

Preceptor Practice Brief

Topic: **Shift from Knowledge Recall to Knowledge Application**

April 2026 | Volume 1 Issue 2

[Click here to read past issues](#) →

pharmacy-nutrition.usask.ca/experiential-learning

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Throughout the PharmD program, students develop foundational knowledge to be used in practice. Preceptors may gauge student readiness for Experiential Learning (EL) based on their ability to recall what they have been taught. EL, however, is intended to support the **transition from knowledge recall to knowledge application**. Even in unfamiliar or unpredictable situations, students must demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving to seek and apply knowledge.

Readiness for EL is measured not just by what students know, but how they think and act when they don't know.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS & INSIGHT

Students arrive at practice sites having learned a **significant amount of material** in the preceding year(s) of the program. While [preceptor training](#) outlines topics covered by year, remember that teaching and assessment in classrooms and skills labs is meant to build a foundation, not authentically mimic the conditions and variability of real-world practice. Every student will encounter problems in EL that the PharmD curriculum has not explicitly prepared them for. Once identified, knowledge and skill gaps become **opportunities for meaningful learning** that sticks long after the placement ends.

At the beginning of a placement, be explicit that your expectation is not for the student to know everything. Rather, you expect them to be honest about what they do not know and demonstrate the **willingness to problem solve** as they address their knowledge gaps. Tell students that you will use **open-ended questions** to help them self-direct their learning.

Consider how the prompts on the left may limit a student's opportunity to explore and address their own knowledge gaps. The comments on the right invite students to be **accountable for their own thinking**, leading them to take action.

"Have you learned about [x] in school yet?" →

"What do you already know about [x]?"

"You're on the right track, but that's not quite right." →

"Talk me through how you arrived at that conclusion."

"You might want to take a look at [y]." →

"How would you go about finding information to help you?"

Bottom line: It is okay for a student to say "I don't know". It is *your* thoughtful follow up prompts that help them to take next steps instead of evading accountability. Students may benefit from early, tailored support and coaching from the EL Office if they struggle to articulate their thought processes, avoid attempting to problem solve at all, or demonstrate significant foundational gaps that could reasonably be expected given their year in the program. **When in doubt, reach out.**

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

Ask yourself:

- In what ways can I adjust my precepting approach to more explicitly prime, model, coach, assess, and reward a student's **ability to reason** over their ability to recall?
- How can I maintain high expectations for students while also acknowledging where they are at in their development?

The Preceptor Practice Brief is a periodical from the EL Office designed to clarify expectations, share best practices, and support high-quality student learning experiences. Each edition highlights one or two timely topics. Drawing on patterns identified across evaluations, inquiries, and other data sources, each edition offers targeted insights and guidance to strengthen the learning environment and enhance preceptor confidence. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this Practice Brief, please contact us.



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
College of Pharmacy
and Nutrition

PHARMACY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
PHARMACY-NUTRITION.USASK.CA/EXPERIENTIAL-LEARNING

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS

Pharmacy Experiential Learning Office

College of Pharmacy and Nutrition

(306) 966-6369 | pharmacyel@usask.ca

© 2026 USask PharmD EL Office. All rights reserved.