

Co-op Employer Guide

Saint Mary's University Co-operative Education



Co-op Employer Guide

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Introduction

Dear Employer Partners,

Welcome, and thank you for partnering with Saint Mary's University (SMU) Co-operative Education. By choosing to hire an SMU Co-op student, you are helping prepare the next generation of professionals while bringing fresh perspectives, knowledge, and talent to your organization.

Co-op students are still developing workplace knowledge, confidence, and professional skills. As a supervisor, you play an important role in bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional practice. Through meaningful work, clear expectations, ongoing coaching, and regular feedback, you help students build confidence, develop career-ready skills, and become increasingly independent throughout their work term.

Our goal is to support both you and your Co-op student in having a positive and successful work term experience. This guide outlines key program requirements, supervisor responsibilities, recommended practices, and available supports to help you create a meaningful learning experience while meeting your organization's goals. Whether you are hosting a Co-op student for the first time or have supervised many students before, this guide is designed to serve as a practical resource that you can refer to throughout the work term.

Throughout the guide, you'll find information on hiring and onboarding, supporting student learning and development, creating an inclusive workplace, providing effective feedback, coaching performance, and navigating challenges should they arise. You'll also find links to additional resources and information about the broader field of work-integrated learning through Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL).

Thank you for your continued partnership and for investing your time, knowledge, and experience in helping our students succeed. We value your support, welcome your feedback, and look forward to working with you to create rewarding work-integrated learning experiences for both students and employers.

With appreciation,
The SMU Co-op Team

Meet the Co-op Team

Throughout the work term, you'll have a dedicated team available to support both you and your student. Whether you have questions about recruitment, evaluations, performance concerns, or simply want to discuss a student's progress, we're here to help.

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Hiring a Co-op Student

Before hiring a Co-op student, there are a few program requirements and administrative considerations to be aware of. This section provides an overview of key information related to position approval, work term registration, student eligibility, and employer resources to help ensure a smooth recruitment, hiring, and onboarding process. If you have questions at any stage, the SMU Co-op Office is available to provide guidance and support.

Process & Considerations

Job Approvals

All Co-op positions must be approved by the SMU Co-op office. Positions should be paid, 12-16 weeks in duration, full-time (minimum of 32.5 hours per week) and provide meaningful work experience related to the student's area of study. Some organizations may require an in-person or virtual site visit.

Position approval helps ensure students receive meaningful, discipline-related work that supports both their academic learning and professional development.

Posting a Co-op Job

For information on recruiting and posting a Co-op position, refer to the [Employer Guide](#) under *How to recruit a Co-op student*.

Funding for Employers

For information on available wage subsidies and funding opportunities, refer to [Potential Funding Opportunities](#) under *Employer Resources*.

International Student Employment Eligibility

[Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#) policies can change. Employers are encouraged to refer to the latest guidance from IRCC, and the SMU Co-op Office will share updates when changes may affect employer partners or students.

Work Term Registration

To register a work term, both supervisor and student must thoroughly read and sign the Co-op Agreement which confirms start and end dates, hourly wage, number of hours per week and the supervisor's contact information (for Midpoint Evaluations and Midpoint Meeting).

Students Completing Courses During a Work Term

Students may be permitted to be enrolled in 6 credit hours (typically two courses), with the exception of students in the Faculty of Science while on a Fall or Winter or Summer work term. Course requirements must be completed outside of Co-op work hours.

Repeat Work Terms

Students may be approved to return to the same organization or complete back-to-back work terms (up to eight months) with approval from the Co-op Faculty Advisor, provided the arrangement supports the student's academic requirements.

Employers and students must demonstrate that the subsequent work term provides increased responsibility, new learning opportunities, or a significant change in duties compared with the previous placement.

NEED SOME GUIDANCE?

Our team is here to support you!

If you're unsure whether a position meets Co-op requirements or if you have questions about recruitment, contact the SMU Co-op Office before posting. We're happy to discuss the role and help ensure it aligns with program expectations.

