

FIELD NOTES:

A field note should describe feedback shared with learner; how things went and what could be improved how to improve

What should I write on a Field Note?

Field notes should offer **narrative** or **descriptive** comments.

- Narrative comments offer expert judgment and describe effectively and concretely a student's performance in the clinical setting. How did it go? What was done well? What could be improved? How can the resident can enhance performance?
- Narrative comments that focus on skills to reinforce and suggestions for improvement are best
- Narrative comments can include feedback on:
 - hypothesis generation and differential diagnosis
 - data interpretation
 - management plans
 - communication skills (written and verbal)
 - learning approaches
 - management skills
 - professional behaviour

When should I create a field note?

- Field notes should be written in a timely manner, as soon after the clinical encounter and feedback as possible.
- Field notes should be routine, daily, frequent and expected. Feedback is part of teaching and learning culture
- When you regularly provide a field note, you normalize the process of feedback. Residents can then focus on what was done well, what could be improved, and how they can enhance their performance.
- Field notes should be dated to allow for positioning on a developmental or learning trajectory

Why Bother Writing Field Notes?

- Field notes guide resident **learning** by providing information about gaps and concerns. Resident strengths are also re-enforced.
- Field note can help **document** educational diagnosis.
- “Field Notes” are an essential **assessment instrument** in residency training as they record what was observed and feedback shared with the learner.

BEST PRACTICES FOR FIELD NOTES

1. Remember that field notes can be used to discuss any of the following: CanMED roles, procedures, skill dimensions and phases of clinical encounter.
2. Be aware that most field notes tend to focus on the “Medical Expert” role. Consider comments on other dimensions as well (e.g. Communicator, Manager, Collaborator)
3. Daily feedback is essential. Make your field notes daily, expected, and focused on what was done well, what could be improved, and how the resident can enhance performance. Frequent feedback should be part of our teaching and learning culture
4. Normalize the process of feedback. This will help reduce resident anxiety around feedback.
5. Remember that field notes are low stakes. They are informal and opportunistic in nature. Take time to document strengths but also areas for improvement so that residents address their weaknesses.
6. Remember that your reflections in field notes are intended to promote learning.
7. Feedback should, whenever possible, be based on direct observation of patient encounters. Learners consider feedback more valid when the preceptor has directly observed the skill about which they are offering feedback.
8. Each Field Note is a single piece of data among many, but each one contributes to a fair and reliable overall competency decision.

What makes an excellent field note?

Just ask yourself the following questions:

Is the feedback timely?

Are there narrative comments?

Is the tone positive and/or supportive?

Does the narrative describe behaviour in clear unambiguous language?

Does the narrative reinforce what has been done well?

Does the narrative identify areas to improve?

Does the narrative include specific strategies for improvement?

Is there congruence between the learner level and the sophistication of feedback?

