



*How to Make the Most of Work
Integrated Learning:*

for Academic Supervisors

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How to Make the Most of Work Integrated Learning: for Academic Supervisors

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An Introduction to Work Integrated Learning (WIL): Benefits for Academic Supervisors

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) requires a three way partnership between the student, the workplace organisations and academic supervisors. In return, the experience provides academic supervisors with the opportunity to achieve the following:

- Improve the educational process and the professional curriculum;
- Develop networks with professionals in the field;
- Inform organisations about the tertiary curriculum; new ideas that are being generated; and the latest research development in the field.
- Help students to develop personal and professional competencies:
 1. Communication Skills
 2. Self-confidence
 3. Customer Relationship Management
 4. Enthusiastic Participation
 5. Industry and Business Knowledge
 6. Self-sufficiency
 7. Personal Organisation
 8. Professional Networks
 9. Professional Ethics

Competencies

The following nine key competencies are derived from retrospective graduate feedback. Academic Supervisors should help students to focus on these competencies so that they may develop personally and professionally during their Work Integrated Learning experience.



Communication Skills

Context For Students

Communication includes speaking (e.g. one-to-one discussion, meetings, group forums, via telephone), writing (e.g. emails, letters, reports) and listening (i.e. with the intention of empathising with others).

It is worth remembering that during face-to-face contact, words only comprise 7% of the impression you make, whereas your tone accounts for 38% and your associated gestures account for 55%, e.g. eye contact, body language and handshake.

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Give the students opportunities to practise their communication skills, e.g. host a workshop where they learn the basics.”

- Organise a ‘Communications Workshop’ for students to learn and practise communication skills;
- Require students to make a formal presentation;
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of communication;
- Provide guidelines for writing a professional email, formal letter or report;
- Encourage students to enrol in Communications papers.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

“Challenge students to demonstrate good communication in class by providing various interaction opportunities.”

- Assess communication skills (e.g. spelling, grammar and format) as an integral part of assignments;
- Plan assignments that promote verbal communication, e.g. presentations to class – or video presentations for extramural students.



Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Provide a positive critical reflective environment in which the student is able to learn from their experiences.”

- Explain to students that they need to be patient in a new environment;
- Remind students about the positive feedback;
- Promote shared constructive criticism rather than allowing students to feel embarrassed about it;
- Listen to student concerns and try to understand what is jeopardising their confidence;
- Discuss examples of when students have previously overcome feeling out of their depth;
- Invite graduates to talk about their experiences and the confidence gained during their work placement;
- Recommend ways of creating a positive, critical, and reflective environment to the Workplace Supervisor;
- Provide guidelines on the art of reflection and be explicit how it will help students to gain confidence;
- Discuss workplace performance reviews and how employers typically measure staff performance;

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

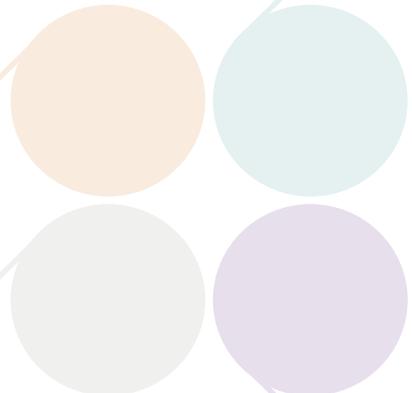
“Encourage openness so that students understand it is better to ask for help than to get things wrong when it matters.”

- Provide constructive criticism so that students realise that mistakes are natural and this is how they will learn.

Context For Students

Self-confidence among students in the workplace is important because, having become used to the academic environment where their performance is quantified by grades, their performance in the workplace is subjective, i.e. based on the perception of others.

Newcomers to the workplace must therefore be patient and realistic in the knowledge that it is impossible for them to know everything about the organisation from the outset.





Customer Relationship Management

Context For Students

Success for all organisations is about pleasing the customer – either by the provision of an efficient service or an excellent product.

To please the customer, it is paramount to first understand their needs and desires. To elicit this information, organisations invest time, money and energy into nurturing their customer relationships. Students in the workplace must therefore understand the importance of interacting with each stakeholder group appropriately.

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Teach students that to be successful they need to be able to orientate their products to what the customer wants.”

- Educate students about the importance of customer service;
- Discuss organisations that provide and thrive on great customer service;
- Encourage students to think about a day in the life of their customers and what really makes them tick;
- Provide evidence from customer satisfaction surveys about customer needs and desires;
- Role-play different scenarios with different types of customers.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

- Include customer-oriented assignments, e.g. sponsorship proposals.



Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Encourage students to roll their sleeves up!”

- Understand each student’s interests then guide them towards project(s) that will inspire them;
- Manage student’s expectations about what will be expected of them throughout the project(s);
- Ask students how will they cope with aspects of the project(s) that they are not looking forward to;
- Challenge students to write and discuss their own individual goals for their project(s).

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

“Reward and praise students who go beyond the call of duty in their assignments.”

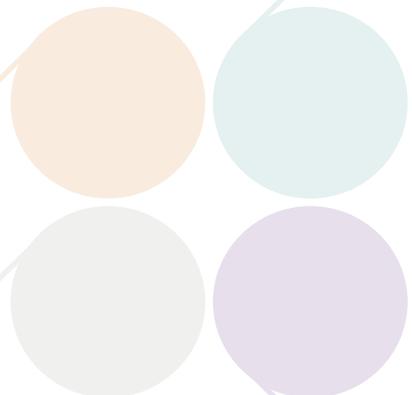
- Praise students that demonstrate extra effort in their assignments;
- Encourage students to add value to lectures and tutorials; then reward them for it;
- Share personal experiences and generate passion for your industry so that your students become eager to get involved.

Context For Students

‘Employee engagement’ is a top priority for many employers today – and this is linked to enthusiasm.

Research has indicated that ‘engaged’ employees say good things about their organisation; want to stay with the organisation; and strive to add value above and beyond expectations.

Employers therefore value students in the workplace who use their enthusiasm to add value to the organisation.





Industry and Business Knowledge

Context For Students

Students in the workplace have a unique opportunity to apply theory to practice and develop real-life knowledge of the industry.

Work placements also encourage the development of business skills that would not ordinarily be found among students, e.g. project management and / or computer software skills.

Students in the workplace should take this opportunity prepare themselves for life after graduation by absorbing as much business and industry knowledge as possible.

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Inform students about the computer programmes that they are likely to need and offer sources of further information to students who want to prepare.”

- Collaborate with the IT department to expose students to Microsoft and other software packages;
- Encourage students to maximise available business-oriented courses;
- Organise a workshop on generic skills, e.g. marketing, project management.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

“Always consider how the theories that are covered in the classroom relate to practical situations.”

- Incorporate applied opportunities into paper design;
- Keep up-to-date by refreshing course material;
- Link theory to practice by using real life case studies – especially examples from personal experience;
- Use practical examples from organisations where the work placements are taking place;
- Teach generic business skills, e.g. budgeting, project plans, relationship management, time management;
- Assess generic business skills via presentations or critical thinking groups;
- Encourage the student to apply their industry knowledge in the classroom post-work placement.
- Make assignments relevant, e.g. local or NZ issues.



Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Reinforce the importance of showing initiative.”

- Help the student set some personal development goals to attain during their work placement;
- Highlight the difference between asking for help and approval seeking / dependent behaviour;
- Ask students to analyse then report on a successful and an unsuccessful initiative from their past;
- Present students with flawed systems and challenge them to suggest improvements;
- Create scenarios that develop student decision making and problem solving ability.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

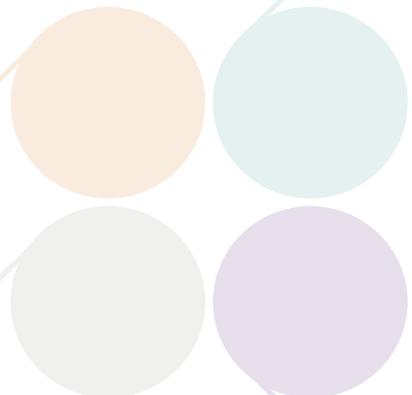
“Give students the opportunity to become decisive decision makers , e.g. problem solving in groups.”

- Teach about innovation and different projects that have been built out of innovation;
- Examine real life case studies and discuss what contributes to success and failure;
- Design assignments that challenge students to be decisive decision makers and problem solvers;
- Set an assignment to analyse a current situation from their industry and then suggest improvements;
- Encourage students to be forthcoming with ideas;
- Be aware that ‘spoon-feeding’ students inhibits their self-sufficiency.

Context For Students

Feeling confident to ask for help is a positive attribute, but becoming dependent on other people’s instructions is not.

