

MFT Trainees: Practicum Course Requirements

California law¹ allows *Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) student trainees to counsel clients when certain requirements are met. This document answers frequently asked questions about those requirements.*

1. What is required for MFT trainees to be allowed to counsel clients?

California law² requires the activities and services provided by MFT trainees in their work setting to constitute part of the trainee's supervised course of study. To meet this requirement, the law specifies that MFT trainees must be enrolled in a practicum course in order to counsel clients (see exception in #2 below).

2. Are there any exceptions for students who would like to see clients while not enrolled in a practicum course?

There is a narrow exception: Trainees may continue counseling clients while not enrolled in a practicum course if the following requirements are met:

- The gap in practicum enrollment is less than 90 calendar days, and
- The gap is immediately preceded by enrollment in a practicum course, and
- The gap is immediately followed by either re-enrollment in practicum or completion of the degree program.

This is commonly referred to as the “**practicum bookends**” rule.

3. What does “completion of the degree program” mean?

It means the date the degree is officially conferred by the school (i.e., the date the degree is awarded as it appears on the official transcript—not the graduation ceremony date).

4. Can I see clients for up to 90 days, even if my gap in practicum is longer?

No. The 90-calendar-day window is the maximum allowable gap in practicum. If the gap is 90 calendar days or longer, you are not permitted to counsel clients at all during that time.

¹ *Business and Professions Code (BPC) section [4980.36\(d\)\(1\)\(B\)](#)*

² BPC section [4980.42](#)

5. What if the practicum gap is 90 calendar days or more?

You may not counsel clients during the gap. The law prohibits client counseling during any gap of 90 days or more, even if you resume practicum afterward. **There are no exceptions.**

6. If I fail or drop my practicum course, do my hours still count?

The law does not specify whether you must pass practicum for hours to count. It is up to your school and supervisor to decide whether to approve and sign off on your hours in that situation.

7. May I gain other types of experience hours while not enrolled in practicum?

Yes. While you cannot counsel clients, you may earn other allowable hours - such as client-centered advocacy, workshops, trainings, and non-clinical activities—as long as all other legal requirements are met (e.g., supervision, setting requirements, and school-site agreement per BPC section 4980.42(e)).

Note: While trainees must meet all legal requirements outlined above, the trainee is also subject to the school's purview pursuant to Business and Professions Code section 4980.42. Schools are permitted to set their own requirements for their program, including the gaining of hours, as long as those requirements do not interfere with requirements set in California law.

For additional FAQs relating to MFT Trainees, see the [FAQs for MFT Trainees and AMFTs](#).

Code Section References: BPC sections [4980.36](#) and [4980.42](#)