

## Fieldwork FAQs

This information provides answers to students about fieldwork requirements, supervision, grading, difficulties with supervisors, failing, unfair treatment, accommodations for a disability, and international fieldwork.

### **Who Sets Fieldwork Requirements?**

The Standards for an Accredited Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist or Occupational Therapy Assistant are the official AOTA documents that govern the length and types of fieldwork required for all students. View the OT Standards or OTA Standards under "Related Content" in the column at right.

### **How Many Hours are Required for Level I and Level II Fieldwork?**

For Level I Fieldwork, AOTA does not require a minimum number of hours. Each program sets the time requirements for students on Level I Fieldwork. For Level II Fieldwork, the Standards require a minimum of 24 weeks full-time for occupational therapy students and 16 weeks full-time for occupational therapy assistant students. This may be completed on a full-time or part-time basis, but may not be less than half-time, as defined by the fieldwork site. Your academic program determines the required time needed to complete both Level I and II fieldwork in your program. All students must complete the fieldwork required by their academic programs.

### **Are There Mandatory Types of Level II Fieldwork Required for All Students?**

The Standards recommend that the student be exposed to a variety of clients across the life span and to a variety of settings. While AOTA does not mandate specific types of fieldwork, such as pediatrics or physical disabilities, individual academic programs do have the right to require specific types of fieldwork placement for their students.

### **How Many Days Off Are Allowed?**

Time off during fieldwork is decided by the fieldwork site **and** the academic program. You should direct any questions about taking time off to your academic fieldwork coordinator and your fieldwork educator.

### **How Many Times May a Student Repeat Level II Fieldwork?**

Because fieldwork is considered a part of your academic program, your school sets the policy on repeating Level II fieldwork. Check your college catalog or student handbook for a statement of your program's policy. Also, discuss this issue with your academic fieldwork coordinator to be sure that you understand the policy at your institution.

**How Much Time Do You Have To Finish Level II Fieldwork?**

The Standards do not specify time requirements for completion of Level II fieldwork. It should be completed in a reasonable amount of time. You should consult with your academic program if there are unusual circumstances that might make it difficult for you to complete fieldwork within their required time period.

**Who is Permitted to Supervise Students?**

For Level I fieldwork, a student can be supervised by qualified personnel including, but not limited to, occupational therapy practitioners with initial national certification, psychologists, physician assistants, teachers, social workers, nurses, and physical therapists.

For Level II fieldwork, an occupational therapist can supervise an occupational therapy student as long as the therapist meets state regulations and has a minimum of 1 year of practice experience subsequent to the requisite initial certification. An occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant who meets state regulations and has 1 year of practice experience subsequent to the requisite initial certification can supervise an occupational therapy assistant student.

**What is a Passing Grade for Level II Fieldwork?**

Each academic program is responsible for determining its grading criteria. The academic program has the responsibility to assign a letter grade or pass/fail grade, and to determine the number of credit hours to be awarded for fieldwork.

**What should you do if your fieldwork grade is lower than you believe you deserve?**

Because fieldwork is considered part of your academic program, you will need to follow whatever grade appeal process your program or college requires. The steps involved in that process should be outlined in your college catalog or student handbook. Your academic program makes the final decision on your fieldwork grade.

**What Should You Do if You Are Asked To Perform Above or Outside Your Level of Practice?**

First, discuss this with your fieldwork educator. You may wish to check with the licensure board in the state where you are doing fieldwork for information defining the scope of practice. If you are unable to resolve this issue with the fieldwork site, contact your academic fieldwork coordinator.

**What Should You Do if You Are Experiencing Difficulty During Level II Fieldwork?**

The first step is to talk with your fieldwork educator. Before your meeting, try to write down what you perceive as the problems and develop a list of possible solutions. If you are still experiencing difficulty after meeting with your fieldwork educator, contact the academic fieldwork coordinator at your school for a different perspective and advice on other possible solutions. It is very important that the academic fieldwork coordinator hear from you if you are experiencing difficulty.

**What Happens if You Fail Fieldwork and You Believe You Should Pass?**

First, discuss the situation with your academic fieldwork coordinator. Should you wish to appeal your grade, you must follow the procedures required by your academic program or college. Check your student handbook or college catalog, or contact the Student Affairs office to learn about your school's procedure. Also, find out what your program's policy is on repeating a failed fieldwork. If repeating is a possibility, you should request another fieldwork placement to make up for the prior failure.

### **Can Your School Drop You From the Program for Failing Fieldwork? What Options Would You Have To Get a Degree?**

Each academic program determines its own criteria for dropping a student from the program. You need to find out your school's policy. You may wish to appeal the decision according to the procedure for your school or program. Some possible options for students who have been dropped from occupational therapy education programs include transfer to another major that may have similar course requirements; career counseling; or application to another occupational therapy program. Should you decide to apply to another occupational therapy education program, be aware that the prospective school decides on whether or not your course credits will be accepted.

### **Are You Required To Tell the Fieldwork Site That You Have a Disability?**

Under the Americans with Disability Act, occupational and occupational therapy assistant students with disabilities have the right to decide if and when they disclose their disability to the fieldwork site. Students with disabilities have the right to be seen as qualified capable students first, and secondly as a student who has a disability. Discuss your decision to disclose with your academic fieldwork coordinator. Determine if you will need accommodations to fulfill the essential job functions for a student in your fieldwork setting. After a student is accepted for the fieldwork placement, the student, academic fieldwork coordinator, and fieldwork educator should determine the appropriate and most effective accommodations.

### **How Can You Find a Fieldwork Site Outside of Your State or Region?**

First, you should talk with your academic fieldwork coordinator for suggestions. Generally speaking, it is not appropriate for students to contact fieldwork sites independently unless they are told to do so by their school. Another source of information is the state occupational therapy association in the state where you wish to find a fieldwork site. See "Related Content" in the right column to view a list of State OT Associations contacts. AOTA does not maintain a listing of current fieldwork sites.

### **Can You Do a Level II Fieldwork Outside of the U.S.?**

Yes, depending on the policies of your academic program, you can do fieldwork outside the U.S., as long as the criteria listed in the Standards are followed. This is the criteria that must be met: "Ensure that the student completing Level II fieldwork outside the U.S. is supervised by an occupational therapist who has graduated from a program approved by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and has 1 year of experience in practice. Such fieldwork shall not exceed 12 weeks."

### **How Do You Go About Filing a Formal Complaint if You Feel That You Have Been Treated Unfairly?**

If you have not been able to resolve an unsatisfactory fieldwork situation with your academic program, you may wish to pursue a formal grievance procedure at your school. To do so, you must follow the steps outlined in the written information on your school or program's grievance process. See your program director for details.

**What if I Believe That the Occupational Therapy Program at My School Is Not in Compliance With the Standards for an Accredited Educational Program for the OT or OTA?**

You may initiate a formal complaint in letter form to the Accreditation Council For Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). ACOTE requires the complainant to demonstrate that reasonable efforts have been made to resolve the complaint, or to demonstrate that such efforts would be unsuccessful. ACOTE will not intervene on behalf of individuals or act as a court of appeal for students in matters of admission or dismissal. ACOTE will intervene only when it believes practices or conditions indicate the program may not be in substantial compliance with accreditation standards or established policies. For more information on the complaint procedure, see "ACOTE Policies and Procedures" under "Related Content" in the column at right.

**What if I Believe That My Legal Rights Have Been Violated?**

In this case, you may wish to consider seeking legal counsel. You should be aware that the courts have a history of upholding the judgment of professional educators on questions of student performance, but may rule in favor of the student when due process or civil rights have been violated.

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