

TAXAD 103 - Office Procedures and Management

Comprehensive Outline

Module 1 — Office Roles, Culture, and Professional Standards

Module Goals

By the end of Module 1, students will be able to:

- Identify common roles in a tax/administrative office and what each role handles
 - Use professional workplace standards (appearance, punctuality, tone, boundaries)
 - Follow office culture norms (communication channels, escalation, teamwork)
 - Apply “client experience” standards from first contact to follow-up
 - Recognize and correct unprofessional behaviors using real examples
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1.1 Office Structure: Who Does What

Most offices operate as a system. Knowing **who owns a task** prevents errors, delays, and awkward client interactions.

Common Office Roles (Tax/Administrative Setting)

Table: Office Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Primary Responsibilities	What They Do NOT Do	Typical Tools
Receptionist / Front Desk	Greeting clients, answering phones, scheduling, basic info, routing calls	Give tax advice, change figures on forms	Phone system, calendar, CRM, intake checklist
Administrative Assistant	Intake packets, document tracking, scanning, file naming, follow-ups, preparing signature packets	Approve returns, interpret tax law	Document portal, scanners, trackers, templates
Tax Preparer	Interview, data entry, form preparation, questions for missing info	Final sign-off (if office uses reviewer)	Tax software, organizer, workpapers
Reviewer / QA	Check return for completeness/accuracy, verify documents, compliance	Collect missing docs from client (often admin does)	QA checklist, review notes, audit trail
Office Manager	Policies, workflow, training, client escalations, staffing, quality metrics	Prepare every return personally	SOP binder, dashboards, staff schedule
Bookkeeper / Billing Support (if separate)	Invoices, payments, receipts, deposits, billing policies	Discuss sensitive tax details	POS, invoice system, payment logs

Illustration Example: “Task Ownership” in Real Life

A client calls asking: “Is my return done yet?”

- **Front Desk/Admin:** verifies identity + checks status in tracker + provides approved status language
- **Preparer/Reviewer:** handles technical questions (why refund is lower, filing status changes, etc.)

1.2 Chain of Command and Escalation

A professional office has **clear escalation paths** so small problems don't become big ones.

Table: Escalation Guide

Situation	First Person to Handle	When to Escalate	Escalate To
Scheduling conflict	Front desk/admin	Client insists on same-day	Office manager
Missing documents	Admin	Client refuses to provide	Preparer (then manager)
Client complaint about service	Admin	Client becomes hostile	Office manager
Fee dispute	Admin (policy-based response)	Client demands exception	Office manager
Technical tax question	Admin routes	Immediately	Tax preparer/reviewer
Potential identity mismatch	Admin	Immediately	Office manager + preparer

“Escalation Language” (Professional Script)

- “I want to make sure you get the correct answer. I’m going to escalate this to our preparer/manager and have them follow up.”

1.3 Professional Standards: What “Professional” Looks Like

Professional standards protect the office, the client, and your reputation.

Core Professional Standards

- **Punctuality:** arrive early enough to be ready at start time
- **Appearance:** clean, office-appropriate, consistent with office policy
- **Communication:** respectful, clear, confident—not casual or slangy
- **Boundaries:** no tax advice if not authorized; no personal opinions
- **Accuracy:** document everything; don't assume
- **Confidentiality:** protect client information at all times

Table: Professional vs Unprofessional Behaviors

Area	Professional	Unprofessional
Language	“Let me confirm and follow up.”	“I think it’s fine.”
Tone	Calm, steady, helpful	Defensive, sarcastic
Privacy	Verify identity first	Sharing info with “spouse” without verification
Appearance	Clean, neat, policy-compliant	Distracting clothing, poor hygiene
Work habits	Uses checklists and logs	Works from memory, no notes
Client handling	Sets expectations	Promises unrealistic timelines

Illustration Example: “Professional Boundaries”

Client asks: “Should I claim my cousin as a dependent?”

- **Correct admin response:** “That’s a tax determination—let me note your question and have the preparer discuss it with you.”
- **Incorrect:** “Yes, you can claim them.”

1.4 Office Culture: How Teams Work Together

Office culture is how people **communicate and behave** day-to-day.

Culture Basics

- Respect roles and workloads
- Use the correct channel: tracker notes vs text vs email
- Support teammates: accurate handoffs prevent rework
- Stay solution-focused, especially during peak season

Table: Communication Channels and When to Use Them

Channel	Best For	Example	Avoid Using For
In-person (brief)	Quick clarifications	“Where does this file go next?”	Long explanations in front of clients
Phone	Immediate client needs	Appointment changes	Sensitive details without verification
Email	Clear documentation	Missing docs request	SSNs or sensitive info unless secure
Office chat	Fast internal updates	“Client arrived early.”	Arguing or venting
File notes / CRM	Permanent record	“Client will upload 1099 by Friday.”	Personal opinions

Illustration Example: “Handoff Notes”

Bad note: “Client missing stuff.”

Good note: “Missing: 1099-NEC + childcare statement. Client promised upload by 3/5. Do not schedule review until received.”

1.5 Workplace Ethics: Trust and Integrity

Ethics in office operations means:

- Doing the right thing even when it’s inconvenient
- Not cutting corners under pressure
- Respecting confidentiality and policies

Common Ethical Problems in Office Settings

- Discussing client matters in public areas
- “Guessing” missing information to finish faster
- Sharing passwords or leaving systems unlocked
- Changing notes to hide mistakes
- Promising outcomes (refund amounts, IRS timing)

Table: Ethical Dilemma Responses

Dilemma	Wrong Response	Right Response
Client wants “estimate” of refund	“Probably \$3,000.”	“The preparer will confirm after review.”
Co-worker asks for your login	“Sure.”	“I can’t share logins—let’s request access.”
Missing a document	“We’ll file without it.”	“We need it; let’s request and document.”
Client insists spouse can pick up	“Okay.”	“We need written authorization + ID verification.”

1.6 Client Experience Standards (The “Service Timeline”)

Clients judge the office by consistency, clarity, and respect.

Client Experience = Expectations + Communication + Follow-through

Table: Client Experience Timeline

Stage	What the Client Expects	Your Standard
First call	Friendly + helpful	Professional greeting + clear next step
Appointment set	Certainty	Confirm time, location, what to bring
Intake	Organization	Checklist + document receipt log
Waiting period	Updates	Clear timelines + status language
Review/sign	Confidence	Prepared packet + explained process
After filing	Support	Next steps: acceptance, delivery, record retention

Illustration Example: Setting Expectations

Instead of: “It’ll be done soon.”

Say: “Once we receive all documents, typical processing is 5–7 business days. We’ll contact you if anything is missing.”

1.7 Practical Skills Lab (Student Activities)

Activity A: “Match the Role to the Task”

Provide a list of tasks; students label each task with the correct role.

Examples:

- Verify ID at intake
- Explain filing status rules
- Create missing documents email
- Final quality review
- Handle fee dispute escalation

Activity B: Rewrite Unprofessional Statements

Unprofessional: “You didn’t send what we need.”

Professional rewrite: “We’re missing a few items needed to complete your return. Here’s what we still need and how to send it.”

Activity C: Micro Roleplay (2 minutes each)

Scenario: client calls angry about delays.

Student must:

1. greet professionally
2. verify identity
3. check tracker (simulated)
4. set expectations and next step
5. close politely

1.8 Module 1 Checklists (Ready to Use)

Professional Standards Checklist (Student Self-Check)

- ☐ I arrive on time and ready
- ☐ I use clear, respectful language
- ☐ I protect confidentiality (screens, files, conversations)
- ☐ I don’t give tax advice unless authorized
- ☐ I document actions and next steps
- ☐ I follow escalation rules when needed

“First Contact” Phone Checklist

- ☐ Greeting + office name + my name
 - ☐ Client name + phone number
 - ☐ Reason for call
 - ☐ Identity verification if discussing status
 - ☐ Clear next step + timeline
 - ☐ Note entered in file/CRM
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Module 2 — Front Desk, Customer Service, and Client Experience

Module Goals

By the end of Module 2, students will be able to:

- Deliver a consistent, professional **front-desk experience** (in-person + phone)
 - Use **service scripts** for greetings, scheduling, missing documents, and follow-ups
 - Apply **client experience standards** (expectations, timelines, clear next steps)
 - Handle common problems (late arrivals, walk-ins, angry clients) using de-escalation
 - Document interactions correctly and protect confidentiality
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2.1 The Front Desk Role: The “Control Center” of the Office

Front desk staff manage flow, protect privacy, and reduce errors.

