

Planning a Placement

Objectives

To guide you in preparing for a contracting meeting or meetings

Relevance

This would be most relevant to those negotiating a placement with their supervisor

Specific Outcomes

The development of an agenda for your contracting meeting that meets your needs

“I applied for a placement and got an interview. I then was offered an amazing opportunity but still decided to go to the interview, but made the mistake of not emailing her beforehand. The supervisor assumed I would accept the placement, and before I could get a word in, gave it to me and started outlining deliverables, start dates and deadlines. I had to tell the supervisor right there and then I wasn’t interested, and it sucked”
PhD Student

A key skill that all organisational psychologists need to develop is the ability to negotiate a service contract. This is, at its core, ensuring that everyone is operating from a shared understanding. Contracting occurs in all placements and there is a lot that students can do to ensure that it is done well. The purpose of this worksheet is to provide some suggestions on how you might do this.

Contracting a Placement

Generally when applying for a placement, you will be invited to an interview, and this is where most of the formal contracting occurs. An important thing to acknowledge is that there is generally a sense of power imbalance in this meeting, which can make asking questions difficult. It has also been the experience of some students that they feel put on the spot to accept a placement at that meeting, before they have had time to properly consider it. A great way to overcome this power imbalance is to send an email before the interview with a set of points to add to the meeting agenda and what you see as the purpose of this meeting. Supervisors appreciate this and it helps you to communicate a more professional image.

Step 1: Decide on the Outcome

The first step in preparing for the initial interview is to decide what outcomes you would be most comfortable with. You might want to be offered the placement in the meeting and start negotiating the logistics of your time there. On the other hand, you might be in a situation where you are unsure about this placement, have several interviews, or are just there to learn more. If both you and the interviewer are not on the same page regarding the purpose of this meeting, you may be in for a very uncomfortable interview.

It is advised that you don't copy and paste the examples. Several students may have applied for placements with this supervisor.

In your email, write down what you see as the purpose of this meeting and specifically when you would like to make a decision about whether or not to accept the placement.

Example

I hope that you can get the information you need to decide if I am a suitable candidate. At this stage, I'm really interested in learning more about this opportunity, but perhaps at the end of the meeting we can organise how we might like to notify each other regarding whether we would like to start the placement.

Step 2: Create an Agenda

The next step is to develop a series of discussion points for the meeting. This can take anywhere from a half an hour to a couple of days to develop, so make sure you start well before your interview date.

Logistical Matters

It is important to address some of the more logistical matters before you start your placement. Some students and supervisors prefer to do this after a placement offer has been accepted, however you might like to ask some basic questions regarding the logistics.

- What days will you attend/when are you available?
- Start and finish times?
- Who will I be reporting to?
- How frequent is your supervision? What times?

Project Details

Placements will almost always be focused around a specific project, task or piece of work. It is important before you sign up to a placement that you clearly understand this project. Some questions you might like to consider include:

- What is the project? What are the goals?
- Define project milestones
- What are the deliverables? (i.e. specific outputs)
- What resources will I have access to?
- Are there any confidentiality constraints with the placement materials you will be working with?
- Who does the work I complete for this project

- belong to? Consider your intellectual property.
- Project timelines

Learning Outcomes

Placement is primarily a learning opportunity and so needs to be defined in those terms. You are providing your expertise and labour to the organisation in exchange for exposure to work and supervision. You can help make this explicit by considering questions such as:

- What APAC competencies can I meet with this placement?
- What areas of practice will I be exposed to?
- What specific skills can I gain?
- Is this placement new and challenging?
- Are there good networking opportunities?
- How does this placement align with my career?

Organisation-supervisee details:

- What is your role in the organisation?
- Are there mandatory tasks I will have to complete?
- What do you think you can contribute to the organisation?
- What supports do I have outside the supervisor-supervisee relationship?

Conclusion

Contracting is perhaps one of the most important skills that you will learn in the degree. In our experience, most of the issues that arise during placement occurs because of poor contracting, where the supervisor, student and clients are operating from a different understandings of the placement. The contracting process is not only dependent on you, but also your supervisor and the placement organisation. So it will not always go well, but ensuring that you play an active role will maximise your chances of having a successful placement.

“I did not realise how valuable the contracting experience would be. Contracting provided me with clarity regarding expectations, outcomes and my role in general. Additionally, contracting was also reassuring in that I felt comfortable that my supervisor and I were on the same page”
Masters Student