



Guide to Pre-Placement Interviews

FOR BSW STUDENTS



School of
Social Work

What is a pre-placement interview?

The placement team works hard to match students with prospective placements based on the information we collect and learn early on and most placements do move forward after the pre-placement interview. The interview is used - the questions that are asked and the information provided - to confirm the fit and highlight any potential issues.

Why is the pre-placement interview important?

The pre-placement interview is a good place to learn important information – information that could identify and prevent placement concerns and breakdown issues in the future.

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Topics to cover to help prevent challenges later on

Placement concerns can arise for a range of reasons. Most often these are: lack of opportunities that match learning objectives, mismatches in supervision style and the unique learning needs that students may have. The pre-placement interview is a good place to discuss these topics.

Learning objectives. What do you want to learn? What feedback have you been given in a practice class or previous placement about the skills you need to build? Are those achievable given the practice opportunities in this setting?

Supervision style. What kind of supervisor are they – are they structured and formal or unstructured and less formal? What can a student expect in terms of frequency, format and kinds of topics that will be covered in supervision? What do they expect from a student in supervision?

Unique learning needs. Some students will have learning needs that require accommodation. It's important to let potential field instructors if there is anything you may need to be successful in the placement. It's equally important that field instructors not ask why you may require any supports or accommodations – that information is private. The University can help work with students/field instructors/agencies to plan for these accommodations.

Preparing for the pre-placement interview

For the interview you want to arrive prepared, confident and enthusiastic. To do that, there are number of activities you can undertake before you interview:

Learn about the organization and Field Instructor: It is important to collect as much information as possible about the organization. This will help you understand the context of practice and will help demonstrate engagement and enthusiasm for the work. Search the agency on the internet and read as much information as their website offers. You might also want to see if the person interviewing you is on LinkedIn to see if you can learn more about them.

Reflect on your learning objectives: The most important thing you can do is create a list of learning objectives that you want to meet through your placement. These may be fairly broad and when you know the practice context, you'll refine them more. But it is good to know both what you want to learn and what you need to learn.

- To understand what you want to learn - think about the courses that you've taken, volunteer work you've done and the kind of practice that has piqued your interest – what made you excited? What are you passionate about?
- To understand what you need to learn – think about the feedback you've received in SW 2A06 and in any volunteer or work positions you've been in. Think about the kind of practice experiences you've had (role playing or real) and the parts that felt especially uncomfortable or challenging.

Preparing for the pre-placement interview

Reflect on your strengths and areas for growth: Similar to the point above, you'll want to consider what you already do well and where you have room for growth. These may be social work practice related or broader than that.

Attend the Resume Writing and Interview Preparation Sessions: The School of Social Work organizes workshops with the Student Success Centre each year to help you tailor your resume for placement and will help you build interviewing skills.

Practice interviewing and print your resume: Make sure you have a copy of your resume for the interview. Also, see if a friend or family member might run through some mock interview questions with you so that you can practice what you learned in the workshop.

A note on references

Typically, you won't need references but sometimes an organization will ask for them. If you are asked for references, consider someone who has a good amount of experience working with you and who can speak to your strengths. You'll want to get in touch with the prospective reference to get permission to share their contact information and give them a heads up who will be contacting them and why.

What to expect from the pre-placement interview

You are welcome to ask questions before you to find out more about the structure and process of the interview. **You might consider emailing your contact at the organization to ask:**

- ♦ Who will interview me? Just one person or more than one person?
- ♦ How will the interview be structured? How long might it take?

During the interview, the prospective Field Instructor will ask you a series of questions to determine if the placement will be a good fit for your learning objectives. They will also spend some time describing their work and the organization. You will also have the chance to ask some questions - you might be nervous so it's a good idea to think about those (and write them down) in advance! **Examples of questions include:**

- ♦ What kind of practice experiences will I get in this placement?
- ♦ What is your supervision style like? What can I expect from supervision?
- ♦ What other roles exist in this organization? Could I have opportunities to shadow them?
- ♦ What are some of the equity-based activities the organization is involved in? How are you responding to calls for decolonization/reconciliation?
- ♦ What accessibility measures does the organization have in place for staff or students who experience disabilities?

What to expect after the pre-placement interview

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of placements move forward after a pre-placement interview. Both the student and Field Instructor will let the field team at McMaster know how the conversation went and if the placement will move forward from their respective standpoints.

If the placement will move forward, the field team will send a confirmation email that initiates next steps with the University. Most organizations will have requirements before you start placement (vulnerable sector screening, TB testing, etc.), please ask about these so that you can get these done in a timely way.

If the placement will not move forward, the field team will relay feedback to the student or field instructor about why not.



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