



University of  
South Australia

# Supporting students to develop skills on and across clinical placements 2024

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# Session overview

- exemplars
- culture and contexts within the placement setting
- setting expectations
- identifying struggling students
- effective feedback strategies
- useful resources for students to develop skills



# Student exemplar

Describe a student you have observed who has demonstrated good skills on placement



(University of South Australia 2023a)

# What is a ‘good’ student?

“Interpersonal communication, professional demeanour and learning styles are culturally bound ... what constitutes a ‘good’ and ‘successful’ student [or practitioner] may not be a shared view amongst students and staff.”

(San Miguel & Rogan, 2012)

# Culture

“A culture is a **shared** system of behaviour, values, beliefs, attitudes, manners, symbols”

(Windschuttle & Elliott 1999, p. 481)



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**Observable**

may or may not be obvious

behaviours  
appearance dress  
language habits  
customs beliefs traditions

**Non-observable**

usually out of our own  
and others' awareness

beliefs  
expectations  
perceptions  
norms  
time orientation  
space orientation  
learning styles  
rules  
roles  
assumptions  
thought processes  
personality styles  
values

# Cultural contexts

- Health care provision
- Teaching & learning
- Specific workplace culture

# Values & expectations

- Patient-centred care
- The role of the 'student' and 'teacher'
- Professionalism, processes & procedures
- Relationships with peers and other staff

# Understanding expectations



How does the student learn about these?

How does a student know what to do to demonstrate they are skilled in an area?



(University of South Australia 2023a)

# Setting expectations for students

- Consider:
  - stage of learning
  - timing within placement
  - assessable components
  - definition of 'adequate' or 'satisfactory'
- Provide explicit directions for expectations re communication, skill demonstration and feedback

# Challenges for students



What aspects of placement do students find most challenging?



(University of South Australia 2023b)

# Identifying struggling students

Sometimes it is obvious

- e.g. unable to complete a task or explain a concept

Sometimes it is less obvious

- What behaviours might indicate a student is struggling?



# Causes

- Clinical skill level / knowledge not sufficient
- Lack of confidence, embarrassed
- Unfamiliar context or understanding of expectations
- Anxiety, medical conditions or other personal issues
- Language & communication skills, e.g. vocabulary & grammar, pronunciation (clarity, tone, rhythm), register, formal vs informal/colloquial language, use of humour, **indirectness**

# Indirect communication

“Mrs Johnson needs a walking frame”

“The next client’s in the waiting room”

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contextual cues

relationships between speakers

intonation & non-verbal signals

what is *not* said



# Scenario



Student approaches Clinical Educator who is busy with paperwork.

Student: Excuse me, but Mrs S needs her insulin.

Clinical Educator: OK. Can you get it?

Student: Yes.

Clinical Educator: OK (and returns to complete paperwork).

- What might the student think they should do next?
- What does the Clinical Educator think the student should do next?

# Giving feedback



How useful is this feedback?

*“You need to improve your communication with patients”*

# Giving feedback



Is this better?

*“You need to improve your communication when you are giving injections to patients”*

How could it be improved?

# Expectations of feedback

## For staff

- relevant, timely, constructive, clear, indicates level, sensitive

## For students

- will take on feedback, use feedback for learning, identify gaps

# Be direct and explicit

Think SMART:

- **S**pecific – modelling/writing down exactly what should be done
- **M**easureable - how will they/you know they're doing it right?
- **A**chievable – not too overwhelming, fit for the stage of study
- **R**elevant – something they can put into practice straight away
- **T**ime-bound – when do they need to do it?

# Giving feedback

Example of improved feedback:

*“I want you to practice giving **more detailed** instructions to patients when you are giving injections.*

*Before you give the injection you need to explain what you are doing and ask them to move their arm. You could say: “ I’m just going to give you your injection now. Could you just move your arm over this way a bit?”.*

*Practice that with a few patients, and we’ll talk again tomorrow about how you have gone”.*

# Giving feedback

Example of improved feedback:

*“I want you to practice giving **softer** instructions to patients when you are giving injections.*

*Instead of flatly saying “put your arm here please”, raise your tone a bit like I do, and say “could you just put your arm over this way a bit?”.*

*Practice that with a few patients, and we’ll talk again tomorrow about how you have gone”.*

# Patterns of feedback

Create an interactional context:

- Don't rely on giving one-directional instructions rather involve student in a dialogue
- Assume nothing and check interpretation / understanding
- Prompt the student's rehearsal of decision making, critical thinking, self-direction

(Laitinen-Väänänen, Talvitie, & Luukka 2007)

# Giving feedback on communication

1. What are the possible issues that need to be addressed?
2. Why are those issues occurring?
  - Is it clinical knowledge, skill-based, cultural, language, nerves, something else?
3. What specific issue will be the focus of feedback?
4. How will you word the feedback so that it is SMART?
5. Create a 'dialogic' (2-way) interaction so the student is involved and you can check they understand

# Scenario 1



A student is checking pain score with patient.

S: How is your pain?

P: It's really bad, there's a shooting pain all up my leg.

S: Ok, it's an 8 out of 10 (student writes score on documentation)

# Scenario 2



You are debriefing with a group of students after a session. You ask a quieter student a question in order to include them in the discussion about what worked well. They don't attempt an answer and wait in silence for someone else to respond.

# Scenario 3



The students observe you (CE) demonstrating a skill. They appear confused by the verbal instructions and despite seeing the demonstration, are still unable to accurately perform the skill.

# Strategies for educators

- Communicate clear expectations about behaviour in the learning environment from Day 1
- Reiterate importance of effective communication especially in the clinical context, provide any tips specific for your context
- Get students to observe first and report back/reflect on the interaction before doing it themselves
- Provide useful strategies to help the student develop skills and communicate when they are unsure or not confident in something

# Strategies for educators

- Identify at risk students early on
- Work with the student to find out what exactly is challenging for them
- Be explicit about what is expected of the student if they are struggling with a task
- Set achievable tasks
  - focus on one stage or aspect of the skill (scaffold the learning)
  - give a time frame
  - give the wording to students or model behaviour if they are still struggling

# Useful strategies & resources for students

- [Communicating at uni & on placement](#) – Study Help chapter with link to useful handouts e.g. [Developing communication skills for placement](#); [Developing small talk skills for clinical settings](#)
- [Strategies for developing English vocabulary](#) – Study Help handout with useful strategies on speaking Australian English for social purposes
- [Communication and language skills for international medical graduates](#) – website by Uni of Melbourne
- [Tips for improving communication with older patients](#) – US govt website

# Useful strategies & resources for students

Medical reality TV shows for use of real Australian language in health contexts:

- [Old People's Home for 4 year Olds](#) – ABC TV documentary in aged care setting
- [RPA](#) – Australian reality TV show based in Royal Prince Albert Hospital
- [Medical Emergency](#) – Australian reality TV show
- [Ambulance Australia](#) – Australian reality TV show
- [Paramedics](#) – Australian reality TV show

# Volunteering & social activities

[Volunteering at Uni](#)

[UniSA Sport volunteers](#)

[Clubs & societies](#)

[Community services volunteering search](#)

[Seniors & aged care volunteering search](#)



# Student support services



**Career Services**



**Access and Inclusion**



**Counselling**



**International Student Services**



**Study Support**



**Wiringka Student Services**

<https://i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-support-services/>



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# Questions?



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