

Learning Contracts



LEARNING CONTRACTS

Background Information:

Current educational theories suggest that adults learn best if they are motivated to learn. They also retain what is learned longer if the material is meaningful and relevant. Therefore adults should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process and take the initiative to discover their best methods of learning. This concept is known as self-directed learning. A learning contract is one method of implementing the concepts of self-directed learning.

Goal & Objectives:

The overall goal of the learning contract is to allow the student to take responsibility for his/her own learning. The specific objectives of learning contracts include assisting the student to:

- a) gain a better understanding of his/her own strengths and limitations, and of the learning techniques which work best for him/her.
- b) obtain a better appreciation of the values and attitudes that he/she obtained from a particular fieldwork setting.
- c) develop increased commitment to the learning process in the fieldwork setting.

How to Use a Learning Contract:

A learning contract is a written document that is developed by the student in conjunction with his/her fieldwork educator. The contract is based on the performance objectives developed by the University program and the fieldwork site but allows the student to individualize his/her learning program by:

- 1) identifying his/her learning objectives
- 2) identifying resources for achieving the objectives
- 3) identifying a time line for achieving the objectives
- 4) providing evidence that the objectives have been met
- 5) stating how the evidence will be validated.

The student writes his/her objectives, once he/she has been at the fieldwork site for approximately a week and knows what learning opportunities are available. There are three primary domains for objectives:

- i) cognitive/ conceptual
- ii) affective/ attitudes/ personal values
- iii) psychomotor/technical/skills.

Depending on the student's individual strengths & weaknesses s/he should decide on which domains to focus. The student can refer to any objectives specified by the fieldwork educator/ fieldwork site and should also consider his/her own learning needs and individual style of learning. The student then chooses 4-5 specific objectives and writes

the contract. The student discusses and negotiates with the fieldwork educator until the contract is mutually satisfying. The student and fieldwork educator sign the contract. The contract, once written, should not be viewed as a static or binding document, but instead used flexibly to allow for changes as objectives are met and new objectives are developed. The student and fieldwork educator should discuss the learning contract together on a weekly basis and modify and add to the original objectives as needed. The focus of the discussion should be on how the student's learning could be enhanced.

Cautions about Using Learning Contracts:

Problems with this method of evaluation may occur if there is not a full understanding by both the therapist and the student of the concept of the learning contract.

Another area of conflict that may occur is if the objectives the student sets for him/herself are not compatible with those set by the fieldwork educator (for example, if the therapist thinks that the student is not setting high enough goals for him/herself). Considerable negotiation and an open environment that promotes discussion is necessary for the contract to be successful.

Other Comments:

There must be a climate of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, supportiveness, openness, and flexibility between the educator and student. This type of climate will enable the student to feel the confidence and support to move towards increasing self-directedness and independent learning. The student must be prepared to shift roles, from a pupil, to an active learner. S/he must be able to: analyze/diagnose his/her learning needs, formulate/identify learning objectives, decide on a method of learning, carry out the plans and take an active role in self-evaluation /self-critique. The therapist must perceive his/her role as a facilitator of the student's learning who will act as a "resource" for the student rather than as an instructor.

Evaluation

The learning contract can replace the "traditional" list of objectives for the placement that is typically developed by the fieldwork educator and appended to the fieldwork evaluation form. The contract should be re-evaluated weekly, adding new objectives and redefining the original ones as necessary. The student can be involved in doing this independently but it is preferable to have input and direction from the fieldwork educator. At minimum the contract should be examined at the midterm and final evaluation to assess whether the student is meeting/has met the objectives. Please refer to the Learning Contract Evaluation Guide (attached) for more information.

Examples:

Please see attached.

References: Self-Directed Learning & Learning Contracts

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Higgs, J. (1992). Managing Clinical Education: The Educator-manager and the Self-directed Learner. Physiotherapy, 78(11) 822-828.

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Section 3: Learning Contract
SAMPLE

Learning Objective(s) (i.e. What do I want to learn?)	Strategies & Resource(s) required to meet the objective(s) (i.e. How will I learn?)	Evidence (How will I demonstrate that I have learned?)	Criteria for Evaluation & Means of Validation (How do I want to be evaluated?)
<p>To perform safe and independent transfers under minimal supervision.</p>	<p>Observe fieldwork educator at least 3 times. Observe other therapists at least 2 times. Practice on other students at least 2 times.. Review class notes. Perform at least 3 transfers under maximum supervision.</p>	<p>Perform at least one transfer in safe and competent manner by December 12, 2003.</p>	<p>Verbal feedback from fieldwork educator with regard to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. appropriate position and stabilization. 2. safety precautions (e.g. wheelchair brakes in correct position) 3. appropriate transfer method selected and demonstrated. <p>Verbal feedback from client (felt safe etc.) Personal reflections after the transfer.</p>
<p>To develop rapport with adult Clients in the day hospital.</p>	<p>Observe fieldwork educator and other team members interaction and communication skills on at least 6 occasions. Talk to at least 2 other students about methods of developing rapport.</p>	<p>Demonstrate initial rapport by the end of the second week (i.e. November 28), by: Maintaining good eye contact Using appropriate tone of voice Demonstrating appropriate body language</p>	<p>Feedback from team members (i.e. physio, social worker, nurse). Feedback from fieldwork educator on the items listed under "Evidence". Feedback would be appreciated (at minimum) at midterm and</p>

	Re-read class notes & references from Enabling & Professional Development I course with regard to this area.	Demonstrating a calm & interested appearance Demonstrating the ability to be spontaneous in conversation and the ability to use humour if appropriate.	weekly thereafter.
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Student signature: _____ Date: _____

Educator(s) signature(s): _____

Section 3: Learning Contract

Learning Objective(s) (i.e. What do I want to learn?)	Strategies & Resource(s) required to meet the objective(s) (i.e. How will I learn?)	Evidence (How will I demonstrate that I have learned?)	Criteria for Evaluation & Means of Validation (How do I want to be evaluated?)

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Student signature: _____ Date: _____

Educator(s) signature(s) : _____

