



## Contexts in Which Social Workers Operate

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#### Core Competencies in This Chapter (Check marks indicate which competencies are covered in depth)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Identity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critical Thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diversity in Practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Human Rights & Justice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research-Based Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human Behavior	<input type="checkbox"/>	Policy Practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Practice Contexts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Engage, Assess, Intervene, Evaluate

### OVERVIEW

Every professional faces boundary issues from time to time. Boundaries are limitations on our activities. Like fences, they are there to protect and maintain. They may be laws regarding proper conduct, local agency policy, or even ethical mandates. Within some settings, certain procedures or practices may have developed over the years. Occasionally, we run into boundaries that we don't like. Because boundaries are not always apparent, we may not even know that there is a boundary issue until a supervisor, an instructor, or a peer points out a problem. This chapter will familiarize the student with boundaries that arise when working in an agency and provide guidance on how to behave as a professional.

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES AMONG VOLUNTEER, STUDENT, AND EMPLOYEE ROLES?

Every day, each of us assumes many roles. For instance, our behavior may reflect our status as a son or daughter, mother or father, student, employee, or volunteer. Social service agencies differ in how they view student interns, and their understanding of the internship role will determine what students will be given to do, the amount of supervision they will receive, and how their performance will be evaluated. Your own educational experience will be enriched by a clear understanding of the differences among the volunteer, student, and employee roles.

Depending on the agency, the differences between a volunteer and a student intern may be barely perceptible. For instance, both volunteer counselors and student interns at a rape crisis center may have to complete 40 hours of training and orientation before they have any client contact. In other settings, such as a hospital, volunteers have very different responsibilities from those of student interns.

Although students and volunteers might at times be given similar tasks, students have the additional responsibility of learning why a task was done, why it was done the way it was, and how that task relates to the larger picture of planned intervention. Being a student involves thinking, analyzing, and reflecting, as well as doing. Students are expected to see the connection between assessment, planning, and intervention. They should feel that they may ask questions and ask for reference material in areas where they have little knowledge, and should be given the opportunity to observe and practice new skills.

Volunteers tend to be given mundane chores (e.g., addressing envelopes or answering telephone calls) because they are seen as just "helping out." Such volunteer assignments generally do not require close supervision. Although you as a student may be given some of the same responsibilities as volunteers, these should make up only a small portion of your time in the practicum. If you find that the bulk of your practicum time is filled with tedious chores that do not allow you to grow intellectually as a social worker, your agency may view you more as a volunteer than as a student.

As an intern, you ought to be working with clients, families, and groups directly (unless you are in certain administrative or research placements).