Key Responsibilities

- Greeting clients and managing arrivals
- Answering phones and routing calls
- Scheduling and confirming appointments
- Collecting/receiving documents using checklists
- Maintaining a calm, professional environment
- Keeping accurate notes/logs

Table: Front Desk Priorities (in order)

Priority	Why It Matters	Example
Safety + respect	Prevent escalation	Keep tone calm; set boundaries
Confidentiality	Legal/ethical requirement	Verify identity before status updates
Accuracy	Reduces rework	Use checklists; confirm spelling
Timeliness	Keeps day moving	Buffers; keep visits efficient
Client experience	Builds trust & referrals	Clear next steps + follow-up

2.2 First Impressions and Greeting Standards

In-Person Greeting (Step-by-Step)

1. Make eye contact + smile
2. Greeting + office name
3. Confirm appointment name/time
4. Ask for ID if policy requires
5. Provide next step (“Have a seat; we’ll call you shortly.”)

Script Example (In-Person)

- “Good morning—welcome to [Office Name]. How can I help you today?”
- “Great, I have you scheduled at 2:30. May I confirm your last name and phone number?”

Phone Greeting (Step-by-Step)

1. Greeting + office name + your name
2. Get caller name + callback number
3. Identify reason for call
4. Verify identity if discussing status
5. Provide next step and timeline

Script Example (Phone)

- “Thank you for calling [Office Name], this is [Name]. How may I help you?”

2.3 Professional Communication and Tone

Service Language Rules

- Use clear, respectful, neutral language
- Avoid slang, arguing, or blame
- Speak in solutions and next steps

Table: “Unprofessional” → “Professional” Rewrites

Don't Say	Say Instead
“You didn't send the right stuff.”	“We're missing a few items needed to complete your return.”
“That's not my job.”	“I can help by routing this to the right person.”
“I don't know.”	“Let me verify that and follow up with you.”
“Calm down.”	“I understand this is frustrating. Let's go step by step.”

2.4 Client Experience: Setting Expectations and Reducing Confusion

Clients feel satisfied when they know:

- what happens next
- what they must do
- when they'll hear back
- what the boundaries are

The “CLEAR” Method

- **Confirm:** what the client needs
- **List:** documents/steps
- **Estimate:** timeline (based on policy)
- **Action:** what you will do next
- **Recap:** repeat the plan

Example

- “To move forward, we need your 1099-NEC and childcare statement. Once received, processing is typically 5–7 business days. I'll send you a secure upload link today, and we'll schedule your review appointment after the last document arrives.”

2.5 Walk-ins, Late Arrivals, and No-Shows

Walk-In Policy (Typical Options)

- Option A: same-day if schedule allows
- Option B: drop-off only
- Option C: schedule next available

Table: Handling Arrivals

Situation	Best Response	What to Document
Walk-in	Offer available option + policy	Name, need, outcome
10–15 min late	Confirm if can still be seen	Arrival time, reschedule if needed
No-show	Follow policy (fee/reschedule)	Time, contact attempt
Early arrival	Thank them, manage wait	“Arrived early” note

Script Example (Late Arrival)

- “Thanks for coming in. You’re about 15 minutes past your start time. Let me check the schedule to see if we can still accommodate you today. If not, I can reschedule the next available appointment.”

2.6 Document Drop-Off and Intake at the Front Desk

Document Handling Rules

- Use a checklist
- Confirm the client’s name is attached to everything
- Provide a receipt or confirmation
- Identify missing items without giving advice

Table: Document Status Labels

Status	Meaning	Next Step
Received	In file and logged	Route to prep/review
Missing	Required but not provided	Request via email/text script
Unclear	Doesn't match client	Verify with client/preparer
Duplicate	Already in file	File in duplicates or shred per policy

Mini-Template: Drop-Off Receipt

- Client: _____ Date: _____
 - Received: _____
 - Missing/Needed: _____
 - Next step: _____
 - Staff initials: _____
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2.7 Handling Difficult Conversations (De-escalation)

The "L.E.A.P." Method

- Listen (don't interrupt)
- Empathize ("I understand this is frustrating.")
- Apologize/acknowledge (without admitting fault)
- Problem-solve (options + next step)

Table: Triggers and Best Responses

Client Behavior	What It Usually Means	Best Response
Angry tone	Feels ignored	Provide clear timeline + next step
Repeating self	Not feeling heard	Summarize back what you heard
Demanding exception	Fear of deadline	Offer policy-based options
Blaming staff	Stress	Stay neutral; document facts

Script Example (Angry Client)

- “I hear you. Let’s look at what we have and what we still need. I can help by confirming the file status and outlining the next step today.”

Boundary Script (If abusive language)

- “I want to help, but I can’t continue the conversation if there’s abusive language. If we keep it respectful, I can provide the next steps right now.”

2.8 Protecting Confidentiality at the Front Desk

“Front Desk Confidentiality Rules”

- Verify identity before sharing status
- Don’t say sensitive details in the lobby
- Keep documents face down; clear printers
- Never confirm a client is present to unknown callers

Table: Identity Verification Examples (Office Policy Dependent)

Verification Method	Example
Two identifiers	DOB + last 4 of SSN (if allowed)
Client ID system	PIN/passphrase
Written authorization	Spouse pickup authorization form

Script Example

- “Before I can discuss your file, I’ll need to verify a couple details for privacy.”
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2.9 Professional Follow-Up: Keeping Clients Moving

Follow-Up Types

- Missing documents reminder
- Appointment confirmation
- Status update (approved language only)
- Payment/receipt confirmation

Table: Follow-Up Timing (Example)

Situation	Follow-Up Timing	Method
Missing docs	Within 24 hours of intake	Email + secure link
Appointment reminder	24–48 hours before	Text/email
No-show	Same day	Call/email
File incomplete	Every 5–7 business days (policy)	Email/call

Missing Docs Email Example (Short)

Subject: Items Needed to Complete Your Tax File

- We received: W-2, 1099-INT
 - Still needed: 1099-NEC, childcare statement
 - Upload by: March 5
 - Next step: Once received, we schedule your review/sign appointment
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2.10 Documentation: Notes That Protect the Office

Good notes are:

- factual (no opinions)
- dated
- clear about next step and owner

Table: Bad Notes vs Good Notes

Bad Note	Good Note
"Client upset."	"2/19: Client requested same-day completion; advised missing 1099-NEC; client will upload by 2/22."
"Left voicemail."	"2/19 3:10pm: Called, left voicemail to confirm 2/21 10am appointment; requested callback."

Module 2 Skills Lab (Practice Activities)

Activity A: Front Desk Simulation

Students rotate roles:

- receptionist
- client
- observer (uses rubric)

Scenarios:

1. Walk-in during busy hour
2. Late arrival with demanding tone
3. Drop-off missing key document
4. Caller requesting spouse's file status

Activity B: Script Writing

Write 3 scripts:

- appointment confirmation
- missing documents request
- de-escalation response

Activity C: "Client Experience Fix"

Given a messy workflow, students redesign the steps using CLEAR method.

Module 2 Checklists (Student Tools)

Front Desk Daily Checklist

- ☐ Phone/voicemail checked
- ☐ Schedule reviewed + buffers confirmed
- ☐ Intake packets ready
- ☐ Secure shred bin/printers cleared
- ☐ Document log open and updated
- ☐ Lobby confidential (no client files visible)

Client Interaction Checklist

- ☐ Greet professionally
 - ☐ Confirm identity when needed
 - ☐ Use policy-based language
 - ☐ Provide clear next step
 - ☐ Document interaction
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Module 3 — Phone Procedures and Appointment Scheduling

Module Goals

By the end of Module 3, students will be able to:

- Answer and route calls using professional standards and confidentiality rules
 - Take accurate messages and document calls in the client record
 - Use appointment types, time blocks, and buffers to build an efficient schedule
 - Confirm, remind, reschedule, and enforce late/no-show policies professionally
 - Handle common call scenarios (status requests, missing docs, fee questions, upset callers)
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3.1 Phone Standards: Professionalism + Control

Why the Phone Matters

- The phone is often the **first impression**
- Calls can create **liability** if staff share info without verification
- Clear call handling reduces errors, missed appointments, and repeat calls

Phone Etiquette Basics

- Smile while speaking (it changes tone)
- Speak clearly, moderate pace
- Avoid slang and filler (“umm,” “you know”)
- Never argue; offer next steps

Table: “Professional Phone Voice” Checklist

Standard	What It Sounds Like
Confident greeting	“Thank you for calling , this is .”
Clear listening	“Let me confirm I heard you correctly...”
Calm under pressure	“I can help with the next step.”
Boundaries	“That’s a tax question—I’ll route that to the preparer.”
Closure	“To recap, we will... and you will...”

