as an entry-level occupational therapist completing my first year of licensure and employment, I find myself looking forward to the next progression of my professional development: supervising a Level II fieldwork occupational therapy student. This responsibility offers an exciting challenge that can affirm one’s knowledge and skills while providing the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the future of occupational therapy practice. On the other hand, being a fieldwork supervisor can seem daunting due to unfamiliarity with this role and the idea of questioning one’s own competency. To become more familiar with student supervision, I launched an informal investigation of the literature, interviewed seasoned colleagues, and searched Web sites. As a novice preparing for my first Level II fieldwork student, I hope to offer a unique perspective on helpful resources, training, and advice to assist other practitioners embarking on this new role.

RESOURCES
The first step of the investigation was to search for student-related information within the occupational therapy department where I practice. I found an established student program with a formal supervisor training protocol and orientation. There is a well-written Policy and Procedures manual that outlines the entire student program and includes expectations of both the student and supervisor. If a student program has yet to be established in your facility, an invaluable resource is the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

AOTA’s Web site (www.aota.org) has an Educators link that provides an abundance of information related to fieldwork education, including steps to starting a fieldwork program. It is highly recommended that one browse the resources in the Fieldwork Education link before receiving a student, to access reference materials, sample feedback and evaluation forms, and site-specific objectives. The form I found most helpful was the Self-Assessment Tool for Fieldwork Educator Competency.¹ This tool was developed for fieldwork educators to reflect on their own knowledge and skills and measure competency in the areas of professional practice, education, supervision, evaluation, and administration. This tool is helpful for identifying areas in need of further professional development that one should focus on before attempting to teach others.

If you discover areas in need of further professional development, it is helpful to consult coworkers with Level II fieldwork supervisory experience to act as mentors and to provide you with additional training.

TRAINING
In addition to the on-site mentoring you may receive from experienced supervisors, formal training opportunities exist that offer the extra benefit of continuing education credits. One such training tool is the AOTA online course Using the Fieldwork Performance Evaluation Forms: An Interactive Approach.² This course is based on the AOTA publication Using the Fieldwork Performance Evaluation Forms: The Complete Guide³ and is intended to introduce future Level II fieldwork supervisors to the standard assessment tool used to rate students’ entry-level competencies. The course allows occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants to learn at their own pace by providing access to the site for up to 1 year. After successfully completing the course, 6 AOTA CEUs (6 PDUs/6 contact hours) are awarded. Further training can be obtained through regional fieldwork councils that hold conferences related directly to student issues. To find the nearest fieldwork council, contact AOTA or go to the Fieldwork Education section of the AOTA site and click on Fieldwork Councils/Consortiums.

It is also recommended that supervisors-in-training fulfill prerequisites to gain experience, such as supervising a Level I fieldwork student, or training a new employee. Teaching opportunities allow one to practice interpersonal skills, evaluate performance, and learn how to provide constructive feedback.

ADVICE
To prepare for a Level II fieldwork student, it is beneficial to listen to the advice of experienced supervisors who know what works and what doesn’t. To gain some insight I interviewed colleagues who have had many students. Three common themes emerged.

First, practice positive communication skills. These skills include establishing good interpersonal relationships; resolving conflict quickly and fairly; and providing concise, clear explanations. Knowing how to communicate with a student allows for easier flow of information and feedback. It was suggested that one should meet with a potential student before agreeing to the supervisor role to determine compatibility. If you know from the get-go
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that the student is not a good fit, then it is best to request a different student.
Second, remember that each student is different and not meant to become your clone. It is important to teach policies and procedures and demonstrate your style, but it is just as important to allow students some creative freedom to establish their own techniques and therapeutic use of self. Have fun and accept that there may be times when the roles will reverse and you will learn a thing or two from the student.

Third, be organized and manage your time effectively. Know the expectations of the student's educational program, including details of assignments and due dates, requirements of direct clinical care, and documentation that needs to be completed by the end of the fieldwork. It is helpful to establish and share with the student a timeline of expected professional progression, but also remain flexible to allow for students' variable needs.

CONCLUSION
You do not need to know it all when it comes to fieldwork education, as long as you know how to take advantage of available resources. If you have a question about fieldwork education, refer to AOTA's many resources, seek out training opportunities, and listen to the candid advice of experienced supervisors.

References

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