

GenAI Conversation Starters for Graduate Placements, Internships, and Co-op

Context

Scope: Work-integrated learning (WIL) formally connects a graduate student's academic program with experience in a workplace or practice setting. WIL takes many forms - co-ops, internships, practica, field placements, clinical placements, and several other recognized models (see CEWIL in the Resources section for a full comparison of WIL types). Unlike coursework or thesis research, WIL involves at least three parties with a stake in how generative AI (GenAI) is used: the student, the academic program (supervisor, course instructor/manager, placement coordinator, or graduate chair), and the host organization (workplace supervisor or preceptor).

Shared understanding: Using GenAI in WIL involves a genuinely different set of considerations than GenAI use in an academic setting such as coursework, thesis or comprehensive exam. For a student participating in WIL, the academic program may set expectations around disclosure, learning outcomes, and academic integrity for deliverables (reflective journals, learning logs, final reports). At the same time, the host organization has its own rules - often unwritten, sometimes contractual - about which AI tools may touch client data, proprietary information, or confidential records, and these workplace expectations do not automatically match academic norms. A student can find themselves accountable to two different, and occasionally conflicting, sets of expectations at once.

Role of this document: Currently there are no Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL) guidelines on the use of GenAI, but in this highly dynamic phase, the reader is encouraged to visit their resources for updates (see Additional Resources). This document applies Western's existing Principles of Using GenAI and the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies' general considerations regarding GenAI use, to the WIL context and draws on practical workplace confidentiality guidance from a peer institution to fill the employer-side gap. It is structured as **two linked conversations**: one with your academic program before the placement begins, and one with your workplace supervisor once you begin.

Before either meeting

- Reflect on your own values and comfort level with using GenAI in a professional, non-academic setting, which may differ from your comfort level in coursework, research or other academic milestones (e.g. thesis, major research project, comprehensive exam).
- Review Western's Principles of Using AI (see "Additional Resources" below) so you have a shared vocabulary for the two linked conversations.
- Confirm the type of and details of your WIL placement (co-op, internship, practicum, field placement, clinical placement, or another model - see the CEWIL WIL Comparison Chart in Resources), since expectations around supervision, deliverables, and assessment vary by type and program.
- Investigate policies on the use of GenAI at your host organization - check onboarding materials, IT policies, or ask your workplace contact directly before your first day.
- Identify which placement deliverables are academically assessed (e.g., a reflective journal, a learning log, a final report to your program) versus which are purely workplace deliverables (e.g., an

internal memo, a client-facing document) - the appropriate role for GenAI may differ between the two.

- Consider simulating both conversations with GenAI to explore your own views “out loud” and focus what you want to ask:
 - Example GenAI prompt: “I am a graduate student in [program] preparing for a [co-op/internship/practicum/field placement] with [type of organization]. I want to explore some thoughts for two separate conversations: one with my academic placement coordinator about GenAI expectations for my academic deliverables, and one with my future workplace supervisor about their organization's AI and confidentiality rules. Play the role of each in turn, respond with plausible answers, and give me feedback after each response.”

Part A - Conversation with your academic program

Have this conversation with your supervisor, course instructor/manager, placement/co-op coordinator, or graduate chair (as relevant) before your placement begins.

Starting the Conversation

- **Deliverables:** Which of my placement deliverables (reflective journal, learning log, final report, presentation) are assessed to meet academic requirements, and what are your expectations for GenAI use in each?
- **Disclosure:** If I use GenAI in preparing an academic deliverable about my placement, how should I disclose that use?
- **Learning outcomes:** How might GenAI use affect my ability to demonstrate the learning outcomes this placement is meant to achieve (e.g., professional judgment, workplace communication, applied skills)?
- **Conflicts:** If my workplace supervisor's expectations about AI use turn out to differ from the program's, who should I go to and how should that be resolved?

Digging Deeper

- **Authenticity of reflection:** Reflective and self-assessment components are meant to capture my own professional growth - what level of GenAI assistance (e.g., organizing notes vs. drafting the reflection itself) would compromise that?
- **Confidentiality overlap:** If I want to reflect on workplace experiences in an academic deliverable, what do I need to know about anonymizing or de-identifying employer/client information for privacy protection before using a GenAI tool or sharing with the university?
- **Evaluation:** Will my placement evaluation or grade be affected by GenAI use in ways that differ from how it's handled in other components of my program?
- **Professional/regulatory norms:** Does my field have a professional body with its own position on AI use in practice that applies to me during this placement?
- **Approved tools:** Are there university-approved AI tools I should use instead of public/free tools for any academic-side work connected to this placement?

Part B - Conversation with your workplace supervisor

Have this conversation with your workplace supervisor or preceptor as early as possible once your WIL placement begins - ideally in your first week.

Starting the Conversation

- **Organizational policy:** Does the organization have an existing AI use policy, and where can I find it?
- **Approved tools:** Which AI tools, if any, are approved for use here, and are there tools I should avoid entirely?
- **Confidential and client data:** What client, patient, employee/employer or proprietary information must never be entered into a GenAI tool, including tools with a free or public tier?
- **Task-level expectations:** For the specific tasks I'll be doing, where do you see GenAI as helpful, and where should I avoid it entirely?
- **Attribution at work:** If I use GenAI to help draft a work document or product, how does it need to be flagged and documented internally?

Digging Deeper

- **IP and ownership:** Who owns work product that I create with GenAI assistance while on placement - the organization, me, or the university - and does that change how I should use these tools?
- **Data residency and security:** Do any data-security or data-residency requirements apply to this organization's information (e.g., health, legal, government, or regulated-industry contexts), and how do those constrain which AI tools are acceptable?
- **Professional/regulatory norms:** Does my field have a professional body or regulator with its own position on AI use in practice that applies to me during this placement?
- **When policy is silent:** If the organization doesn't have a written AI policy, what's the safest default assumption I should work from until I get more information and direction?
- **Verification:** For any GenAI-assisted output I produce here, what is the expected standard of review before it is shared with internal unit, internal organization and/or external audience?

Additional Resources

- Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (2024, Oct). [Artificial Intelligence: Considerations for Graduate Research \(PDF\)](#). Ontario Council on Graduate Studies. *(General considerations only - does not address placements/WIL directly; core principles of integrity, transparency, and disclosure still apply. Watch for future updates from this group)*
- AI at Western (n.d.). [Western's AI Policy - Principles of Using AI](#). Western University, Office of the Chief AI Officer. - *Western's five guiding principles (transparency, accountability, integrity, privacy, inclusion) referenced throughout both conversations above.*
- CEWIL Canada (n.d.). [Work-Integrated Learning Comparison Chart](#). Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada. *(not GenAI-specific; used here to define and distinguish the WIL types this guide covers (co-op, internship, practicum, field placement, clinical placement, and others).*
- Harvard University Information Technology (n.d.). [Generative AI Guidelines](#). Harvard University. - *in the absence of a Canadian source, included as a practical model for the kind of confidential/proprietary-data questions a workplace supervisor conversation should cover.*