3.2 The 6-Step Call Flow (Every Time)

Standard Call Workflow

1. **Greet** (office + your name)
2. **Identify** caller (name + callback number)
3. **Reason** for call (what they need)
4. **Verify** identity (if discussing any status/details)
5. **Resolve/Route** (schedule, message, transfer, follow-up)
6. **Close** (recap + timeline)

Table: Call Flow + Common Mistakes

Step	Do This	Avoid This
Greet	Friendly + professional	“Hello?”
Identify	Confirm spelling + number	No callback number
Reason	Ask clarifying questions	Guessing what they need
Verify	Follow office policy	Sharing status too soon
Resolve/Route	Correct department	Warm transfer with no context
Close	Recap next step	Ending with “Okay bye”

3.3 Identity Verification and Confidentiality on Calls

When Verification Is Required

Verify before discussing:

- return status (“done?”, “filed?”, “accepted?”)
- balances/fees/payment history
- any personal data (address, SSN, income, dependents)

Table: Verification Methods (Office Policy Dependent)

Method	Example
Two identifiers	DOB + address / phone on file
Account pin/passphrase	“Please provide your passphrase.”
Written authorization	Spouse/third party pickup authorization
Call-back policy	“We’ll call the number on file.”

Script: Verification

- “For privacy, I need to verify a couple details before I can discuss your file.”

Script: If Caller Can’t Verify

- “I’m not able to access or discuss the file without verification. If you’d like, we can call you back using the number on file.”

3.4 Message Taking (Accurate and Useful)

What Every Message Must Include

- Caller full name (spell it)
- Callback number
- Best time to reach them
- Reason for call (specific)
- Urgency/deadline (if any)
- Who should respond (preparer/manager/admin)

Mini-Template: Phone Message Slip

- Date/Time: _____
- Caller: _____ (spell)
- Phone: _____
- Client? ☐ Yes ☐ No (new lead)
- Reason: _____
- Verified? ☐ Yes ☐ Not needed ☐ No
- Action: ☐ Transfer ☐ Callback ☐ Email follow-up ☐ Schedule
- Assigned to: _____
- Notes: _____

Example (Good Message)

- “2/19 11:15am — Maria Lopez, (917) 555-0112. Verified DOB. Needs to confirm missing 1099-NEC and wants to schedule review after upload. Best time 4–6pm.”

3.5 Transfers: Warm vs Cold

Best Practice: Warm Transfer

- Tell the staff member: who is calling + why + what has been verified
- Then transfer

Script: Warm Transfer

- “I’m going to connect you with our preparer. Before I transfer, may I confirm your callback number in case we get disconnected?”

Table: Warm vs Cold Transfer

Type	What It Is	Risk
Warm transfer	Briefly inform receiving person	Low (better experience)
Cold transfer	Transfer with no context	High (client repeats story, frustration)

3.6 Appointment Scheduling: Building the Right Appointment

Scheduling Principles

- Match **appointment type** to **client need**
- Use **buffers** to prevent schedule collapse
- Confirm **required documents** before “prep/review” appointments

Table: Common Appointment Types

Type	Typical Length	Purpose	Required Before Booking
New Client Intake	30–45 min	Start file, checklist, expectations	Photo ID, basic info
Document Drop-Off	10–15 min	Log documents received/missing	Checklist + receipt
Prep Interview	30–60 min	Clarify income/deductions	Most documents in hand
Review/Sign	20–30 min	Final review + signatures	Draft approved / file ready
Problem Resolution	15–30 min	Notices, missing info	Notice copy + notes
Pickup/Delivery	10–15 min	Provide copies, close file	Payment/authorization complete

3.7 Scheduling Rules: Buffers, Peaks, and Priorities

Buffers You Should Use

- 5–10 minutes between complex appointments
- Daily “catch-up block” for callbacks and urgent issues
- Extra time for new clients and complex files

Table: Buffer Planning Example

Appointment	Base Time	Add Buffer	Total Slot
New intake	45 min	10 min	55 min
Review/sign	30 min	5 min	35 min
Drop-off	15 min	5 min	20 min

Peak Season Scheduling Guidelines (Example)

- Limit walk-ins or convert to drop-off only
- Require documents before review appointments
- Set same-day expectations realistically

3.8 Confirmations, Reminders, and Rescheduling

Confirmation Must Include

- Date/time + location + parking info (if applicable)
- What to bring (doc checklist)
- How to cancel/reschedule
- Late/no-show policy

Text/Email Confirmation Script

- “Your appointment is scheduled for Tuesday, March 5 at 2:30 PM at [address]. Please bring: photo ID, SSNs/ITINs, all W-2/1099s, and last year’s return. If you need to reschedule, please call 24 hours in advance.”

Reminder Timing (Typical)

- 48 hours before (email/text)
- 24 hours before (text)
- Same-day reminder for high no-show clients (policy-based)

3.9 Late and No-Show Policy (Professional Enforcement)

Goals

- Keep schedule fair
- Protect staff time
- Maintain consistent standards

Table: Late/No-Show Handling

Situation	What You Say	What You Do
5–10 min late	“We can still proceed, but we may need to shorten the appointment.”	Continue if possible
10–15 min late	“Let me check if we can still fit you in today.”	Decide: wait/reschedule
15+ min late	“We’ll need to reschedule to ensure you get full service.”	Reschedule + document
No-show	“We missed you today—would you like to reschedule?”	Follow policy (fee/notes)

Script: Reschedule Due to Late Arrival

- “To give you the full time needed, we’ll reschedule. The next available is __. Would you prefer morning or afternoon?”

3.10 Common Call Scenarios (Practice Scripts)

Scenario A: Status Request

- “For privacy, I’ll verify a couple details. Thank you. Your file is currently in [stage]. The next step is [what]. Our typical timeline is [policy].”

Scenario B: Missing Documents

- “We can move forward once we receive [items]. I can send a secure upload link now. When you upload, we’ll update your status and schedule the next appointment.”

Scenario C: Fee Question (Non-technical)

- “I can explain our general fee structure. Final fees depend on the forms required, and the preparer confirms that during review.”

Scenario D: Upset Caller

- “I understand this is frustrating. Let’s take it step by step. I can check what’s in the file, what’s missing, and what the next step is today.”

3.11 Documentation: Call Notes That Protect the Office

Good Call Notes Include

- Date/time
- Reason for call
- Verification completed (yes/no)
- What you told the client (approved language)
- Next step + owner + deadline

Example Call Note

- “2/19 1:40pm — Client John Smith called for status. Verified DOB + address. Advised missing 1099-NEC; emailed secure upload link. Client will upload by 2/22. Follow-up set for 2/23. — TR”

Module 3 Skills Lab (Student Practice)

Lab A: Call Roleplay Rotation

Students practice:

1. greeting + identification
2. verification
3. scheduling correct appointment type
4. closing recap

Lab B: Build a Day Schedule

Students create a schedule with:

- 8 appointments (mixed types)
- at least 4 buffers
- a daily callback block

Lab C: Call Notes Accuracy Drill

Students rewrite “bad notes” into correct professional notes.

