THE CO-OP WORK TERM REPORT PSYCHOLOGY

*Revised July 2024*

Your co-op work term is designed to complement and enrich your academic program with work experience. The co-op work term gives you practical exposure to and experience in the discipline that you are studying. It also assists in funding your education and providing guidance for future career specialization. For Psychology students, the goal of the work term is to develop in the following crucial areas:

* to enrich and complement academic learning with practical work experience.
* to develop transferable professional skills.
* to develop confidence and professional communication skills (written and oral).
* to provide opportunities for mentorship by professionals in a workplace context.
* to increase awareness of opportunities and your interests in your area of specialization.

# 1. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORK REPORT

One of the key components to maximizing the co-op work term experiential learning experience is reflection. Through reflection, students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the learning and development experienced during their co-op work term. The purpose of the second work term report is not just to help you reflect and learn from critical incidents but also to enhance your professional skills. You will be required to reflect on two critical incidents at work.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is an incident that has significance for you. It is often an event that made you stop and think or one that raised questions for you. It is an incident that, in some way, has had an impact on your personal and professional development. It can be a negative or positive event.

Taking the time to reflect on the incident can help you gain insights and deeper learning from your co-op work experiences, and improve your critical thinking and decision-making skills. The goal of the assignment is for you to critically analyze two specific incidents or experience, identify the key components, reflect on your thoughts and feelings, and consider what lessons you have taken from these incidents and how these incidents may affect your future decisions or behaviours. Furthermore, by describing and then evaluating a specific incident, you can examine the relationship between theory and practice.

Some examples of critical incidents are provided below. (There is no requirement for you to have been directly involved in the actual event itself).

Examples of Possible Critical Incidents:

* + Conflict Resolution
    - Situations of conflict or tension at work that require resolution.
      * Reflect on how you approached the situation, resolution strategies you or others applied, and how key players in the conflict reacted.
  + Ethical Dilemma
    - You face a situation that challenges your ethical beliefs or ethical standards
      * Reflect on what about the situation was unethical, how you responded and the reaction of others.
  + Unexpected Problem Solving
    - * You encountered an unforeseen problem at work (e.g., a technical failure ).
        + Reflect on how you and/or others addressed the issue and what you learned from the experience.
  + Client or Customer Relations
    - You had to deal with a difficult client or customer
      * Reflection on the interaction and how you handled it. How did you use your communication and/or problem-solving skills?

In the second work term report, you will use Graham Gibb’s reflective cycle to structure the critical incident work term report. The Gibbs reflective cycle consists of six distinct stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. Each stage prompts the individual to examine their experiences through questions designed to incite deep and critical reflection. Please use the following six headings for describing the two critical incidents in your report.

Description: You want to give a comprehensive account of the situation. Describe what happened. Accurately recall key features of the experience. Start by objectively recounting the experience. Describe the incident, the setting it took place, and the circumstances leading up to the incident. Identify who was involved and their roles. Keep focused on describing the situation; don’t make judgements or draw conclusions in this section of the report.

Feelings: Analysis of feelings is a key component for developing self-awareness. It involves exploring how the critical incident affected you. Capture your emotional response to the experience. It's essential to acknowledge both positive and negative emotions, as they significantly affect our interpretation of the event.

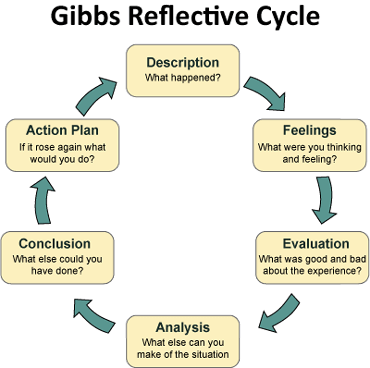
Initial Evaluation: Evaluate your initial feelings and reactions in order to identify what really concerned you about the experience (positive or negative). Taking time to evaluate the critical incident encourages you to make a judgement about the value of the situation. Assess the good and bad aspects of the experience. What worked well, and what didn't? What were the positive impacts and negative consequences? This step should allow you to identify the key issues that you will move on to develop in the next section under critical analysis.

