

Write as much as you want (at least 500 words) about what you gave to/got out of the practicum experience. Consider the following prompts: What are you most proud of? What conditions do you think contributed to this accomplishment? What was your biggest struggle? If you overcome it, how did you do that? If not, what would you do differently now that you have the benefit of hindsight? What are you learning about yourself as you finish up this practicum?

Looking back on my practicum experience, I am most proud of learning about new models and tools, applying my statistics skills, and adopting new working and supervising styles. During this practicum, I have been learning three different models, multiple R packages, a relational database management language, a data visualization tool, and machine learning. All those skills, models, and tools are new to me. In the short period, I am not only familiar with those new things but also apply them in practice. Worse, all those models and methods are also new to this office. Even my supervisor is not sure about which model is more appropriate and what exact variables should be put in the models beforehand. All the processes we went through are learning processes. If I would know that I need to learn so many new things before this practicum, I must feel too challenged and exhausted to finish it. However, instead of being exhausted, I feel interested when I learned those new things.

Moreover, I worried that I could not get used to the new working and supervising style of this practicum. I only experienced the role of a student in the past, but this practicum requires me to be an employee. That is to say, I need to learn by myself, conduct my work independently, and report to my supervisor. Luckily, I met a supportive supervisor and friendly colleagues. Their help means a lot to me, which encourages me to transfer from a student to an independent employee. The flexibility that this practicum offers also helps me to explore and learn multiple new things.

However, the flexibility of this work is a double-edged sword. It offers me time and flexibility to learn and manage my time. Meanwhile, it requires me to set deadlines for myself and arrange my daily tasks. In schools, instructors set deadlines for every assignment, but in this practicum, I do not have any deadlines. I report to my supervisor as soon as I finish my tasks. I even need to set tasks for myself. It is common to procrastinate on tasks. For example, some codes need half of the day or even several days to run. While I was waiting for results, instead of planning for the next steps, sometimes, I just had a rest. No deadlines mean no sense of urgency. It is common for me to end up with a YouTube video when I searched and planned to learn a new method. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to set deadlines and predict my productivity for this work. Errors in code are unexpected. Solving one problem might lead to several errors. After running and waiting for several days, I might need to re-run and re-analyze all codes. The virtual desktop also provided various challenges frequently, such as computer crashes, program hangs, etc.

Now I try to differentiate my job by dividing them into several types. Some works have to finish on the virtual desktop, while others can be done on my computer. When the virtual desktop does not work, I can continue to work on my computer for other tasks. Moreover, I changed my workflow. Instead of conducting and interpreting the results after running all codes, I keep writing new codes and interpreting previous results when the program is running. As for the deadlines, although I have not found a solution, I attempted to leave more room for various unexpected problems.

One other unsolved problem for me is how to be confident and comfortable when reporting my results. Although I am dealing with numbers, unlike math or statistics classes which have only one correct answer, data analysis does not have the only answer. I need to interpret all results and choose reasonable ones. While I am keeping learn about those methods and skills, I am always afraid that I might make mistakes, misunderstand, or ignore the key issues. For this problem, I did not have any clues, but be cautious about what I reported and think carefully before I report.

From this practicum, I have learned what I value in a job. First and foremost, the working environment is significant, including a supportive supervisor and friendly relationship with colleagues. Time and resources for me to learn new skills and new thoughts are also essential. Boring and repetitive tasks are the latest ones that I would like to do. I need challenges and creativity for the work.