Module 4 — Client Intake, Onboarding, and Documentation

Module Goals

By the end of Module 4, students will be able to:

- Complete a client intake from first contact through “file ready” status
 - Collect and verify required client information and authorizations
 - Use checklists to track documents received/missing
 - Create clear file notes and route files correctly
 - Apply confidentiality and identity verification during onboarding
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4.1 Intake Overview: What Intake Is and Why It Matters

What “Intake” Means

Intake is the process of:

1. collecting client identity + contact info
2. gathering documents
3. recording key facts (filing status, dependents, income sources)
4. setting expectations (timeline, fees, next steps)
5. creating a complete, organized file for the preparer

Intake Outcomes

- **Client file created** (paper and/or digital)
- **Document status known** (received vs missing)
- **Next step scheduled** (or pending documents)
- **Clear notes** for the preparer/reviewer

Table: Intake Goals vs Results

Intake Goal	What “Success” Looks Like
Accuracy	Correct name, DOB, SSN/ITIN, address, contact info
Completeness	All key documents collected or clearly listed as missing
Compliance	IDs verified, authorizations signed, privacy protected
Efficiency	File organized and routed correctly
Client experience	Client understands next steps + timeline

4.2 New Client vs Returning Client Intake

Differences

- **New clients** need full profile setup + prior-year return request (if applicable)
- **Returning clients** still need updates: address, dependents, new income, life changes

Table: New vs Returning Intake

Category	New Client	Returning Client
Profile	Create from scratch	Confirm and update
Documents	Full list + prior-year return	Prior-year often already on file
Expectations	Full orientation	Quick refresh
Risk areas	Missing SSNs/IDs, unknown history	Changes not reported (new job, new baby, divorce)

4.3 Intake Forms and Required Information

Core Intake Information (Must Collect)

- Full legal name (match ID)
- Date of birth
- SSN/ITIN (per office policy)
- Current address
- Phone + email
- Filing status indicators (married? dependents?)
- Preferred contact method
- Prior-year return (recommended if new client)

Table: “Must Have” vs “Nice to Have” Intake Data

Must Have	Why	Nice to Have	Why
Name + DOB	Identity matching	Preferred contact time	Fewer missed calls
SSN/ITIN	Filing requirement	Employer contact	Fix W-2 issues
Address	Notices + forms	Notes on life changes	Reduce errors
Phone/email	Follow-ups	Referral source	Marketing/metrics

Identity Verification

- Check photo ID and record “verified” per office policy
- Never discuss file details without verification

Script: ID Request (In-person)

- “For privacy, we verify a photo ID at intake. May I please see your ID?”

4.4 Required Authorizations and Consents (Office Policy Dependent)

Common paperwork offices may use:

- engagement letter/service agreement
- consent to communicate electronically (email/text)
- authorization for someone else to pick up documents
- e-file authorization forms (later in workflow)

Table: Common Intake Documents

Document	Purpose	When Collected
Engagement letter	Defines scope/fees/policies	Intake or first meeting
Privacy notice/consent	Communication + confidentiality	Intake
Third-party authorization	Allow spouse/rep to act	If requested
Document receipt	Confirms items received	Drop-off/intake

Example: Consent Language (Simple)

- “Client agrees to receive appointment reminders and document requests via email/text.”

4.5 Document Collection: What to Request

Key Document Categories (General)

- Identification (photo ID)
- Taxpayer + dependents SSNs/ITINs (as required)
- Income documents (W-2, 1099 series, etc.)
- Deduction/credit support (childcare, education, mortgage interest, charitable giving)
- Prior-year return (helpful for consistency)

Table: Common Documents Checklist

Category	Examples	Notes
Identity	Photo ID	Verify names match
Income	W-2, 1099-NEC, 1099-INT	Compare totals; watch duplicates
Education	1098-T	Confirm student info
Housing	1098 mortgage interest	Verify property use
Childcare	Provider statement + EIN	Needed for certain credits
Banking	Routing/account for direct deposit	Confirm client-owned account

4.6 Document Receipt and Tracking System

“Received / Missing / Requested” Method

- Use a checklist and a log (paper or digital)
- Date-stamp received items
- Note missing items and send follow-up instructions

Table: Document Status

Status	Meaning	Next Action
Received	In file and logged	Scan/upload and file correctly
Missing	Needed, not provided	Send request + deadline
Requested	You asked client for it	Track follow-up date
Pending clarification	Item unclear/inconsistent	Ask client/preparer

Mini-Template: Document Receipt Log

- Client: _____
- Date received: _____
- Received: _____
- Missing: _____
- Requested on: _____ Method: ☐ Email ☐ Text ☐ Call
- Next follow-up date: _____
- Staff initials: _____

Example

- Received: W-2 (ABC Corp), 1099-INT (Bank)
- Missing: 1099-NEC, childcare statement
- Follow-up: secure upload link sent 2/19; follow-up 2/23

4.7 Intake Interview Basics (Admin Level)

Admin staff may ask **non-advice** questions to ensure completeness:

- “Any new dependents this year?”
 - “Any address changes?”
 - “Any new jobs or self-employment income?”
 - “Any major life changes (marriage/divorce)?”
- Then document answers for the preparer.

Table: Safe Intake Questions vs Not Allowed (Tax Advice)

Safe Intake Questions (OK)	Tax Advice (Do Not Do)
“Any new income forms?”	“You should file Head of Household.”
“Any childcare expenses?”	“You qualify for the maximum credit.”
“Did you move this year?”	“Your move is deductible.”
“Any students in the household?”	“Claim the education credit.”

Script: Boundary

- “I can collect the information and documents, and the preparer will determine what applies.”

4.8 Creating File Notes and Routing the File

What Makes a Good Intake Note

- factual
- dated
- clear on what’s missing
- includes deadlines and next steps
- identifies owner (admin/preparer/reviewer)

Table: Bad Notes vs Good Notes

Bad Note	Good Note
“Client missing stuff.”	“2/19: Missing 1099-NEC + childcare statement. Client will upload by 2/22. Do not schedule review until received.”
“Changed address.”	“2/19: Address updated to 45 Pine St, Bronx, NY. Verified with client and ID.”

Routing Rules (Typical)

- Intake complete + docs complete → route to preparer
- Missing docs → hold in “Incomplete” + follow-up
- Sensitive issues → escalate to manager/preparer

4.9 Onboarding Communication: What Clients Should Leave With

Clients should understand:

- what was received
- what’s missing
- how to submit missing items
- timeline expectations
- next appointment step (if applicable)

Example: Intake Wrap-Up Script

- “Today we received your W-2 and bank interest form. We still need your 1099-NEC and childcare statement. I’ll email you a secure upload link. Once those are received, we’ll schedule your review appointment. Processing is typically 5–7 business days after the file is complete.”
-

4.10 Common Intake Problems and How to Handle Them

Table: Common Problems + Professional Responses

Problem	Best Response	Next Step
No ID	“We’ll need ID to complete intake.”	Reschedule or hold file
Missing SSN/ITIN info	“We’ll need taxpayer/dependent IDs to proceed.”	Request documentation
Documents mixed with another person	“Let’s separate and label everything.”	Clarify ownership
Client wants same-day completion	“We can start intake, but completion depends on documents and workflow.”	Set expectations
Client refuses to provide docs	“We can’t claim items without support.”	Escalate/decline item

Module 4 Skills Lab (Student Practice)

Lab A: Mock Intake Packet

Students receive a mock client scenario and must:

- complete intake form fields
- log received/missing documents
- write a professional intake note
- draft a missing-documents email
- determine routing status (Complete vs Incomplete)

Lab B: Document Sorting Drill

Students sort documents into categories and flag:

- duplicates
- missing items
- unclear items requiring clarification

Module 4 Checklists (Student Tools)

Intake Checklist (Quick)

- ☐ Greet + confirm appointment
- ☐ Verify ID (per policy)
- ☐ Confirm contact info
- ☐ Ask safe intake questions
- ☐ Collect and log documents
- ☐ Identify missing documents
- ☐ Provide receipt/confirmation
- ☒ Explain next steps + timeline
- ☐ Add file notes + route correctly

Module 5 Skills Lab (Student Practice) is located in the Study Materials & Resources

Module 6 — Confidentiality, Ethics, and Data Security in Office Operations

Module Goals

By the end of Module 6, students will be able to:

- Explain why confidentiality and data security are critical in a tax office
- Apply identity verification rules before sharing any client information
- Recognize common security threats (phishing, social engineering, device risks)
- Follow safe handling procedures for paper files, digital files, email, and phone calls
- Use ethical decision-making and proper documentation to reduce office risk

6.1 Why Confidentiality and Security Matter

Key Reasons

- Tax offices handle highly sensitive data (SSNs/ITINs, income, bank info, addresses)
- Mistakes can cause identity theft, fraud, legal issues, and loss of trust
- Everyone in the office shares responsibility—not just managers

Table: What Can Go Wrong (Realistic Risks)

Risk	What Happens	Example
Unauthorized disclosure	Client info shared with wrong person	Spouse calls; staff gives status without verification
Data breach	Files leaked or stolen	Laptop stolen with unencrypted client files
Identity theft	Fraudulent returns or credit theft	SSNs exposed in email
Operational disruption	Work stops	Malware locks office systems
Legal/disciplinary issues	Penalties, termination, reputational harm	Staff ignores policy and shares documents

6.2 What Counts as “Confidential Information”

Confidential information includes anything learned from the client relationship:

- SSNs/ITINs, DOB, address, phone, email
- income documents (W-2/1099), bank statements
- return status, filing history, balances due/refunds
- copies of IDs and signatures
- any notes about the client (even informal)

Table: Confidential vs Not Confidential

Confidential	Not Confidential (Usually)
“Client’s refund was reduced.”	Office hours
SSN/ITIN, DOB, address	General fee range (no client specifics)
Return status (in prep/review)	Parking instructions
Copies of IDs and signed forms	How to upload documents (general instructions)

6.3 Identity Verification (Before Sharing Any Status)

When to Verify

Verify identity before sharing:

- return status
- amounts (refund/balance)
- appointment details tied to a client file
- copies of documents
- any personal data

Table: Verification Methods (Office Policy Dependent)

Method	Example
Two identifiers	DOB + address on file
Passphrase/PIN	“What is your file PIN?”
Call-back policy	“We will call the number on file.”
Written authorization	Spouse pickup authorization form

Script: Verification

- “For privacy, I need to verify a couple details before I can discuss your file.”