Critical Analysis: Critically analyze what was going on in the situation. Dig deeper into understanding why things unfolded as they did. Examine the components of the critical incident, identify existing knowledge, challenge assumptions, and explore alternatives. For example, were people’s experiences similar to or different from yours, and in what ways? How did this experience compare with your previous experiences? Does this situation cause you to challenge any assumptions?

This is an opportunity to develop your critical analysis skills by integrating new knowledge with previous knowledge. You want to make use of knowledge/ideas from outside your experience to develop and form your analysis. The critical analysis stage is where you draw on relevant literature (i.e., academic portion) and what you have learned in classes to interpret the experience. Identify and describe relevant theories and concepts that relate to the critical incident, and analyze how these theories and concepts could have been applied in the situation described. Evaluate the effectiveness of the application of these theories in practice. Evaluation and analysis are crucial in the development of new perspectives.

Conclusion: Summarize your key reflections and learning outcomes. How has this impacted your self-awareness - what have you learnt about yourself. Determine what you could have done differently and what you've learned from the experience.

Final Evaluation and Action Plan: Develop a plan detailing what you'll do if a similar situation arises in the future. How will you decide if your practice has been improved.



# Figure 1 Gibbs Reflective Cycle is from: <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/gibbs-reflective-cycle>

# 2. APPROACH TO WORK REPORT DEVELOPMENT

Your work term critical incident reflection report will be based on your experiences throughout your work term. As a starting point, you might think about your work experiences within the context of the personal learning goals that you established for your co-op work term. Were there any critical incidents that related to those goals. To help you get started, choose an experience from your co-op placement and ask yourself these questions from the Reflective Framework (Stephenson, 1994):

* What was my role in this situation?
* Did I feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Why?
* What actions did I take?
* How did I and others act?
* Was it appropriate?
* How could I have improved the situation for myself, and others involved in the critical incident?
* What can I change in the future?
* Do I feel as if I have learnt anything new about myself?
* Did I expect anything different to happen? What and why?
* Has it changed my way of thinking in any way?
* What knowledge from theory and research can I apply in this situation?

## Critical Incident Reflective Cycle – Critical Analysis Stage:

## Your work term report must have an academic or research component. In the analysis section of the critical incident report, you want to tie your work-term experience with what you are learning in school. You can start by identifying previous research related to your critical incident, identify theories and concepts that are relevant to your critical incident, and explain how those theories or ideas were applied (or not) and if they were effective (or ineffective). Depending on the topic of your reflection, you may use the University of Guelph Library website, Google Scholar, various textbooks and/or specific information you have learned in courses. Your work term report should include at least 2-3 scholarly references. Ideally, your references should be no older than 2000, unless they are classic references.

* 1. **Access to University of Guelph Library Resources.** To assist with your work term report, you can access the Library’s electronic resources (databases, electronic books, etc.) from off-campus.

Click on the “Off-campus Log in” link from the Library’s home page (<http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/>) and sign in using your central ID and password. Key business literature databases (e.g. ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete) can be found under the “Journal articles” link.

* 1. **Using other University Libraries.** Most academic libraries are committed to the Canadian University Reciprocal Borrowing Agreement which allows students to check out books directly from another university library. Within Ontario you should be able to check out books from other university libraries with your University of Guelph student card. There are some exceptions to this agreement: most notably, the University of Toronto does not lend to undergraduates from other institutions. Complete details can be found at: <http://www.coppul.ca/rb/rbhow.html>
  2. **Getting Research Help.** If you need help with researching your work term report, the Library provides many avenues for assistance. You can chat, instant message, email, phone or visit with a librarian. For complete contact information visit: <http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/assistance/ask_us/>..
  3. **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the presentation of the ideas or work of others as your own. It includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and representing these as your thoughts by not acknowledging the appropriate source or by the failure to use appropriate quotation marks. For more details, please see: [http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08- amisconductoffen.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-%20amisconductoffen.shtml)
  4. **Statement on the use of AI.** Students’ work must reflect their unique intellectual capacity and demonstrate the application of reflection and critical thinking. Therefore, the use of AI (e.g., Chat GPT) to complete any form of assessment is not permitted. Submission of materials completed by AI constitutes an offence under the University’s academic misconduct policies, either as a form of plagiarism or the use of unauthorized aids.