Supervisor Milestone Checklist

To optimize the work term for both the Co-op student and your department, please consider these suggested tips:

In advance of the work term

- ☐ If deemed necessary by SMU Co-op, participate in a site visit (either in person or virtual).
- ☐ Invite the student to your workplace or hold a virtual introduction meeting to familiarize the student with the location and key colleagues/supervisor.
- ☐ Confirm start/end dates, work hours and dress code with the student.
- ☐ Advise the student of any documentation to bring on the first day.
- ☐ Have designated workspace, supplies and equipment ready and inform security/reception of the student's start date and work arrangement.
- ☐ Provide a desk for the student located near the team and supervisor for greater interaction and support.

First week of the work term

- ☐ Review and discuss student Learning Objectives for the work term.
- ☐ Discuss work-related policies such as time off, holidays, cell phone / computer use, etc.
- ☐ Discuss the expected communication protocol should the student be sick or absent.
- ☐ Verify pay schedule.
- ☐ Ensure the student understands supervisory structure regarding any questions, etc.
- ☐ Assign the student to a mentor to help them feel at ease while adjusting to the work culture, especially for those living outside of their home city.
- ☐ Share workplace norms and provide examples of preferred communication (email tone, meeting etiquette), professional behavior, feedback styles, office dynamics and decision-making processes.
- ☐ Introduce your student to the team and office amenities.

During the work term

- ☐ Schedule regular check-ins (1:1's) throughout the work term to review progress and give feedback (ideally once a week during the first month of the work term).
- ☐ Complete the Employer Midpoint Online Evaluation; will be sent from coop@smu.ca approximately halfway through the term.
- ☐ Be available to meet with the student and their WIL Advisor midway through the work term to discuss the student's progress during the Midpoint Virtual Meeting.
- ☐ Allow the student to take any necessary meetings with SMU Co-op staff during work hours.
- ☐ Complete the online Final Employer Online Evaluation and discuss your feedback with your Co-op student prior to the end of the work term.
- ☐ Have career discussions with the student; provide professional development and opportunities for them to connect with other departments and mentors.

End of the work term

- ❑ Complete the **Final Employer Online Evaluation** - sent via Career360 a few weeks prior to end of work term - and discuss your feedback with your Co-op student prior to the end of the work term.
- ❑ Arrange to provide a positive reference for the student, discuss career supports and next steps for keeping in touch. Co-op students must submit a Work Term Report for each work term completed which will be graded with a pass or fail by the Co-op Faculty Advisor. Deadlines: Fall WT – January 1; Winter WT – May 1; Summer WT – September 1.

Communication with SMU Co-op staff

- ❑ Loop the Co-op Education office in if you have any concerns – the sooner the better, particularly before the Midpoint Virtual Meeting. E.g., changes in supervisor, student tardiness, performance issues, etc.
- ❑ Supervisors will be introduced to the Co-op student's WIL advisor by email at the beginning of the work term.

Designing a Successful Co-op

Co-op students bring strong potential, fresh perspectives and a willingness to learn. As emerging professionals, they are often entering a workplace environment for the first time and may need support as they develop confidence, independence and professional judgment.

A successful co-op experience balances meaningful contributions to your organization with intentional opportunities for student learning and growth. By designing thoughtful work, setting clear expectations and providing ongoing support, employers can help students succeed while gaining valuable contributions from their co-op hire.

Create Meaningful Work Experiences

A co-op work term should provide students with opportunities to apply their academic learning, develop professional skills and contribute to your organization's goals.

When designing a co-op position:

- ✓ Provide meaningful projects and responsibilities that contribute to organizational goals.

- ✓ Assign work that allows students to apply and develop skills related to their program of study.
- ✓ Balance independent work with opportunities for collaboration and mentorship.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for students to learn about different areas of your organization.
- ✓ Consider including projects that have a clear beginning, middle, and end so students can see the impact of their work.
- ✓ Avoid limiting students to only administrative or repetitive tasks — co-op students can contribute at a higher level when given appropriate guidance and support.
- ✓ Consider how the role can build transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and project management.