Script: If Not Verified

- “I’m not able to discuss the file without verification. We can call you back using the phone number on file.”

6.4 Confidentiality in Daily Office Situations (Front Desk Reality)

Common High-Risk Moments

- Busy lobby and front desk conversations
- Printing and scanning
- Phone calls on speaker
- Emailing documents
- Leaving files on counters/desks

Table: Everyday Situations + Safe Action

Situation	Risk	Safe Action
Client asks status in lobby	Others overhear	Move to private tone/area; verify identity
Papers left at printer	Unauthorized viewing	Pull-print; clear trays immediately
File open at desk	Walk-by exposure	Face down; lock up when away
Sharing screen with client	Accidental exposure	Open only their file; close other windows
Speakerphone in open area	Eavesdropping	Use headset; lower voice

6.5 Phone, Email, and Text Security Rules

Phone

- Verify identity before sharing status/details
- Don't leave sensitive info on voicemail
- Avoid speakerphone in public areas

Voicemail Safe Script

- "This is [Name] from [Office]. Please call us back at [number]."

Email/Text

- Use approved office channels (secure portal if available)
- Avoid sending SSNs, full returns, bank info through unsecure email/text
- Double-check recipients before sending

Table: Communication Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Use secure upload links	Email SSNs or full returns casually
Confirm recipient address	Autocomplete the wrong email
Keep messages neutral	Include sensitive amounts in texts
Document contact attempts	Share client details in group threads

6.6 Physical Security (Paper Records + Office Space)

Physical Security Basics

- Locked cabinets and controlled access
- Clean desk policy
- Shred bins for disposal
- Visitor control: clients stay in designated areas

Table: Physical Controls Checklist

Control	Purpose
Locked file cabinets	Prevent unauthorized access
Shred bin (not trash)	Secure disposal
Badge/visitor sign-in	Limit access to staff areas
Clean desk rule	Reduce accidental exposure
Printer placement + pull-print	Prevent unattended documents

6.7 Digital Security Basics (Every Staff Member)

Core Practices

- Strong passwords + MFA
- Lock screen every time you step away
- No shared accounts
- Store files only in approved systems
- Update software (as directed by IT/office policy)

Table: Digital Threats + Defenses

Threat	Example	Defense
Phishing	“IRS needs your login now”	Verify sender; don’t click unknown links
Malware	Fake attachment	Don’t open unknown files; report to IT
Weak passwords	“Password123”	Use password manager + MFA
Lost devices	Phone/laptop stolen	Encryption, remote wipe, don’t store locally
Public Wi-Fi	Client docs sent at coffee shop	Use VPN/avoid sensitive work

6.8 Social Engineering: The Human Hack

Social engineering is when someone manipulates staff into revealing information.

Common Social Engineering Examples

- “I’m her husband—tell me the status.”
- “I’m from IT—what’s your password?”
- “I’m the client—my phone changed; email me the return here.”
- “I’m in a rush—just tell me if you filed it.”

Table: Social Engineering Red Flags

Red Flag	Why It's Suspicious
Urgency (“right now!”)	Pressure reduces careful thinking
Authority (“manager said...”)	Attempts to override policy
Unusual request	“Email the return to a new address”
Avoids verification	Refuses DOB/address check
Anger/threats	Manipulation tactic

Script: Policy Boundary

- “I understand, but we must follow our privacy policy. I can help once we verify your identity.”

6.9 Ethics in Office Operations (Practical)

Ethics means:

- honesty in communication
- accurate documentation
- following policy consistently
- not cutting corners under pressure
- respecting client rights and privacy

Common Ethical Issues (Admin/Office Setting)

- “Guessing” missing amounts
- Changing notes to hide mistakes
- Sharing client details with friends/family
- Disclosing client info to “help” someone
- Promising outcomes (refund timing, audit results)

Table: Ethical Decision Guide

Situation	Wrong Choice	Right Choice
Missing form	Estimate numbers	Request documentation
Angry client	Promise unrealistic deadline	Provide policy-based timeline
Wrong email entered	Ignore it	Report, correct, document
Spouse request	Share status	Require authorization/verification

6.10 Incident Response: What to Do When Something Goes Wrong

Examples of Incidents

- Email sent to wrong recipient
- Lost/stolen device
- Suspicious email link clicked
- Paper file missing
- Client complaint of identity misuse

Table: Incident Response Steps

Step	Action
1. Stop	Don't keep sending or clicking
2. Report	Notify manager/IT immediately
3. Document	What happened, when, who involved
4. Contain	Change passwords, recall email (if possible), secure files
5. Follow policy	Client notification steps (manager-led)

Script: Reporting

- “I may have sent a document to the wrong email address at 2:10 pm. I’ve stopped further messages and I’m reporting it immediately.”

Module 7 — Office Communications: Email, Text, and Professional Writing

Module Goals

By the end of Module 7, students will be able to:

- Write clear, professional emails using proper tone, structure, and subject lines
- Use texting appropriately for office operations (reminders, simple updates) while protecting confidentiality
- Apply “approved language” that avoids tax advice, guarantees, and sensitive disclosures
- Document communications correctly (notes, logs, attachments, secure links)
- Handle common office writing tasks: missing docs, confirmations, status updates, fee policies, and client complaints

7.1 Why Communication Quality Matters

Communication Impacts

- client trust and retention
- fewer repeat calls and confusion
- fewer errors (clear instructions)
- reduced privacy risk
- better workflow (clear handoffs)

Table: Weak vs Strong Office Messages

Weak Message	Problem	Strong Message
“Send your stuff.”	Unclear, unprofessional	“Please upload the following documents by ____ using the secure link.”
“It’ll be ready soon.”	No timeline/condition	“Once all documents are received, processing is typically 5–7 business days.”
“You forgot again.”	Blame escalates	“We’re still missing a few items needed to complete your file.”

7.2 Professional Writing Standards (Email + Text)

The 6 Rules

1. Be clear and specific
2. Be polite and neutral (no blame)
3. Use short paragraphs and bullet points
4. Include next step + deadline
5. Avoid tax advice/guarantees
6. Protect confidentiality (use secure channels)

Table: Tone and Word Choice

Avoid	Use Instead
“ASAP!!!”	“By [date]”
“You didn’t...”	“We still need...”
“I think...”	“Our records show...” / “I will confirm...”
“Definitely”	“Typically” / “Based on office policy”

7.3 Email Essentials: Structure That Works

Standard Email Format

- **Subject:** short and specific
- **Greeting:** “Hello [Name],”
- **Purpose (1–2 sentences):** why you’re writing
- **Bullets:** what is needed/what was received
- **Next step + deadline**
- **Closing:** “Thank you,” + signature block

Table: Subject Line Examples

Situation	Good Subject
Missing documents	“Documents Needed to Complete Your 2026 Tax File”
Appointment	“Appointment Confirmation — March 5 at 2:30 PM”
Status update	“Update on Your Tax File — Next Steps”
Pickup	“Your Tax Return Package Is Ready for Review/Signature”

7.4 Confidentiality Rules for Written Communication

High-Risk Items (Avoid in Standard Email/Text)

- SSNs/ITINs, DOB
- full tax return PDFs (unless secure portal policy allows)
- bank account numbers
- detailed refund amounts/status details if not verified

Safer Alternatives

- secure upload link/portal
- “Please call us” for sensitive discussions
- call-back to number on file

Table: Email/Text Safety Guide

Safe to Send (Usually)	Not Safe (Usually)
Appointment reminders	SSN/ITIN
Office address + hours	Full return PDF (unsecured)
General doc checklist	Bank account numbers
Secure portal link	Detailed tax figures via text

7.5 Texting: When It's Appropriate (and When It Isn't)

Appropriate Uses

- appointment reminders
- “we sent a secure link” notifications
- simple confirmations (“Received your upload”)
- rescheduling notices

Not Appropriate

- discussing tax outcomes
- sending sensitive documents or numbers
- negotiating disputes
- any message that would be risky if forwarded

Example Text Templates

- “Reminder: your appointment is Tues 3/5 at 2:30 PM. Reply C to confirm or call to reschedule.”
- “We sent a secure upload link to your email. Please use it to submit your documents.”

