The Purpose

A component of the Social Sciences Co-op Program is the completion of work term projects for each placement. These guidelines will give you details on the following aspects of the work term report:

1. Goals and Objectives
2. Choosing a Topic
3. Content & Research
4. Suggested Outline
5. Written Report Requirements
   a. Format
   b. Deadlines
   c. Academic Integrity
6. Evaluation Criteria
7. Oral Report

1. Goals & Objectives

The goal of the written work term project is to prepare a critical analysis relevant to your work term experience.

A critical analysis is a scholarly effort that reflects your experience by evaluating, questioning and assessing some organizational goal, service, initiative, process, policy or project. While the emphasis and overall character of the report should be scholarly, strive to compose a report that can be understood by academics and professionals alike, and that you would be proud to share with your employer. An oral report will give you an opportunity to hone your verbal presentation skills by describing your work responsibilities and the findings of your written report to an audience of fellow undergraduates and faculty members.

2. Choosing a Topic

Carefully choosing an appropriate topic is the first important step to writing a successful work term report. Start by reflecting on your work experience and select any problem, question or issue that is relevant within the professional environment in which you are working. Choose something you think is interesting and important and that you would like to know more about.
The project does not have to deal specifically with your own position or job activities.

Early in the work term you should meet with your faculty Co-op Supervisor of Studies and your employment supervisor to discuss suitable topics for your project. Plan to do some preliminary research with respect to potential topics on your own time. After your initial discussions with your faculty Co-op Supervisor, promptly meet with your employer/supervisor to obtain his/her feedback on the topics you are considering. You should be prepared to confirm your choice of topic with both your employer/supervisor and the Co-op Supervisor of Studies by the middle of your work term.

Possible topics for your work term project include:

- An evaluation of a current service, project or program. These evaluations might focus on any elements of a project or program, including efficiency, output quality, social outcomes, or other appropriate goals of an organizational function or activity.
- An analysis of how a formal concept or method is applied in practice by those working in the organization.
- A discussion of the implications of social/economic changes for the organization and its activities.
- A discussion of the implications of new direction in government policy, or changes in political leadership or institutions for the organization and its activities.
- A counterfactual analysis that asks “what if” some external circumstance or internal feature was absent to examine the implications of that circumstance.
- An analysis of research conducted or data collected by the organization, including (but not restricted to) research you completed during your work-term.
- A replication of previous research conducted by the organization, a study of the organization or project, or a study of similar organizations or projects.

3. Content and Research

The work term project is an essential component of your co-op education as it provides you with the opportunity to reflect on your learning experience during the work term and links your professional experience to academic inquiry.

Remember that the work term report should be analytical, not descriptive. Except for an appendix (see below), this is not a report of your daily routine during your placement. Strictly narrative reports will result in an unsatisfactory evaluation.
Analytical papers assist decision-makers dealing with that matter. Analyses focus on questions like “why” rather than “what.” Thorough analyses break a problem or issue down into its component parts. When you critically consider each component, you can more readily identify the crux of the issue, ensuring that your recommendations match the source of any particular problem(s).

Your research can analyze original information, such as interviews you conduct, documents you collect, or surveys you implement, or can rely on existing data, such as reports collected by the organization, government statistics, or public opinion data. Whenever appropriate, you are encouraged to include statistical analyses or analyses of qualitative data. With your employer’s explicit permission, you can utilize organizational data and/or draw on organizational reports. With permission of your employer and any relevant ethics approvals, you may conduct interviews with co-workers, clients and/or service recipients.

You might also compare your problem or issue to other places, issues or times. Many good analyses compare a project or program to similar efforts in other places or past efforts rather than to some hypothetical ideal. This often requires more initial research, but the writing and analysis may ultimately prove to be easier.

Program or policy evaluations should include recommendations for improvements along with an assessment of the likelihood of such recommendations being adopted and any barriers that may impede the implementation of the recommended reforms.

In an appendix separate from the core analysis in your report, summarize your role in the organization and the tasks you completed or responsibilities you held during your work-term(s). This should be the only purely descriptive section of the report. In this section, please reflect on your experience and what you learned during the term(s). The length of the appendix should not exceed two pages.

4. Suggested Outline

The structure of this report should be similar to other reports you have written. The standard framework for an analytical report is:

1) An Abstract that summarizes your report in a single paragraph.
2) An introduction that
   a) Succinctly delineates a problem or issue.
b) Explains why this problem is important.

c) Summarizes relevant theory or literature on the issue (if relevant).

3) An analysis of the problem or issue.

4) A discussion and/or conclusion, including any:
   a) Possible alternatives.
   b) Recommended reforms.
   c) Forward-looking assessments.

5) An appendix that describes your job responsibilities and the tasks you completed during the term.

With the permission of your Co-Op Supervisor of Studies, you may compose your report consistent with the policy memo format utilized in select public policy courses.

5. Written Report Requirements

a. Format
Reports should be between 5 and 7 pages in length (font size 12; single line spacing, standard page margins) excluding the abstract, any tables, appendices and organizational information and charts, questionnaires, survey results, etc.

The overall presentation of your work term report is very important. As mentioned above, please produce a piece of writing that you would be proud to share with your employer. Be sure to avoid any unprofessional spelling or grammatical errors. Use spelling and grammar checks and thoroughly proofread (if you can, ask someone else to proofread for you!). Write using language that is clear, concise and easy to understand. Avoid jargon and explain technical terms. Employ section headings that guide the reader through the paper, include page numbers, and format the text in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing and consistent throughout.

b. Deadlines
All work term reports are due by April 30. Any extensions require approval from the Co-op Office and your Supervisor of Studies. Students on a double work term should produce an interim report at 4 months and a final report at the end of the work-term. The interim report should include a project proposal and a summary of the experience thus far.
c. Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student’s individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Students must prepare and submit individual reports. Reference all sources. Clearly indicate where you are using direct quotes from people or other written materials by appropriately utilizing quotation marks. Include a complete bibliography of all sources cited/used in the report, including a list of all interviews and other information requirement by research ethics. The Writing Centre at UTSC provides handouts for different citation styles. Be prepared to submit your document to turnitin.com for textual analysis of your document to ensure originality.

More detailed suggestions for avoiding problems with plagiarism »

6. Evaluation Criteria

Grades for Work Term Projects are either a Pass/Fail. The following represents the criteria that will be used to evaluate work term projects.

1. Clear statement of the topic and goal of the report
2. Quality of analysis
3. Discussion, conclusions & recommendations (in line with goals of the report)
4. Writing Style and Presentation

If you fail your first term report, you may be given a second opportunity to complete the report in a satisfactory manner within two weeks by a deadline established by the Co-op Office or the Co-op Supervisor of Studies. A second fail will result in a failed work term (recorded as NCR/no-credit on your transcript) and removal from the Co-op Program.

7. Oral Report

Two or three times a year, there will be a symposium for Social Science Co-op Students. At that symposium, all students who have completed (or are nearing completion) of a work-term will deliver a 10-15 minute presentation to co-op staff, interested faculty and current and prospective co-op students. During the presentation, you should describe the organization and the main activities the organization engages in, your actual work experience (much like the
content in the appendix), and present the research and key findings contained in your written report.

Please include any work place or job search advice that you found valuable and wish to pass along to future co-op students. Dates for the presentation will be announced each term.

NOTE: A draft version of your oral report should be shared with your Co-op Supervisor of Studies no later than eight days before the date of the presentation.