Remember that students are not expected to arrive with all the skills needed to complete a role independently. The purpose of co-op is to provide a structured environment where students can learn, contribute and grow.

Employer Success Tips

Successful Co-op supervisors:

- ✓ Clarify expectations early and often.
- ✓ Provide structured onboarding and ongoing feedback.
- ✓ Make workplace norms explicit.
- ✓ Facilitate networking and connections.
- ✓ Normalize learning, questions and mistakes.
- ✓ Ensure equitable, meaningful work opportunities.
- ✓ Support communication across cultures.
- ✓ Prioritize student well-being.

Set Students up for Success

The first few weeks of a work term are an important transition period. Clear communication and structured onboarding help students understand their role, build confidence and become productive members of the team.

Communication Strategies

1. Use Multiple Communication Formats

Students may learn and process information differently.

Consider combining:

- Verbal explanations and walkthroughs.
- Written instructions and documentation.
- Visual examples, templates or screenshots.
- Follow-up summaries after meetings or conversations.

2. Normalize Questions

Create an environment where students feel comfortable asking for clarification.

Consider saying:

“If anything is unclear, just ask — that’s part of the learning process!”

3. Make Expectations Explicit

Do not assume students already understand workplace norms.

Discuss:

- Role responsibilities and priorities.
- How tasks should be completed.
- Deadlines and timelines.
- Communication preferences and response expectations.
- Meeting etiquette and workplace routines.
- Procedures, templates and examples of previous work.

4. Break Complex Tasks into Manageable Steps

Help students build confidence by:

- Providing clear milestones.
- Breaking larger projects into smaller steps.
- Confirming understanding before moving forward.
- Gradually increasing responsibility as skills develop.

5. Create Predictability in Meetings

Support effective communication by:

- Sharing agendas in advance when possible.
- Providing relevant materials beforehand.
- Summarizing decisions, responsibilities and next steps afterward.

Supervising Inclusively

Students bring different experiences, communication styles and approaches to learning. Inclusive supervision recognizes these differences and creates an environment where students can ask questions, share ideas and develop professionally.

Consider asking:

- “What helps you learn best?”
- “Would you prefer written instructions, a walkthrough or both?”
- “What strategies are you using to learn and check your understanding?”
- “Is there anything you need from me to feel more confident in your role?”

Accommodations & Mental Health

Co-op students may experience challenges related to mental health, disability, or personal circumstances during their work term. Employers play an important role in creating a supportive workplace where students can access appropriate support.

In Nova Scotia, employers cannot discriminate against employees based on disability, including mental health-related disabilities.

Students are not required to disclose a specific diagnosis unless documentation is required for the requested accommodation.

If a student requests support, focus the conversation on:

- What they are experiencing.
- How it is impacting their work.
- What workplace support may help them succeed.

Possible workplace accommodations may include:

- Written instructions instead of verbal instructions.
- Adjusted work schedules when possible.
- Remote work options when job duties allow.
- A quieter workspace.
- Adjusted deadlines
- More frequent check-ins or feedback

For more information, refer the [Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia resource](#).

Supporting Students from Diverse Backgrounds

SMU co-op students come from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and locations around the world. Many students — including international students — may be entering a Canadian workplace for the first time and learning workplace expectations.

Employers play an important role in helping students understand how their organization operates and what success looks like.

Clear communication, patience and structured onboarding help students contribute more effectively and feel confident in their roles.

Cultural Norms and Workplace Expectations

SMU's student population includes students from more than 117 countries, bringing a wide range of cultural perspectives and workplace experiences. Students may not be familiar with Canadian workplace norms, so employers should avoid assuming knowledge and instead make expectations clear.

Examples of areas where expectations may differ include:

Communication Styles

Non-verbal communication, feedback styles and approaches to asking questions can vary across cultures. A student's communication style may not always indicate their level of understanding, confidence or engagement.

