise in your supervisory relationship. For example, you may feel that your agency field instructor does not devote enough time to you and your learning needs. Perhaps you may believe that your agency field instructor is either too controlling or not structured enough. The two of you may have very different personalities. Perhaps you and your agency field instructor differ in terms of gender, race, ethnic background, or age, and at times these differences affect your relationship and work in ways you are not sure about how to handle. You may wonder if your supervisor is ethical because of something you observe. If you have a conflict or difficulty with your agency field instructor, talk about it with this person, or ask your faculty supervisor for guidance. Do not avoid the problem or circumvent your agency field instructor. You will be expected to find ways to deal with these issues, both now and in any future work environment. If the problem cannot be worked out with your agency field instructor, consult with your faculty supervisor.

Exercise caution when developing a **dual relationship** with your agency field instructor. This person should act as a supervisor, not a friend or a counselor. Although an element of friendship can arise between students and supervisors, this can also be problematic when supervisors need to provide feedback and students need to be able to accept it. State laws and professional organizations may prohibit forms of dual relationships, including romantic relationships. Do not agree to requests by your supervisor or coworkers to engage in personal requests to provide child care, borrow personal items or money, or other similar behaviors. If you have personal problems

Table 3.2 Stages of Practicum: Student and Supervisor Experiences

Stage of Practicum	Student Experiences	Supervisor Experiences
Orientation Stage	<p>Approach to Supervision Enthusiastic, excited, anxious, unsure, overwhelmed, confused, ready, motivated, confident, worried about making mistakes, hesitant to be observed</p> <p>Responsibilities Develop learning plan, participate in orientation and training, become familiar with agency staff and programs, attend agency meetings, visit other agencies</p>	<p>Approach to Supervision Motivated to teach, hopeful that student will be competent, challenged to find time to supervise student</p> <p>Responsibilities Provide orientation and training, offer guidance and direction, provide encouragement, assist in selection of learning activities, support initial attempts at practice behaviors, identify student competencies and limitations</p>
Exploration and Skill-Building Stage	<p>Approach to Supervision Less anxious, more realistic, motivated, growing in confidence, willing to be observed, motivated by successes, learning from mistakes</p> <p>Responsibilities Implement learning plan, take on responsibilities, develop professional skills and knowledge, integrate theory and practice, gain exposure to all facets of agency practice, gain experience in all levels of practice, play variety of social work roles, identify strengths and address limitations</p>	<p>Approach to Supervision Confident in student competence, allowing more student autonomy, aware of student strengths and limitations and need for supervision</p> <p>Responsibilities Monitor completion of learning activities, provide instructive and corrective feedback, help build on experiences, assist student in integrating theory and practice, help student assume more challenging tasks</p>
Beginning Competency Stage	<p>Approach to Supervision More confident in skills, increased insight, self-aware, motivated for professional position, appreciative of supervision, and experienced in most aspects of practicum experience</p> <p>Responsibilities Identify own professional growth needs, identify tasks independently, integrate theory and practice, refine skills</p>	<p>Approach to Supervision Confident in student as an entry-level practitioner, affirming of student competence</p> <p>Responsibilities Help student refine skills, assign broad range of tasks at all levels of practice, expect autonomous performance, help student generalize learning to other settings and populations</p>

that arise during your practicum, do not ask or expect your agency field instructor to provide counseling. If you need such services, arrange to receive them in another way. As supervision is not counseling or therapy, if you need counseling for personal issues or those related to your practicum, seek counseling from a professional other than your agency field instructor.

Video Application Exercise 3.3. This interactive exercise suggests that you determine early in your career how to seek and use professional supervision.

PREPARE FOR PRACTICE: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

This chapter has guided you to recall and integrate classroom knowledge about supervision into your practicum experience. It has also asked you to apply your knowledge of supervision in your practicum setting. The next step is to use all this knowledge and experience to prepare yourself for professional practice utilizing supervision. Following are two exercises designed to help you take several more steps toward becoming a professional.

State Standards for Supervision

Each state has its own distinct way of regulating social work supervision and may specify how such supervision must be done, how often, and by whom. These standards are applied because clients deserve the best services possible, which in turn requires that social workers seeking licensure develop competence under the supervision of trained and approved social workers. Read the laws and guidelines of your state regarding the social work profession and answer the following questions.

Who is considered an approved supervisor for social workers seeking licensing (i.e., degree, training in supervision, practice experience)?

How much supervision is required of a social worker seeking licensure, with what frequency, and on which topics?

How is supervision documented and included in applications for licensure?

Professional Standards for Supervision

Read the National Association of Social Workers *Best Practices in Supervision* (NASW, 2013) and *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2017), which describe the profession’s commitment to and best practices in providing and seeking supervision throughout a social work career. Answer the following questions based on what you learned.