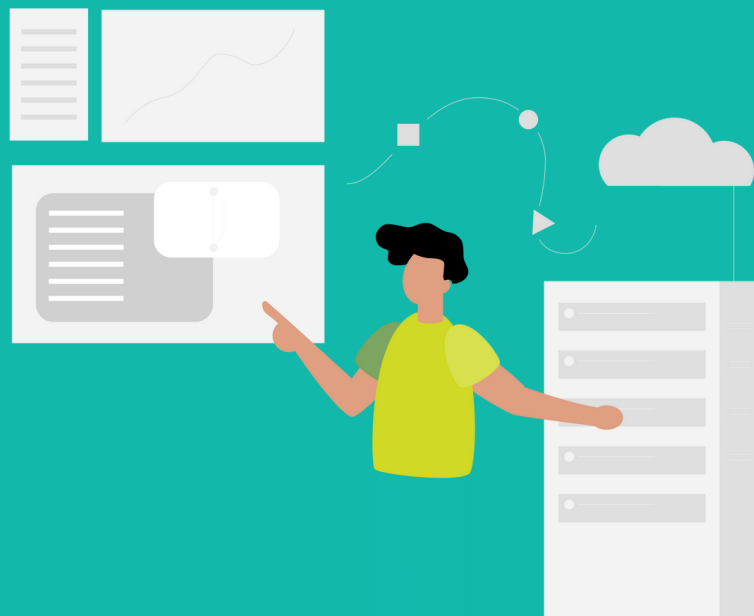


Virtual Supervision & Communication

A resource from Rural Roots



Introduction

With the move to remote and blended work, we've had to adapt technology to create relationships in virtual environments. Supporting remote teams, especially those new to the workplace, might sound intimidating. But, it's simply adapting in-person supervision to virtual spaces. Here are some tips and best practices from Rural Roots to help you make the most of your work integrated learning placements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. Tips for Employers
2. Tips for Students
3. Recommended Resources

Tips for Employers

Communication and leadership are something we continuously work at. Our biggest learning curve is adapting to spaces or mediums we may be uncomfortable in.



Understand the Project & Associated Deadlines

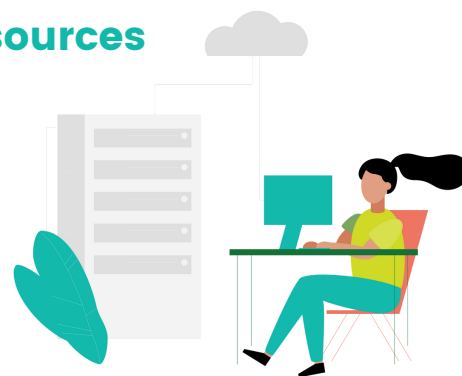
If you're working with students, your WIL placement likely has critical milestones and deliverables. You might be required to share feedback with the educator throughout the course or have specific project deadlines that you need to meet (e.g., midpoint survey). It's essential to understand what the project entails and have a timeline to help you and the student stay on track.

Tips and tricks:

- Communicate with the educator you've been matched with.
 - Mark important dates in shared calendars with your team and students.
 - Set appropriate reminders (e.g., week in advance, a day before, the day of).
 - Have a clear understanding of the educator's and student's expectations from the outset of the project.
-

Review Technology Needs & Existing Resources

Take stock of what resources, including technology, **are required to complete the project successfully**. This can include research papers, access to data, branding guides, social media handles, or even a grant database. Consider these questions when putting together an inventory list:



- What background information or history should I share with my student to help move the project forward?
- Are there pieces of the project we've already built that will be helpful for the next phase?
- What types of technology do they need to carry out their project? For example, maybe they require access to a separate phone line or a cloud-based folder to help them reach out to contacts or share information with other students/colleagues.
- What do they need to know about the organization? History, structure, staff bios? Can this information be shared in advance?

If you're struggling to put together a list, we've included some examples of the types of resources that may be required to complete specific projects .

Here are some resources you could consider for a **Website Design Intern**:

- Brand guidelines and key messages.
- Examples of website designs and layouts
- Project brief or background on why you're changing the website - is it a rebrand? Have you had feedback from clients?
- Packages or access to folders that contain logos, photo packages, taglines, fonts, brand colours.
- Access to the backend of the website
- Access to Grammarly or other content editing software.
- Access to Canva, InDesign, or other visual design software.

Here are some resources you might include for a **Human Resource Intern**:

- Current organizational chart and job vacancies.
- Existing job descriptions.
- Existing policies and processes for recruitment and retention, employee onboarding and training, exiting an employee, or occupational health and safety.
- Existing salary ranges and benefit information.
- Access to job boards.
- Access to employee onboarding or training presentations.

Draft a Work Plan

Work placements are usually part-time and short-term. This plan will cover how you manage expectations in a remote work environment, keep everyone on the same page, and provide a thorough level of instruction to support and meet deadlines.