Time Management and Punctuality

Expectations around deadlines, meeting attendance and workplace schedules may differ between cultures. Clearly communicate your organization's expectations around punctuality and timelines.

Language Support

For many international students, English may not be their first language. Provide opportunities for clarification, encourage questions and offer constructive feedback to support continued language development.

Student Well-Being

International students may experience additional pressures related to adapting to a new country, finances, academics, family responsibilities or living far from home.

If you notice changes in a student's engagement, energy, communication or performance, consider checking in and connecting them with appropriate supports, including the Co-op Office when needed.

Supporting Student Engagement & Belonging

Providing meaningful, supported work that aligns with the student's learning objectives allows students to contribute to organizational goals while developing career-ready skills, and is essential to helping Co-op students feel valued.

When students understand how their work contributes to team goals, they are more likely to feel a sense of purpose and belonging. Involving them in meetings and projects further reinforces their role as valued team members. This sense of inclusion is strengthened when supervisors create a structured and predictable environment.

Examples include:

- Weekly 1:1 check-in.
- Clear task lists and deadlines.

- Discuss progress to date.
- Agendas sent in advance of meeting.
- Written follow ups to verbal instructions.

Creating an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, seeking clarification, and learning from mistakes helps build confidence, encourages initiative, and leads to stronger workplace outcomes.

Additionally, demonstrating inclusive, respectful behaviour and adapting to different communication or learning styles ensures all students feel supported. When supervisors seek out and act on student feedback, they further signal that the student's voice matters.

Behaviors That Support Belonging

Supervisors can help foster belonging by:

- Using inclusive language.
- Avoiding acronyms or explaining them when used.
- Being mindful of different learning or communication styles.
- Making space for quiet voices.
- Respecting diverse backgrounds, identities and lived experiences.

Supervisors play a key role in helping Co-op students feel a sense of belonging, starting with a warm and well-structured onboarding experience. Early communication, clear expectations and thoughtful preparation — such as introducing students to team members, assigning a mentor and reviewing workplace norms — help reduce anxiety and set students up for success.

Taking the time to normalize the learning process further supports their confidence by reinforcing that questions, mistakes and growth are all expected parts of their experience.

Teaching & Developing Students

A co-op work term is a learning experience that helps students develop the skills, confidence and professional judgment needed for their future careers. Effective supervisors provide opportunities for students to learn, ask questions, take ownership of their work and receive feedback that helps them grow.

Supporting Today's Co-op Student

1. Transitioning from Classroom to Workplace

What employers may observe:

- Students may struggle to apply theory to real tasks.
- Uncertainty around expectations, priorities and decision-making.

How employers can support:

- Provide **clear onboarding + role clarity**
- Break down tasks into “what success looks like”.
- Explain why tasks matter (connect to bigger picture).

2. Building Confidence in Skills

What employers may observe:

- Strong technical knowledge, but gaps in communication, initiative, or problem-solving.
- Hesitation in asking questions or taking ownership.

How employers can support:

- Normalize learning: “We expect you to ask questions”.
- Model communication (emails, meetings, feedback conversations).
- Give structured feedback early and often (not just at midpoint/end).

3. Understanding Workplace Culture

What employers may observe:

- Students unsure about professionalism expectations (tone, hierarchy, boundaries).

- Uncertainty around when to speak up or take initiative.

How employers can support:

- Make the implicit explicit (e.g., response time expectations, meeting etiquette).
- Assign a buddy/mentor.
- Encourage observation + reflection (e.g., “What are you noticing about how we work here?”).

4. Building Networks & Workplace Relationships

What employers may observe:

- Students may stay within their immediate team.
- Limited confidence reaching out to others for informational conversations.

How employers can support:

- Facilitate introductions beyond the immediate team.
- Invite students to cross-team meetings.
- Encourage participation in informal spaces (lunch, coffee chats).

