Preceptor Practice Brief

Topic: Making Learning Intentional Within Authentic Workflow

October 2026 | Volume 1 Issue 4

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Experiential learning is intended to provide students with opportunities to apply what they have learned to date in **authentic and meaningful ways**. Making timely interventions to prevent or solve **real problems** solidifies their abilities, builds their confidence, and adds value to the placement site. While they learn and grow, they can contribute to the workflow.
This **reciprocal relationship** is a draw for many practice sites and is encouraged.

Inadvertently, however, and often due to complex factors, that balance within the rotation can sometimes drift.

Placement setup may prioritize workflow contributions at the expense of appropriately challenging learning opportunities

"A lot of the time, I felt like an extra set of hands. I appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the workflow, but I felt limited in being able to explore other opportunities. The pile of prescriptions kept growing and I felt I couldn't step away."



Placement setup may over-emphasize knowledge acquisition at the expense of genuine practice experience

"Some of the work felt more theoretical than practical. The scenarios were interesting, and I learned a lot, but I would have benefited from more opportunity to make real interventions. Other pharmacists often intervened before I had the chance. "

Quotes created for illustrative purposes only

KEY CONSIDERATIONS & INSIGHT

Preceptors do not have to create new and novel opportunities just for students.
To facilitate both **impactful learning** for the student and **productive contributions** for the site, consider the formula below:

Authentic Opportunities + Clear Intentions + Reflection & Feedback

Authentic Opportunities: Routine, daily work is inherently authentic. Learners require **repetition** to develop pattern recognition and increasing independence. The focus, however, should remain on applying knowledge, making **timely decisions**, and responding to **real practice needs**. Choose tasks that require both **thinking** *and* **doing**. Task complexity should fall in the sweet spot between too easy and too challenging, and can increase over the course of a placement.

Clear Intentions: Before assigning a task, **name the purpose out loud**. Better yet, ask the student to set their own intention for what they hope to gain from the experience. Clarify expectations and misconceptions as necessary. The goal is not just to get the work done, but to exercise **clinical judgement** and enhance patient outcomes. A student who simply goes through the motions of a routine task without clearly understanding what they could be learning from the experience may be missing an opportunity to develop their **discernment** and problem-solving skills, and sense of professional identity.

Reflection & Feedback: Experienced pharmacists may be able to complete routine activities without thinking about their own thinking, but learners generally need **explicit opportunities** to make sense of their developing knowledge, skills, and beliefs. Build in moments to briefly talk through not just what they did, but **what it means** for their professional practice.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

When thinking about student activities in your placement, ask yourself:

- Is this **authentic** to what pharmacists actually do at our site and in the sweet spot of complexity for the student?
- What do I want the student to learn or develop with this activity and **how does it connect** to their own goals?
- How can I **help them recognize** ways in which they grew during this activity and connect that to their future practice?

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.

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