Starting your Co-op term: Important Things to Know

Starting a new Co-op job can be exciting, daunting and bewildering all at the same time! Or, it may start more slowly than you expected, depending on the organization you’re working with and their approach to training new staff.

Ask questions and talk to people - it often takes a couple of weeks to feel part of a team and figure out the dynamics of your new environment. Take this opportunity to learn as much as you can, contribute to the organization and get involved - these are the hallmarks of a successful Co-op term!

If you have questions or concerns about something that’s happening at work, contact your primary Arts Co-op coordinator so that we may provide information, advice and support. Additionally, we have provided some tips on how to handle specific workplace questions or issues that could potentially occur.

We hope that these tips inspire you to more forward in your work term with confidence, knowing that Arts Co-op is here to help you make the best of any situation that should arise. Serious workplace issues are rare, but Arts Co-op aims to set students up for success in any way we can.

We hope you have an enjoyable, rewarding, and interesting co-op experience!

Sincerely,

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Co-op

Dealing with Problems and Challenges

- If you are experiencing difficulties with your work term, you need to get in contact with us so that we can help you deal with the issue you are facing and suggest solutions (without informing your supervisor), or arrange to meet with you earlier than a planned site visit. We can meet with you at your workplace or a cafe.

- Sometimes you may find, especially at the start of a work term, that you are not as challenged in the position as you had hoped. You may be given routine tasks and lots to read, for example.
You may also find that the project you were hired to undertake is not ready for you to tackle, or there may have been staffing changes and you unexpectedly have a new supervisor who is busy adjusting to their new role and workload. While these things may not feel normal, they are all normal occurrences in the workplace. With that said, we don’t want you to suffer in silence.

If after 2-3 weeks in the position you are feeling frustrated, please call one of us. We can brainstorm some ideas on how to approach your supervisor with your concerns. We are here as a resource to support you.

If you have safety or harassment concerns, please tell us immediately.

**Personal Use of Email and Electronics at Work**

- Your employer may give you specific information regarding appropriate personal use of email, electronics and the internet in your office. If this hasn’t been clarified by your manager, make sure to ask.
- Be aware that there is **no such thing** as private email, and the way you use it and the websites you log onto can be tracked and are part of the organization’s public record.
- It is not appropriate to text or take calls on your personal cell phones during work hours (at meetings or at your desk), and it is not appropriate to use company photocopiers or work computer for personal business.
- Texting friends and listening to your iPod while working is not looked at favourably by managers or co-workers.
- Your employer expects you to understand the importance of professional and ethical conduct, and we rely on you to represent Simon Fraser University, the Co-op Program and yourself in a responsible manner.

**Confidentiality at Work**

- Depending on the nature of your work, you may be asked to sign contracts and be given formal written confidentiality and ethics agreements.
- All students are expected to respect the confidentiality of their workplace while employed as well as after the work term has ended.
- Even if you are not given a written confidentiality agreement, be aware that as a temporary employee you are expected to respect the policies and procedures of your employer, and the privacy of clients, coworkers and others you come into contact with.
- Many of you will be given access to confidential files and documents, account codes, statistics, financial information, and personal client information. If you are at all unsure about what constitutes confidential information, discuss this with your supervisor.

**Being Absent from Work**

- As temporary employees, you are likely not entitled to benefits such as sick leave. However, if a situation arises where you are unable to go to work due to illness, it is your responsibility to inform your supervisor. Contact them at the start of the workday if you are staying home sick, **preferably by phone, not email**. If an emergency family or
personal situation occurs which affects your ability to be at work, contact your supervisor immediately to inform them of your absence.

Leaving a Co-op Position

Do not, under any circumstances, terminate a position without first discussing the situation with the Arts Co-op Program Manager or a Co-op coordinator. Leaving a co-op position has far-reaching repercussions that can impact you personally, as well as the employer, Simon Fraser University, the Co-op Program and other students.