- **Determine the end goal and result.** This was likely completed when your company posted a project to Riipen and matched with a course or educator. Still, it's important to refer to the project submission when creating a work plan with your student(s). Break end goals into SMART objectives – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timebound.
- **Book a meeting with your student(s) to discuss the steps required to complete the project.** Make sure these steps are small enough to be completed by an individual or a small team within a reasonable time.
- **Assign roles and responsibilities.** What skills and interests do your students bring to the table? Do they have to work with other team members to complete deliverables? Assign tasks so that each person is performing to their full potential and interests.
- **Set deadlines.** Ensure each task has a deadline and everyone knows how long they have to complete it. Having clear timelines and dates help everyone stay on track.
- **Establish a check-in plan** (see our section on accountability plans for more tips and tricks).
- **Provide reviews and feedback.** After each stage of the project, it's important to check in. Establish what pieces took longer than anticipated, whether future deliverables need to be adjusted for scope or timeframe, and if the project is meeting expectations for you, the students, and the educators.



Software for Project Management

[Monday.com](https://monday.com)

[Clickup.com](https://clickup.com)

[Freedmap](https://freemap.com)

[Trello](https://trello.com)

[Asana](https://asana.com)

[Pre-existing templates in Microsoft Excel](#)

Make a Communication Plan

It's crucial to establish how and when you'll communicate with your student. Regular meetings and clear channels for communication will help you be available and responsive to one another.

If your organization already has regular communication channels and processes in place, share how they are used and subscribe your students to the appropriate channels. Set clear expectations for how each platform is used. For example:

- We use Microsoft Teams for informal communication. Use this platform to sign in and out, chat with your colleagues, or join virtual coffee breaks.
- We use email for tracking action items, decision records, or external correspondence. Please send related items as attachments or include links for things that need approval/review.
- Use email when communicating with external parties and always share internal resources as PDFs.
- We use Zoom for internal and external meetings.

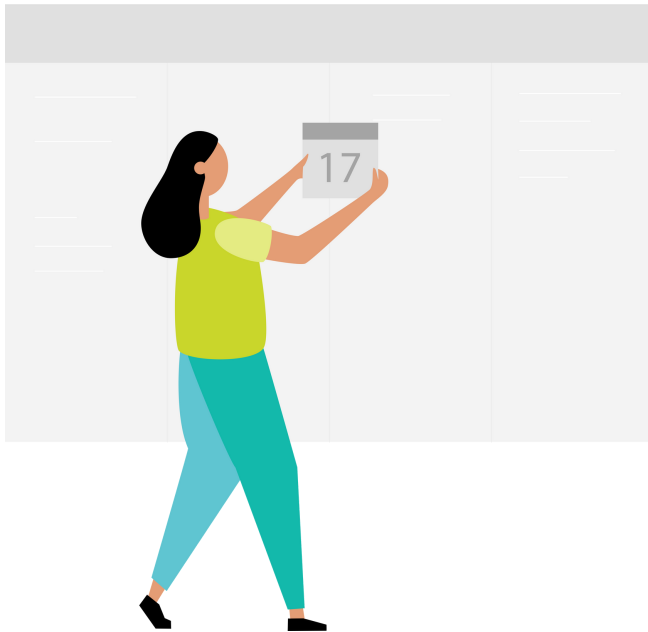
If you use Microsoft Teams, Slack, or other instant messaging platforms, create separate channels for specific topics, programs, or teams. Also, try to respond promptly to requests. If you're in a meeting or don't have the time to write a lengthy response, say you'll respond later or react with an emoji to confirm you've received their update.

Consider adding statements to your email subject lines, so you can help determine email priority. For example:

- **Action required:** There is a timeline and deliverable that needs to be completed within a specific time frame.
- **Need to know:** information necessary for the project but doesn't have a particular timeline.
- **Nice to know:** sharing information that might interest someone but isn't required reading or essential for the project.
- **Urgent:** requires immediate attention.

If you don't have established platforms, discuss your students' most responsive platforms and how best to communicate with them – email, text, or the Riipen platform.

Create an Accountability Plan



Have a conversation with your student about how they like to receive feedback and their mentorship style. Do they need more hands-on support? Do they like having the freedom to create and prefer brainstorming meetings? Do they like open office hours where they can drop by if they need to ask questions? Do they prefer a set time each week to discuss upcoming deadlines or obstacles? When creating an accountability plan, it's important to remember:

- Be open and honest about your communication styles and preferences.
- Define the ways you'll be accountable to one another. For example, you may set up a check-in meeting at the start of each week to discuss upcoming deadlines and deliverables.
- Establish your availability and how you plan to communicate with each other well in advance. If you have limited availability, consider setting up formal meetings or a designated time for discussions and brainstorming.

Additional Tips & Tricks

Recommendations for increasing accountability and engagement among remote teams



Face to Face Interaction

Consider what needs to be face-to-face interaction. Zoom and other video conferencing software has been great for connecting with people in a remote environment. We can cross distance and time zones. Still, we often feel mentally drained after a full day of meetings. If your meeting isn't a long conversation, isn't heavily reliant on nonverbal cues, and doesn't require complicated visuals, consider having a quick discussion over email, instant message, or phone.