5. Confidence & Professionalism Identity

What employers may observe:

- Imposter syndrome, fear of making mistakes.
- Reluctance to contribute ideas.

How employers can support:

- Reinforce that they are learners, not finished professionals.
- Acknowledge progress (e.g., “You handled that client email well”).
- Create psychological safety for questions and mistakes.

6. Equity, Inclusion & Access Barriers

What employers may observe:

- Some students may experience exclusion, bias, or lack of belonging.
- Unequal access to meaningful work or feedback.

How employers can support:

- Ensure equitable access to meaningful tasks and mentorship.
- Check assumptions about “readiness” or communication style.
- Foster inclusive team dynamics (invite input, value diverse perspectives).

7. Supporting International Students (if applicable)

What employers may observe:

- Language confidence, unfamiliarity with Canadian workplace norms.
- Difficulty interpreting expectations or feedback.

How employers can support:

- Use clear, direct communication (avoid idioms/jargon).
- Confirm understanding (two-way communication).
- Provide context behind feedback.
- Support student’s unique customs and holidays.

8. Creating Meaningful Work Experiences

What employers may observe:

- Students disengage when given repetitive or low-skill tasks.
- Difficulty connecting work to career goals.

How employers can support:

- Design roles with progressive responsibility.
- Include at least one stretch project (A stretch project is a task that is challenging but achievable, where someone needs to learn new skills, take on more responsibility, or work in unfamiliar ways).
- Schedule regular check-ins focused on learning – not just output.

9. Supporting Well-Being & Workload

What employers may observe:

- Stress navigating new environments and expectations.
- Pressure to perform while still learning.

How employers can support:

- Set realistic expectations (especially early weeks).
- Encourage work-life balance habits.
- Check in holistically (“How is the experience going for you?”).

Coaching Student Development

Co-op students are still learning workplace norms. When performance gaps appear, supervisors can use a structured, supportive approach that builds skills, confidence and independence.



1. Clarify Expectations with Concrete Examples

Supervisors can help by:

- **Showing examples** of good work
- Showing completed documents, reports, or templates
- Reviewing **what success looks** like for each task
- Explaining how tasks will be evaluated

2. Break Tasks into Clear, Manageable Steps

Underperformance often comes from feeling overwhelmed or missing steps. Supervisors can:

- Break large tasks into smaller pieces
- Set short, interim deadlines
- Provide a step-by-step checklist
- Confirm understanding before work begins

3. Increase Touchpoints

Struggling students usually need more structure, not less. Supervisors can temporarily provide more check-ins to support the students' progress.

- Schedule brief daily or frequent check-ins.
- Review work throughout task, not just at the end.
- Ask students to summarize their plan before starting.
- Ask for a recap of next steps after meetings.

4. Teach the Skill

Many gaps reflect missing skills (e.g., prioritization, professional email writing, research methods).

Supervisors can:

- Demonstrate how to approach the task.
- Work through one example together, sharing practical tips.
- Coach the student through the next example.

5. Give Supportive, Actionable Feedback

- Name the specific issue.
- Explain why it matters.
- Describe what to change.
- Provide a clear example.

SUPERVISOR SCRIPT

“Your report missed key discussion points. Accuracy matters for our records. Next time, try taking point form notes during meetings.”

6. Ask Questions to Understand the Barrier

The issue may be misunderstanding, confidence or workload rather than ability.

Consider asking the following:

- “Which part of this felt unclear?”
- “Where did you get stuck?”
- “Would it help to do the first step together?”
- “What would make this more manageable?”

7. Use Visual Supports

Many students benefit from visual guidance, such as:

- Checklists.
- Workflows or flowcharts.
- Templates.
- Colour coded priorities.
- Step-by-step written instructions.

8. Reinforce Progress – Even Small Wins

Reinforce when you see: Improved effort, greater accuracy, better organization, skill development

9. Involve the Co-op Office Early

Students are assigned to a Work-Integrated Learning Advisor. The Co-op office can help:

- Coach the student.
- Identify learning needs.