7.6 Common Office Email Templates (Student-Ready)

A) Appointment Confirmation (Email)

Subject: Appointment Confirmation — [Date] at [Time]

Hello [Client Name],

Your appointment is scheduled for [Day, Date] at [Time] at [Office Address].

Please bring:

- Photo ID
- All W-2/1099 forms
- Last year's tax return (if available)

If you need to reschedule, please call us at [Phone].

Thank you,
[Name], [Title]
[Office Name]

B) Missing Documents Request

Subject: Documents Needed to Complete Your 2026 Tax File

Hello [Client Name],

We received:

- [List received items]

We still need:

- [List missing items]

Please upload the missing items using our secure link by **[date]**.

Once received, processing is typically **5–7 business days** after the file is complete.

Thank you,
[Signature]

C) Status Update (Approved Language)

Subject: Update on Your Tax File — Next Steps

Hello [Client Name],

Your file is currently in the **[intake / document collection / preparation / review]** stage.

Next step: **[what will happen next]**

If you have questions, please call us at [Phone].

Thank you,
[Signature]

D) Late/No-Show Follow-Up

Subject: Missed Appointment — Reschedule Options

Hello [Client Name],

We missed you at your appointment on **[date/time]**. If you'd like to reschedule, please call us at [Phone] or reply with your preferred times.

Thank you,

[Signature]

7.7 Professional Writing for Difficult Situations

Handling Complaints (Do/Don't)

- Do acknowledge feelings: "I understand this is frustrating."
- Do provide a process: "Here's what we can do next."
- Don't argue or blame
- Don't promise outcomes you can't control

Complaint Response Template

Hello [Client Name],

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. I understand your concern.

Here is what we can do next:

- [Step 1]
 - [Step 2]
- If you'd like, we can schedule a call with the manager/preparer.
- Thank you,
[Signature]

7.8 Documentation: Creating a Communication Record

What to Document

- date/time
- method (email/text/call)
- what was requested or provided
- deadlines given
- client responses

Table: Communication Log Example

Date	Method	Summary	Next Step
2/19	Email	Requested 1099-NEC + childcare statement	Follow-up 2/23
2/21	Text	Appointment reminder sent	Await confirm
2/22	Email	Received upload confirmation	Route to preparer

Example File Note

- “2/19: Sent missing-doc email with secure upload link; deadline 2/22; follow-up set 2/23.”

7.9 “Approved Language” to Avoid Risk

Table: Risky Statements vs Approved Alternatives

Risky	Approved
“You’ll get a refund next week.”	“IRS processing times vary.”
“Your refund will be \$2,000.”	“The preparer will confirm amounts after review.”
“Claim this credit.”	“The preparer will determine eligibility.”
“We filed it already” (if unsure)	“Your file is currently in [stage]; I’ll confirm next steps.”

Module 8 — Workflow Management and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Module Goals

By the end of Module 8, students will be able to:

- Map a tax office workflow from lead to archive
- Use workflow stages, owners, triggers, and outputs to prevent missed steps
- Create and follow SOPs to standardize work and reduce errors
- Use trackers, checklists, and handoffs to keep files moving
- Identify bottlenecks and propose process improvements

8.1 What Is Workflow Management?

Workflow management is organizing work so files move through steps **consistently** and **on time**, with:

- clear stages
- clear ownership (who does what)
- clear triggers (what starts the step)
- clear outputs (what must be completed before moving on)

Table: Workflow Problems vs Workflow Solutions

Common Problem	Result	Workflow Solution
No clear “next step”	Files stall	Stage + owner + due date
Missing documents not tracked	Repeated calls	Missing-doc log + follow-up schedule
No standard handoff	Errors and rework	Handoff checklist + file notes
Too many walk-ins	Schedule collapses	Intake/drop-off policies + buffers
Inconsistent process	Uneven quality	SOPs + QA checklists

8.2 The End-to-End Tax Office Workflow (Typical)

Standard Stages

1. Lead / Inquiry
2. Appointment Scheduled
3. Intake / Onboarding
4. Document Collection (complete vs incomplete)
5. Preparation
6. Review / Quality Control
7. Client Review + Signatures
8. E-file Submission
9. Acceptance / Rejection Handling
10. Delivery / Copies Provided
11. Payment Closeout
12. Archive / Retention Label

Table: Workflow Map (Stage + Owner + Trigger + Output)

Stage	Owner	Trigger	Output
Lead/Inquiry	Front desk/admin	Call/email/web inquiry	Client created in CRM
Appointment	Front desk	Client requests schedule	Appointment confirmed
Intake	Admin	Client arrives / drop-off	Intake complete + checklist
Doc Collection	Admin	Intake complete	File marked complete/incomplete
Prep	Preparer	File complete	Draft return
Review/QC	Reviewer	Draft ready	Approved draft + corrections
Signatures	Admin	Approved return	Signed forms + payment status
E-file	Preparer/admin	Signatures complete	Submitted return
Acceptance	Admin	IRS response	Accepted/Rejected logged
Delivery	Admin	Accepted	Final package delivered
Archive	Admin/manager	Closeout complete	Archived per retention

8.3 Workflow Tools: Trackers, Checklists, and Boards

Common Tools

- CRM notes or client tracker spreadsheet
- Kanban board (To Do / Doing / Waiting / Done)
- Appointment calendar with categories
- Document receipt logs
- QA checklists
- Standard email templates

Table: Tool Purpose Guide

Tool	Purpose	Example
Workflow tracker	See file status instantly	“In prep / missing docs”
Doc receipt log	Track received vs missing	“1099-NEC requested 2/19”
QA checklist	Prevent errors	“Names match ID”
SOP checklist	Standardize steps	“Drop-off procedure”
Calendar categories	Manage appointment types	Intake vs review vs drop-off

8.4 Handoffs: Making Work Transfer Smoothly

A handoff happens when work moves from one person to another (admin → preparer → reviewer).

Handoff Requirements

- clear status (complete/incomplete)
- list of missing items (if any)
- key notes (life changes, questions, deadlines)
- correctly named and filed documents
- next step owner assigned

Table: Handoff Checklist (Admin to Preparer)

Must Include	Example
Status	“File complete as of 2/22”
Missing items	“None” or list
Key notes	“New baby; daycare expenses reported”
Document organization	W-2/1099s properly labeled
Client questions	“Asked about dependent eligibility—route to preparer”
Deadline	“Client wants review before 3/1”

Example Handoff Note

- “2/22: File complete. Received W-2 ABC, 1099-INT Chase, daycare statement w/EIN. Client asked about HoH—needs determination. Route to prep.”

8.5 Bottlenecks and How to Fix Them

Common Bottlenecks

- missing documents
- unclear ownership
- too many reschedules/no-shows
- delayed review/QC
- unclear fee/payment steps

Table: Bottleneck → Fix

Bottleneck	Symptom	Fix
Missing docs	Files stuck “waiting”	Doc checklist + auto reminders
No ownership	“Everyone thought someone else did it”	Assign owner + due date
No QA	Frequent corrections	Admin QA + reviewer checklist
Poor scheduling	Overbooked days	Buffers + appointment types
Poor communication	Repeat calls	Approved status language

8.6 What Is an SOP?

An SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) is a written step-by-step guide that ensures tasks are done the **same way every time**.

Why SOPs Matter

- reduces mistakes
- trains new staff faster
- improves consistency and client experience
- protects the office with documented procedures

Table: SOP vs Checklist

SOP	Checklist
Explains “how and why”	Confirms steps were done
Includes exceptions/escalation	Short verification list
Used for training	Used for daily execution

8.7 SOP Components (Student Format)

A strong SOP includes:

1. Title
2. Purpose
3. Scope (who it applies to)
4. Definitions (if needed)
5. Required tools/forms
6. Step-by-step procedure
7. Exceptions and escalation
8. Documentation/logs required
9. Quality checks
10. Revision history

SOP Template (Copy/Paste)

SOP Title: _____

Purpose: _____

Scope: _____

Tools/Forms Needed: _____

Procedure Steps

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Exceptions/Escalation

- If _____, then _____

Documentation Required

- _____

Quality Check

- _____

Revision History

- Version _____ Date _____ Updated by _____

8.8 Example SOP (Short Example): Document Drop-Off

SOP Title: Document Drop-Off and Receipt Logging

Purpose: Ensure documents are logged, secured, and routed correctly.