Act with Authenticity

It's important to be yourself and connect from a space of authenticity to create mutual respect and trust. Do things like:

- Offer support and encouragement.
 - Don't focus solely on deliverables and timelines in your interactions:
 - Create spaces for mentorship, coaching, and other personal interactions.
 - Ask questions and get to know one another on a personal level to establish a more well-rounded relationship.
 - Engage in water cooler conversation.
-

Embrace Over Communicating

When in doubt, over communicate. Share information like supporting documents and resources, provide regular feedback, have a quick check-in once a day, or create a project dashboard using some of our suggested software in the accountability plan, or schedule weekly debriefs to see progress on project deliverables and timelines. This might seem like a lot of communication, but you'll eventually establish a rhythm and feel comfortable with nonverbal cues, need for space, and individual communication styles.

Keep in mind: these projects are short-term, and there's a lot of information to share. It's better to over communicate than not communicate enough.

Use a Buddy System

Consider pairing existing staff with students for a more hands-on experience. You might choose a mentor to introduce students to the workplace or their team members. You might also see this an opportunity to build internal leadership capacity and nurture existing employees in achieving their future career goals.

Working from home can be isolating, so find ways to create deeper connections through shared interests and projects. Having a designated "buddy" can make it easier for people to feel like part of the team.

Give Constructive Feedback

When it comes to feedback, be constructive. Your feedback shouldn't be negative and personal. Keep it individualized and relevant, focused on behaviour, goal-oriented, respectful and reciprocal. Establishing trust and open and honest communication will go a long way in creating a space for continuous learning, improvement, and collaboration.

For more tips, see [Characteristics of Constructive Feedback](#).

Tips for Students

Working from home can be intimidating, especially if this is your first time working in a professional environment. Here are some tips for creating an optimal work environment:



Create a Dedicated Work Space

It can be hard to separate work, school, and your personal life. Having physical boundaries will help you shut down after the workday and support a healthy work-life balance. Create a dedicated workspace for your computer, laptop, and work materials separate from your personal space, if you can.

Short on space? Consider deleting work-related apps from your mobile device or turning off notifications once the work or school day is finished. You don't want to feel like you need to respond immediately or work around the clock.

Minimize Distractions

Focus on one thing at a time. If something requires your full attention, turn off notifications and tell your supervisor when you'll be back online to check messages. When possible, establish communication pathways for urgent requests.

Consider having your office in a space with a closed door or using headphones to block external distractions like pets, kids, or other family members.

Schedule Dedicated Work Blocks & Breaks

Your health and mental well-being are important for you to thrive – personally, professionally, and academically. It can be challenging to balance daily expectations, timelines, and personal goals. Schedule in work blocks for specific tasks, like carving out half an hour at the end of the day to respond to emails or provide an update to your supervisor.

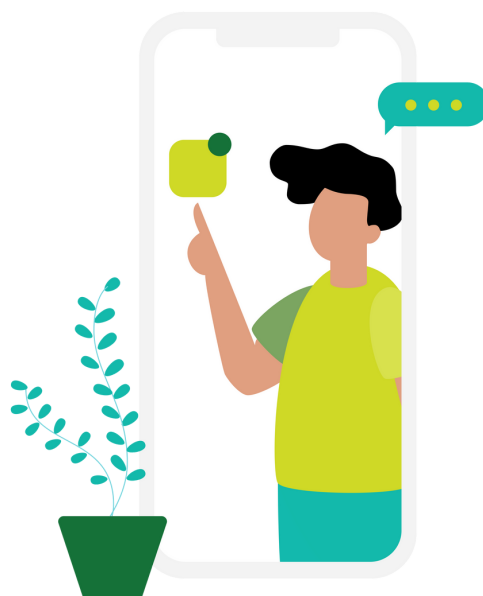
Also, schedule breaks! Give your eyes a rest from staring at a screen and take 5 minutes to stretch or practice the 20-20-20 rule. Take a 15-minute walk and get some fresh air. You'll find yourself being more productive if you're not staring at a screen for 8 hours straight.

Over Communicate

When in doubt, over-communicate with your supervisor and your teacher. Provide regular updates, schedule check-ins, and book times for review and discussion. The more you communicate with everyone involved in the project, the better the final product will be. Here are times when it's essential to check in with your supervisor:

- You need a decision or piece of information to move forward
- A situation has emerged that may impact deadlines or impact your ability to complete the project
- You have questions, and you don't know where to find the answers
- You're not getting the support you need from your supervisor or teammates. Have an open and constructive conversation

Make sure you understand the communication processes and how different channels are used by the organization. When in doubt, ask!



Recommended Resources

Constructive Feedback

[Examples of Constructive Feedback from Kazoo](#)

[Best practices for constructive feedback from Mind Tools:](#)

[Guide to Constructive Feedback from Work Patterns](#)



Virtual and Remote Team Management

[An article from Entrepreneur on managing remote teams](#)

[A guide to remote management from the University of Rochester](#)

[A guide to preparing for your intern](#)

Recommended Reading

[Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Communication, No Matter the Distance by Erica Dhawan \(2021\)](#)

[Best Practices in Virtual Communication](#)



Contact Us

11443-143 Street, NW
Edmonton, AB
T5M 1V7

780.964.2736

www.ruraldevelopment.ca
info@ruraldevelopment.ca

