



Learning Contract Guidelines in MSc(PT) Clinical Education

1. Introduction

A learning contract is an agreement between a student and a preceptor outlining in detail what the student would like to achieve (objectives) over the duration of a placement. A learning contract includes the specific resources a student will use to help meet the objectives, the types of evaluations the clinical instructor will use to evaluate a student's success in meeting the objective; and the specific criteria that will be evaluated.

Learning contracts are utilized in the McMaster University Physiotherapy Program to reinforce our philosophy of self-directed learning. Learning contracts allow students to have more individuality and flexibility in directing their learning within the clinical setting.

2. Characteristics of a Learning Contract

The contract format utilized at McMaster University has 4 components:

- i. Objectives:* What the student wants to learn / achieve
- ii. Learning Resources and Strategies:* How the student will go about learning the stated objective.
- iii. Evaluation Methodology:* What evaluation methods will be used and who will confirm that the objective is completed.
- iv. Criteria for Evaluation:* The specific characteristics that must be observed in order for a student to be considered to have completed the specific objective.

3. Procedures for Negotiating a Contract

- Students are expected to write 5 SMART objectives for each placement.
 - 2 objectives should relate to their assessment skills.
 - 2 objectives should relate to their treatment skills.
 - The final objective can relate to skills or behaviour in any area of clinical practice.
- Students present the preceptor with a first draft of their objectives based on their knowledge of the learning opportunities available and their individual learning needs by the end of the first week of placement.
- The preceptor and student should discuss, revise, as necessary, and finalize the contract by the middle of the second week of placement.

4. Steps in Developing the Learning Contract

a) Self-evaluation

The student should assess their strengths and weaknesses and consider past performance during previous clinical placements.

Questions to consider:

What knowledge and skills do I already have?

What knowledge and skills do I need?

What knowledge and skills would I like to learn?

b) Identification of Learning Needs (objectives)

Individual behavioural objectives will depend on the self-evaluation and the clinical setting. Clinical preceptors and students should consider whether the objectives are feasible within the setting and a six week time frame.

Questions to consider:

Are my objectives described clearly?

Are my objectives realistic and feasible?

Will it be possible to measure my objectives?

Do the objectives describe what I propose to learn?

Are there other objectives I might consider?

c) Identification of Learning Resources and Strategies

All resources, including literature, facilities and people, should be identified. The feasibility and time frame of the strategies should be negotiated between the student and clinical preceptor.

Questions to consider:

How will this strategy help to accomplish my objectives?

Is this strategy feasible within the learning situation and time frame?

How will you acquire the resources? Are they current?

What knowledge and skills are required to use this resource?

Are there other resources to consider?

What are the available resources in the facility?

d) Identification of Evaluation Methodology

The student should consider means of providing evidence of learning and the most appropriate person to evaluate the objective. This is most often the clinical preceptor but other team members or colleagues could be utilized.

Questions to consider:

Why select this method?

What knowledge/skill will it help you demonstrate?

How and when will this be evaluated?

What alternative methods have you considered?

Does the method demonstrate variety and creativity?

e) Identification of Criteria for Evaluation

Criteria should reflect the learning objectives and be described in behavioural terms. It is important for the clinical preceptor and student to agree on the appropriate criteria for the student's level.

Questions to consider:

Are the criteria clear, relevant and able to be applied?

Do the criteria relate to your objectives?

Are the criteria appropriate for your level/time frame?

What alternative criteria have you considered?

5. Marking of Objectives

The contract is scored out of 10 with a maximum of 2 marks per objective.

2 All criteria for that objective have been met successfully.

1 Minor elements have not been demonstrated.

0 Major elements were not demonstrated.



Clinical Placement _____ Learning Contract for _____

Placement Facility: _____ Preceptor: _____

<u>OBJECTIVES</u>	<u>LEARNING RESOURCES TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS</u>	<u>EVALUATION METHODOLOGY</u>	<u>CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION</u>	<u>MIDTERM MARK</u>	<u>FINAL MARK</u>	<u>FINAL COMMENTS</u>
What do I want to learn?	How will I go about learning it?	A: What evaluation will be used? B: Who will confirm the objective is complete?	What are the characteristics of my performance which will tell us that the objectives have been met?	2 All criteria have been met successfully. 1 Minor elements have not been demonstrated. 0 Major elements were not demonstrated.		
1.	•	•	•			
2.	•	•	•			
3.	•	•	•			
4.	•	•	•			
5.	•	•	•			

*All learning objectives must be SMART goals

Student Signature (midterm): _____

Student Signature (final): _____

Preceptor Signature (midterm): _____

Preceptor Signature (final): _____

Date (midterm): _____

Date (final): _____