Scope: Front desk/admin staff.

Steps

1. Greet client and confirm full name
2. Verify identity if required by policy
3. Review documents using checklist
4. Date-stamp or note receipt date
5. Log received and missing items
6. Provide receipt/confirmation to client
7. Scan/upload to correct folder with proper naming
8. Update workflow tracker (Complete/Incomplete)
9. Route file to next owner or hold for missing docs

Exceptions/Escalation

- If document appears to belong to another person → stop and escalate to manager/preparer

Documentation Required

- Document receipt log + file note + tracker update

Quality Check

- Confirm correct client folder and readable scan

8.9 Process Improvement: Continuous Improvement Cycle

The “Plan–Do–Check–Act” (PDCA) Method

- Plan: identify problem and solution
- Do: try the change
- Check: measure results
- Act: standardize if it works (update SOP)

Table: Metrics to Track

Metric	What It Tells You
Missing docs rate	Intake quality
No-show rate	Scheduling effectiveness
Rework/corrections	QA effectiveness
Turnaround time	Workflow efficiency
Callbacks per file	Communication clarity

Module 8 Skills Lab (Student Practice)

Lab A: Workflow Mapping

Students create a workflow map with:

- 10 stages
- owner for each
- trigger + output
- where notes/logs are required

Lab B: SOP Writing Assignment

Students write a 1–2 page SOP for one task:

- phone message handling
- appointment confirmation/reminders
- document scanning and naming
- missing document follow-up
- file routing rules

Lab C: Bottleneck Case Study

Given a “busy season problem log,” students propose:

- 3 improvements
- 1 new SOP or SOP update
- 1 metric to track after change

Module 9 — Billing Support, Payment Processing, and Office Admin

Module Goals

By the end of Module 9, students will be able to:

- Explain the admin role in billing support (without giving tax advice)
- Follow office procedures for collecting payments, issuing receipts, and logging transactions
- Communicate fees professionally using approved language and policies
- Handle refunds, chargebacks, and disputes using escalation rules
- Maintain accurate billing records, daily reconciliations, and secure cash-handling practices

9.1 Billing Support: What Admin Staff Can and Cannot Do

Admin Billing Support Includes

- providing general fee policy information
- collecting payments (per office procedures)
- issuing receipts and confirmations
- updating payment logs and client records
- routing fee disputes to managers

Admin Staff Should NOT

- promise final fees before preparer confirms (if policy requires review)
- change pricing without authorization
- negotiate tax outcomes or provide tax advice
- waive fees without approval

Table: Billing Support Boundaries

Task	Admin Can Do	Admin Should Not Do
Explain general fee policy	✓	
Collect payment & issue receipt	✓	
Quote final fee without review		X
Waive/discount fees		X (unless authorized)
Discuss technical tax issues		X
Escalate disputes	✓	

9.2 Fee Schedules and Service Packages (Office Policy Dependent)

Common Pricing Models

- flat fee packages (basic, standard, complex)
- form-based pricing (1040 + schedules)
- hourly consulting (less common for basic offices)
- add-ons (rush fee, amendments, bookkeeping support)

Table: Example Fee Schedule Format (Sample Only)

Service Type	What It Covers	Notes
Basic 1040	W-2, simple credits	Final fee depends on forms
Self-employed	Schedule C + expenses	Documentation required
Amendment	Correct prior-year return	Requires prior docs
Notice response	IRS/State notice support	Time-based or flat

Important: Students should always use office-approved pricing sheets.

9.3 Professional Fee Communication (Approved Language)

Key Rules

- be clear and neutral
- tie fee language to policy
- avoid guarantees (“this will lower your tax”)
- avoid surprises (confirm timing of payment)

Table: Risky vs Approved Fee Statements

Risky Statement	Approved Alternative
“This return will be cheap.”	“Our fees depend on complexity and required forms.”
“You’ll definitely get a refund.”	“Refund outcomes depend on the completed return.”
“I can discount it for you.”	“Discounts require manager approval.”
“We’ll fix it for free.”	“Let’s review the situation and apply office policy.”

Script: Fee Explanation (Admin)

- “Our pricing is based on the complexity of the return and the forms required. The preparer confirms the final fee during review. I can share our general fee range and explain what’s included.”

9.4 Payment Timing: When Payments Are Collected

(Depends on office policy—teach consistent workflow.)

Common Payment Points

- at intake (deposit)
- at review/sign (balance due)
- at pickup/delivery (final release)

Table: Payment Timing Options

Timing	Pros	Risks
Deposit at intake	Reduces no-shows, secures commitment	Must document deposit policy
Payment at sign	Clear “pay before filing” step	Must manage late payments
Payment at delivery	Smooth for client	Higher risk of nonpayment

9.5 Payment Methods and Processing

Common Methods

- cash
- debit/credit card
- electronic transfer (if office accepts)
- money order/check

Payment Controls (Best Practices)

- receipts for every payment
- two-person cash count (if policy)
- daily cash drawer reconciliation
- no “off the record” payments
- secure storage of checks/cash

Table: Payment Method Controls

Method	Key Control	Example
Cash	Count + receipt + secure drawer	Drawer balanced nightly
Card	Use approved POS only	No manual card number storage
Check/MO	Endorse and log	Copy/scan check (policy)
Transfer	Confirm receipt	Note transaction ID

9.6 Receipts, Invoices, and Payment Logs

Required Recordkeeping

- invoice number/receipt number
- date/time
- client name
- service description
- amount and method
- staff initials

Template: Payment Log (Student Form)

Date	Client	Service	Amount	Method	Receipt #	Staff	Notes
_____	_____	_____	_____	☐ Cash ☐ Card ☐ Check	_____	_____	_____

Example Entry

- 2/19 | Lopez, Maria | 1040 + Sch C | 450 | Card | 1056 | TR | Deposit 150 collected

9.7 Refunds, Chargebacks, and Disputes (Admin Role)

Common Disputes

- “I was quoted less”
- “Why is this extra fee included?”
- “I’m not paying until the IRS refunds me”
- card chargeback claims

Table: Dispute Handling Steps

Step	What to Do	What to Say
Listen	Stay calm, gather facts	“Let me review your invoice and policy.”
Verify	Check signed agreement/fee sheet	“According to the service agreement...”
Explain	Use neutral policy language	“This fee covers...”
Offer options	Manager review, payment plan (if allowed)	“I can escalate this to the manager.”
Document	Note date/time and summary	Add to client record

Script: Dispute Escalation

- “I understand your concern. I’m going to escalate this to our manager so we can review the invoice and apply office policy consistently.”

9.8 Daily Office Admin: Reconciliation and Closeout

End-of-Day Tasks (Typical)

- reconcile cash drawer
- confirm POS totals vs receipts
- deposit preparation (if policy)
- update payment log
- store cash/checks securely
- flag any mismatches immediately

Table: End-of-Day Reconciliation Checklist

Task	Completed
Cash count matches receipts	☐
POS batch totals match log	☐
Checks secured and logged	☐
Receipts filed/scanned	☐
Discrepancies reported	☐

9.9 Protecting Financial Data (Security)

Financial Security Rules

- never store card numbers manually
- use approved payment systems
- restrict access to billing systems
- lock drawers and secure receipts
- avoid discussing balances in public areas

Table: Financial Data Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Use official POS and receipts	Write down card numbers
Limit billing access	Share billing passwords
Keep receipts secure	Leave invoices on counter
Verify identity for balance discussions	Tell spouse payment history without authorization

Module 9 Skills Lab (Student Practice)

Lab A: Payment Processing Simulation

Students practice:

- taking a payment (cash/card/check)
- generating a receipt
- recording it in a payment log
- using proper fee language

Lab B: Fee Dispute Roleplay

Scenario: client says, "You told me it would be \$200!"