- Share a Supportive Improvement Plan.
- Support difficult conversations.
- Suggest accommodations.

SUPERVISOR SCRIPT

“Let’s connect with the Co-op office so we can support you together.”

10. Create a Short, Supportive Improvement Plan

A simple plan builds clarity and accountability. For the next 2 weeks, outline:

- Clear goals.
- What success looks like.
- Support that will be provided.
- Check in dates.

11. Keep it Positive

Remember students are still learning, provide feedback promptly, and avoid doing the work for the student “because it’s faster”.

Communication Styles

Consider the students’ communication styles. Finding common ground is important for open dialogue and learning strategies. Many people may exhibit a mix of styles. The key is noticing preferences and adapting your approach to support effective communication.

Direct Communicators

Be concise and clear:

- Lead with your main point.
- Be specific about expectations and timelines.
- Keep communication focused and efficient.

Indirect Communicators

Ask open-ended questions and invite input:

- Use collaborative, supportive language.
- Listen for subtle cues or hesitations.
- Create space for them to share comfortably.

High Context Communicators

Don't rely on implied meaning — clarify expectations:

- Confirm understanding by summarizing next steps.
- Pay attention to tone, relationships, and non-verbal cues.
- Build trust overtime.

Low Context Communicators

Use plain language and direct feedback:

- Be explicit and clear.
- Provide concrete instructions and follow-up.
- Address feedback directly.

Introverted Communicators

Send agendas early; allow time to reflect:

- Share materials in advance.
- Allow time to think before responding.
- Invite input in low-pressure ways (1:1, written).

Extroverted Communicators

Use discussion and brainstorming:

- Build in conversation and idea-sharing.
- Encourage real-time discussion.

- Use verbal check-ins to move work forward.

Effective Learning Styles & Supports

Equally important is determining the students' learning styles and implementing beneficial support strategies.

Visual Learners

Use diagrams, written instructions and examples:

- Show how tasks connect (charts, visuals, demos).
- Use step-by-step examples.
- Reinforce with visual summaries.

Auditory Learners

Walk through tasks verbally and invite questions:

- Talk through processes and reasoning.
- Encourage discussion and clarification.
- Ask them to explain it back.

Read/Write Learners

Provide text-heavy instructions, templates and notes:

- Share written guides and templates.
- Encourage notetaking and documentation.
- Follow up discussions with written summaries.

Kinesthetic Learners

Demonstrate, let them try and then provide feedback:

- Use a “show → do → reflect” approach.
- Provide hands-on practice early.
- Connect learning to real tasks.

Reflective Learners

Give time to prepare and send materials early:

- Share information ahead of time.
- Allow time for thinking before responding.
- Encourage reflection after tasks.

Active Learners

Let them jump into tasks with brief guidance:

- Start with a quick overview, then move into action.
- Use trial-and-error and problem-solving.
- Provide quick, ongoing feedback.

Helping Students Take Ownership

As students gain confidence, look for opportunities to gradually increase responsibility.

Examples:

- Facilitate a meeting.
- Lead a project update.
- Present findings.
- Coordinate an event.
- Onboard another student.
- Represent your department.

SUPPORTING STUDENT OWNERSHIP IN ACTION

Leading a Meeting

Students will feel much more confident in leading a staff meeting if they have your guidance first. It's a great way to build confidence, communication skills and leadership experience in a supportive environment. Let students know what to expect and give them time to prepare in advance of the meeting.

Prepare together for the meeting

1. Clarify the Meeting Purpose.
2. Co-create the Agenda.
3. Practice Introductions & Closings.
4. Anticipate Questions.
5. Provide helpful script phrases such as:
 - “Let’s move on to the next agenda item.”
 - “Does anyone have additional thoughts?”
 - “I’ll follow up with details after the meeting.”

Review together after the meeting

1. Give the student time to reflect.
2. Invite the student to share their experience and assessment of the meeting.
3. Provide feedback on what went well.
4. Share actionable advice for areas of improvement.
5. Give the student an opportunity to ask questions.