It is important to remain pro-active not re-active because employers value people who use their initiative to overcome problems and who think creatively (outside the box) to add value.





Personal Organisation

Context For Students

Like all employees, students in the workplace will be required to deliver tasks on time and on budget.

Personal organisation is essential for people who want to be efficient and effective, especially when they find themselves under pressure in challenging work environments.

Personal organisation is about being able to set and prioritise goals, then planning how to achieve them in the time available. Given that situations change, it is also important to be flexible, which means being able to re-prioritise and re-plan.

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Ensure students know the importance of meeting deadlines; and about their progress with assignments.”

- Organise a workshop on planning skills, which explains what ‘planning’ really involves, e.g. upwards and downwards planning;
- Discuss assessing risk, dependencies, contingency planning and status reporting;
- Guide students to MS Outlook and MS Project;
- Require students to write a formal plan for the initial organisation of their project(s);
- Reinforce the importance of keeping to deadlines.
- Schedule appointments with students to review their project plan.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

“Make sure students hand things in on time and that students arrive in class on time.”

- Do not tolerate missed deadlines and bad excuses for academic assignments;
- Lead by example where good personal organisation is concerned, e.g. start and finish class on time;
- Discuss with students how to plan for their workload ahead;
- Revisit workload plans when students are under pressure and prove to them how careful planning can alleviate stress.



Professional Networks

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Give the students opportunities to develop their networks via past students, visits to organisations, guest lectures, exposure to a range of networks in the community.”

- Organise functions that give students exposure to their industry;
- Create opportunities for employers from the community to network with students;
- Encourage students to visit peers undertaking projects in other organisations.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

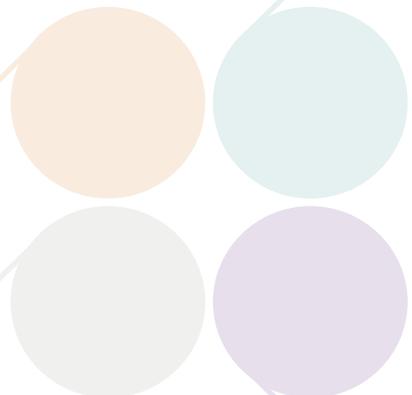
“Encourage students to meet people and get themselves known for the right reasons.”

- Talk about your professional network and how it has helped you;
- Organise an assignment for which the presentation is not just to the class, but to industry people.

Context For Students

Relationship building is important in most industries and therefore there are clear advantages to being well known for the right reasons.

Building a network of contacts is the best way to maximise your job opportunities in any career.





Professional Ethics

Context For Students

Professional ethics is about respecting the culture of an organisation while maintaining your own personal integrity. At the very minimum, organisations expect employees to be honest, trustworthy, courteous and conscientious.

Hints and Tips for Academic Supervisors

“Set clear expectations about students’ behaviour before they undertake their project(s).”

- Remind students that they are ambassadors of their tertiary organisation and programme;
- Discuss with students what it means to be professional;
- Provide examples of organisational values and discuss what they mean;
- Require students to attend a meeting dressed professionally;
- Challenge the students to set a dress code amongst themselves.

Hints and Tips for Paper Coordinators

“Ask students to be professional at all times.”

- Help students understand that tertiary education is about practising for professional life;
- Set high expectations for students, e.g. meeting deadlines and expected contribution.

Reflecting on the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Experience

'Reflection' should be an explicit learning objective of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experiences. The objective of reflection is to learn from experience by reflecting in action (reflection which occurs in the midst of experience) and through reflection after an event (reflection on action). Academic Supervisors should encourage students to undertake the following sequential stages:

- **Work Description** – Describe their experience in detail, including: what they were doing; what other people were doing; the context of the event; what happened; and the overall outcome.
- **Feelings and Thoughts** – Reflect on their self-awareness by recalling what was going on inside their head, including: how they were feeling when the event started; what they were thinking about at the time; how the event made them feel; how other people made them feel; how they felt about the outcome of the event; and what they think about the event in hindsight.
- **Evaluation** – Consider what was good and bad about their experience.
- **Analysis** – Break the event down into component parts to be explored separately in detail, including: what went well; what they and others did well; what went wrong; and what they or others did that could be improved.
- **Conclusion and Synthesis** – Make some concluding judgments based on the information they explored during the 'analysis' stage.
- **Action Plan** – Reflect on what they would do the same and what they would do differently if they were to encounter the same / a similar event again.



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