# 3. FORMAT OF THE WORK TERM REPORT

* The work term reflection report should be approximately 4-5 pages in length. This does not include the title page, references, or any appendices. The report should be APA style (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, etc.). Given that it is a self-reflection you will write in first-person.
* **Cover page**. Include your name, student ID number, your employer, the title of your report and the term during which you worked for your employer (Summer 2024, etc.).
* **Introductory letter.** Your letter should be addressed to your Faculty Advisor. Include in your letter information regarding where you worked, your position title, your main responsibilities/projects, the topic of your report, and finally, acknowledge the employer for his/her assistance during your placement.
* **The report.** This work term reflection report will be structured using Gibb’s reflective cycle. Gibb’s reflective cycle has the following six sections: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. Please use real examples from your work term to support your reflection. There needs to be a research component with a minimum of 2-3 scholarly references. Despite the fact this is a reflective paper, you should still approach the development of this report like a business report, using subheadings and sections where appropriate. Work term reports should be written clearly and concisely, free of spelling and grammatical errors. **Please note that your report is not a diary of your activities during your work term.**
* **References.** In-text citations and your reference list must be formatted according to the latest Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (e.g., 7th edition). Information on APA style is available from the University of Guelph library at https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/APA.
* **NOTE**. Because of the confidential nature of the material in your reflection paper, you should not seek your supervisor’s signature on the Coop Work Term Report – Employer Comments Form. It is not required for this work term report submission. Your reflections will only be shared with your Faculty Advisor.
* The grading sheet which will be used to evaluate your report is attached in Appendix 1. Please note that this is a generic form used by Co-operative Education. There will be sections under “Structure” that do not apply to Psychology co-op work term reports. Please proceed with the sections laid out above.

# 4. MISCELLANEOUS

* Any e-mail correspondence to your faculty advisor should include the word Co-op in the subject line. This will help your faculty advisor to identify your e-mail more quickly and respond to you more eﬃciently. If you have not heard back from him/her within one week, please resend your email. Your original message may have gone into “cyberspace”!
* If you need to speak directly with your faculty advisor, please indicate where she/he can reach you and when. This, again, will be helpful when he/she is trying to return your call. Please indicate the nature of your call in your message.
* Please ensure that you keep an electronic copy and a hard copy of your work term report until you have received a grade.

# 5. DEADLINES . . . WHAT GOES WHERE AND WHEN

Following your work term, please ensure that co-op requirements are submitted to the appropriate location.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Due on the **second class** day following the work term. To be completed online. | Due on the **fifth class** day following the work term to your faculty advisor – preferably as a WORD document in an e-mail attachment. |
| * Work Term Performance Evaluation   Completed online by your supervisor,  and can be viewed in your RG profile | * Work term report |
| * Learning Goals - Reflection   Completed online by the student |  |

You must use the standardized naming convention for your work term report:

* [First Name] [Last Name] [student number] [semester] [Work Term Report]
* Example: Joe Smith 0123456789 Winter2024 Work Term Report

***Please note that Faculty Advisors will grade reports during the semester in which they have been submitted.***

* The Co-op Faculty Advisor uses the following evaluation scheme supplied by the co-op office as criteria to grade the Work Term Report: Grading Scheme for the Report.
* Students will be notified when their marked reports are available from the Co-op Faculty Advisor for feedback.
* Work term report grades can be viewed in Experience Guelph in the student’s profile under the corresponding work term tab. Any reports that are deemed Unsatisfactory must be resubmitted. A student who receives a grade of Unsatisfactory a second time will be required to withdraw from the Co-op program.
* All reports are kept on file after being evaluated.

Portions of the work term report guidelines were adapted from Gibbs G (1988). Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford (URL: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20most%20famous,analysis%2C%20conclusion%20and%20action%20plan>.) and Bulman, C., & Schutz, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Reflective practice in nursing*. John Wiley & Sons.