Giving Constructive, Supportive Feedback

Thoughtful feedback is most helpful when it is clear, timely, balanced, and focused on growth. It's meant to support learning and improvement – helping students build confidence and develop their skills over time.

Effective feedback should be:

Specific

Focus on observable actions, not personality traits.

Timely

Address issues close to when they occur.

Balanced

Recognize strengths as well as areas for improvement.

Actionable

Provide clear guidance on what to do next.



Supporting Improvement

When feedback explains why something needs improvement, what is expected and how to move forward, it encourages active learning — helping students connect ideas, apply theory and strengthen their understanding through real experience.

Recognizing Success

Positive feedback is as important as developmental feedback. Recognizing what students are doing well reinforces effective behaviors, builds confidence and helps students understand the skills they are developing.

When providing positive feedback:

- Name the specific behavior or action you want to reinforce.
- Explain why it was effective or how it contributed to the team or project.
- Encourage the student to continue applying that approach in future situations.

For example, instead of saying “Great job,” provide context by explaining what made the work successful and what skills the student demonstrated.

Supporting Success When Challenges Arise

Managing Performance Challenges: A Step-by-Step Approach

Performance challenges are common with early career learners and should be addressed early, consistently, and with support.

The Co-op Office is your partner throughout the work term. Whether you have questions, need guidance or encounter challenges, we encourage you to connect with us early so we can work together to support both the student and your organization.

Step 1: Identify the Root Cause

Ask yourself:

- Is the learner unclear about expectations?
- Do they lack technical skills or experience?
- Are workload or personal factors affecting performance?
- Is this a one-time issue or a pattern?

Many challenges can be resolved through clearer instruction, additional training, or coaching.

Step 2: Address Issues Early and Privately

- Schedule a one-on-one conversation.
- Be factual and calm.

- Clarify expectations and timelines for improvement.
- Co-create an improvement plan with concrete next steps.

Document:

- Dates of conversations
- Key issues discussed
- Agreed upon actions

Step 3: Monitor and Support

- Follow up regularly.
- Offer resources, checklists, or mentorship.
- Adjust expectations if tasks were initially too advanced.

Step 4: Know When to Involve the SMU Co-op Office

You should contact the students' Work Integrated Learning Advisor if performance does not improve after steps 1-3.

Involve the Co-op Office if:

- Performance issues persist despite coaching.
- Behavioral concerns arise (e.g., professionalism, attendance, communication).
- There may be personal, health, or accommodation factors involved.
- Conflicts occur between the learner and workplace staff.
- You are considering early termination or transitioning the student to a new role.

Why Early Contact Matters

The Co-op office can help reframe expectations, mediate conversations, provide guidance on best practices, and support the student appropriately. Early involvement often leads to better outcomes for both the employer and the learner.

Concluding the Work Term Successfully

The end of a co-op work term is an important opportunity to reflect on the student's growth, recognize their contributions, and help them take the next steps in their career journey.

Before the work term concludes:

- ✓ Complete the required Co-op Final Employer Evaluation (sent by email before the end of the work term) and provide thoughtful feedback on the student's performance and development.
- ✓ Schedule time for a final conversation with the student to discuss their experience, accomplishments, strengths, and areas for continued growth.
- ✓ Recognize the students' contributions and celebrate their successes throughout the work term.
- ✓ Consider supporting the student's future career development by:
 - Connect with them on LinkedIn.
 - Offering to serve as a professional reference for future opportunities.
 - Providing a letter of recommendation or confirmation of employment, where appropriate.
 - Discuss potential future opportunities with your organization, if available.

A positive conclusion to the work term helps students leave with confidence, valuable professional connections, and a stronger understanding of their skills and career goals.

Thank you for partnering with SMU Co-op to provide meaningful learning experiences for students! Your guidance, mentorship, and investment in student development play an important role in preparing the next generation of professionals.