Tips for starting your new Co-op (for students)

To experience the most benefit, we recommend these best practices:

I. Expectations
- The first day of employment, ask your employer to go over all the expectations - assume nothing!
  (possible items to cover: dress code, internet use, email, instant messaging, cell phones, etc.)
- Ask them to clarify salary, work hours, reporting time/date, OT, sick time
- Ask for any necessary training on office equipment, office supplies
- Ask where and when people eat lunch, take breaks and whether or not coverage is necessary when away from your desk, ask location of bathrooms, kitchen, etc.
- Don’t be embarrassed to ask about little things; you won’t appear stupid

II. Information about company/location/area
- Are there required or suggested trainings/workshops/certifications
- Special meetings/events you need to attend or help with?
- Protocol for “snow days”, etc?

III. When you begin work:
- Ask to be introduced to the department and “key players”
- Identify potential “mentor/s”
- Identify who to go to if there’s a problem
- Be sure to clarify office policy - adherence to work hours, flextime, etc.
- Ask to be included in departmental activities
- Ask to be involved in as many “big picture” meetings as you can (helps you understand the organization and your individual contribution)

IV. Establish and acquire boundaries between work and personal life:
- Clarify if you need to work from home periodically
- Ask about expectations regarding work hours regarding personal technology (cell phones, etc)
- If personal cell phones are used for work purposes, establish guidelines (Will the supervisor be texting you? Will you be contacted during non-work hours? What kind of response time is expected during off-hours? Should you call co-workers on their personal cell phones?)
- Keep your co-op coordinator in the loop regarding telecommuting arrangements and work hours.

IV. At the beginning of term:
- Ask how work will be evaluated, by whom and when
- Learn your supervisor’s preferred style of communication (email, phone, weekly meetings, etc.)
- Ask for clarification on how to prioritize and the importance of deadlines
- Establish learning objectives/goals with your supervisor (this may be easier after 4-6 weeks)
- For projects, clarify what is needed, when, for whom, and the format expected (be sure to finish at least 1-2 days before “due date” to give your boss time to “chime in” or edit)

V. Schedule meetings throughout the work period to:
- Monitor your general performance and receive feedback from your supervisor/peers
- Measure progress towards goals/learning objectives
- Report back to the Co-op Coordinator if there are problems and concerns

VI. Conclusions/Evaluations
- Review the employer’s evaluation of you that will be submitted online with your boss
- Identify skills developed (strengths) and areas that may need improvement
- Ask for any future work experiences that might be beneficial to you