Student must:

- listen and verify policy
- explain neutrally
- escalate appropriately
- document interaction

Lab C: End-of-Day Reconciliation

Students compare:

- mock receipts
 - mock POS report
 - mock cash count
and identify any mismatch.
-

Module 10 — Quality Control, Error Prevention, and Continuous Improvement

Module Goals

By the end of Module 10, students will be able to:

- Explain why quality control (QC) matters in office operations
- Use admin-level QC checklists to prevent common errors
- Identify error types (data entry, missing docs, workflow gaps, communication failures)
- Apply root-cause thinking to fix problems permanently
- Track simple metrics (missing docs rate, rework rate, turnaround time) to improve performance

10.1 What Quality Control Means in a Tax Office

QC Definition (Office Operations Focus)

Quality control is a set of **checks and standard steps** that ensure:

- the file is complete
- client info matches documents
- required forms/signatures are present
- communication and notes are documented
- the correct version and delivery method are used

Table: QC Benefits

Benefit	Why It Matters	Example
Fewer errors	Less rework and fewer notices	Correct SSN prevents IRS mismatch
Faster turnaround	Fewer stop-and-fix moments	Complete files reach prep sooner
Better client trust	Professional experience	Fewer “we need one more thing” calls
Better compliance	Fewer privacy mistakes	Proper authorization on file

10.2 Common Errors and Where They Happen

Errors usually happen during:

- intake
- document handling
- data entry/hand-offs
- review/signature stage
- delivery/archiving

Table: Common Errors + Prevention

Error	Where It Happens	Prevention
Wrong spelling of name	Intake/data entry	Verify ID + repeat spelling
SSN/ITIN mismatch	Intake	Use verification checklist
Missing income form	Document collection	Checklist + receipt log
Wrong file uploaded	Scanning	Confirm client folder + file name
Draft sent as final	Delivery	Version control + “FINAL” rule
Missing signatures	Sign stage	Signature checklist
Poor notes	Any stage	Standard note template

10.3 Admin-Level QC Checklist (Core)

Admin QC prevents errors before the preparer/reviewer spends time.

Admin QC “Must Check” Areas

- Identity: name/DOB match ID
- Contact: address/phone/email confirmed
- Filing basics: status and dependents info captured (facts only)
- Documents: received vs missing clearly logged
- File organization: correct folder/tab placement, naming convention
- Communication: missing-doc requests sent and documented
- Handoff: clear status + next step owner

Admin QC Checklist (Template)

- ☐ Client name matches ID
- ☐ DOB verified (per policy)
- ☐ Address confirmed/updated
- ☐ Phone/email confirmed
- ☐ Dependents listed (names/DOB/SSN/ITIN per policy)
- ☐ W-2/1099s logged and filed correctly
- ☐ Missing documents list created (if any)
- ☐ Secure link/request sent and documented
- ☐ Documents scanned clearly + correct file names
- ☐ Status marked: Complete / Incomplete / Pending clarification
- ☐ Handoff note includes next step + deadline

10.4 Error Prevention Tools: Checklists, Standard Notes, and “Stop Points”

“Stop Points” (Quality Gates)

A file should not move forward unless it meets a minimum standard.

Table: Quality Gates (Stop Points)

Gate	Standard to Pass	If Not Pass
Intake complete	Identity + contact + checklist done	Hold file, request info
Docs complete	Required docs received	Mark incomplete + follow-up
Ready for sign	Approved return + signature packet	Do not schedule sign yet
Ready for e-file	Signed authorizations + payment policy met	Hold until complete
Ready to archive	Final delivered + closing checklist	Complete closeout first

10.5 Communication Errors (A Hidden Source of Mistakes)

Common Communication Mistakes

- unclear deadlines (“ASAP”)
- no written record
- wrong recipient email
- overpromising timelines
- not stating “next step”

Table: Communication QC Checks

Check	Example
Clear deadline	“Upload by March 5”
Clear next step	“After upload, we schedule review”
Approved language	“Processing times vary”
Correct recipient	Double-check address
Logged contact	Note: date/time/method

10.6 Root Cause Analysis (Fix the System, Not the Symptom)

Common Root Causes

- unclear SOPs
- missing training
- poor forms/checklists
- time pressure and shortcuts
- unclear ownership
- messy file system

Simple Root Cause Methods

- **5 Whys** (ask “why” until you reach the system cause)
- **Fishbone (cause-and-effect)** categories: People, Process, Tools, Environment

Example: 5 Whys

Problem: “Missing documents cause delays.”

1. Why? Clients don’t bring everything.
 2. Why? They don’t know what to bring.
 3. Why? Checklist isn’t clear.
 4. Why? Checklist is outdated.
 5. Why? No one updates it after season.
-
1. **Fix:** Update checklist + add confirmation email with doc list.

10.7 Continuous Improvement (Simple and Practical)

Improvement Cycle: PDCA

- Plan: identify the problem and solution
- Do: test the solution
- Check: measure results
- Act: standardize if it works (update SOP/checklist)

Table: Improvement Ideas (Office Operations)

Problem	Simple Improvement
High no-show rate	48-hr reminder + policy text
Wrong files uploaded	Rename rule + scan QA checklist
Missing signatures	Signature packet checklist
Too many callbacks	Better status email template
Rework from reviewer	Admin QC before routing

10.8 Metrics to Track (Student-Friendly)

Choose a few simple measures:

- Missing documents rate
- Rework rate (files returned for fixes)
- Turnaround time (intake → completion)
- No-show rate
- Number of client callbacks per file

Table: Basic Metrics Tracker Template

Week	Files Opened	Missing Docs %	Rework #	Avg Turnaround (days)	No-Shows
Wk 1					
Wk 2					

10.9 Documentation and Accountability (QC Notes)

Good QC notes must be:

- dated
- factual
- action-based
- assigned (who owns the next step)

Example QC Note

- “2/19: QC check completed. Name/DOB verified. Missing 1099-NEC; request sent; follow-up set 2/23. File held Incomplete.”

Module 11 — Handling Special Situations and Difficult Cases

Module Goals

By the end of Module 11, students will be able to:

- Use professional scripts and policies to handle difficult client situations
- Identify when to **de-escalate**, when to **set boundaries**, and when to **escalate** to a manager
- Manage special situations: missing documents, late arrivals, walk-ins, urgent deadlines, identity concerns, and third-party requests
- Document incidents and difficult interactions factually and correctly
- Maintain confidentiality and avoid tax advice while still being helpful

11.1 The Core Approach: Calm + Policy + Next Step

When situations get difficult, use a consistent method:

The “C.A.L.M.” Method

- Control your tone (steady voice, slow pace)
- Acknowledge feelings (without admitting fault)
- Look up policy/process (don’t guess)
- Move to next step (options + timeline)

Example

- “I understand this is stressful. Let me check our process and tell you the next steps we can take today.”

11.2 De-escalation Skills (Front Desk + Phone)

The “L.E.A.P.” Method

- Listen (don’t interrupt)
- Empathize (“I understand this is frustrating.”)
- Acknowledge (“Thank you for letting us know.”)
- Problem-solve (options, boundaries, escalation)

Table: De-escalation Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Lower your voice	Raise your voice
Repeat back the issue	Argue about "who's right"
Offer 2–3 options	Make promises you can't keep
Use policy language	Use blame/shame language
Document facts	Add opinions ("rude client")

11.3 Boundaries and Safety (When Behavior Crosses the Line)

When to Set Boundaries

- profanity, threats, harassment
- refusal to follow office rules
- repeated aggressive behavior

Boundary Script (In-Person/Phone)

- "I want to help, but I can't continue if there is abusive language. If we keep it respectful, I can explain the next steps."

When to End the Interaction

- threats of violence
- stalking/harassment
- refusal to calm down after boundary warning
- unsafe behavior in office

Escalation Script

- "I'm going to involve my manager now to help resolve this."

11.4 Special Situation: Missing Documents (Most Common)

Common Missing Items

- W-2/1099 forms
- childcare provider details
- education forms
- identity documents
- prior-year returns (new clients)

Table: Missing Documents Workflow

Step	Action	Example
Identify	Use checklist	Missing 1099-NEC
Communicate	Neutral request	“We still need...”
Provide method	Secure upload link	Portal link sent
Set deadline	Clear date	“Upload by 3/5”
Follow-up	Schedule	Follow-up 3/6
Hold/route	Mark incomplete	“Hold – Incomplete”

Script: Missing Docs

- “To complete your file, we still need [items]. Please upload them using the secure link by [date]. Once received, we can schedule your review.”

11.5 Special Situation: Late Arrivals and No-Shows

Policy-Based Handling

- protect schedule fairness
- don’t punish—offer options

Table: Late Arrival Guide

Late Amount	Best Response	Outcome
0–10 minutes	Proceed if possible	Shorten visit if needed
10–15 minutes	Check schedule	Proceed or reschedule
15+ minutes	Policy + reschedule	Reschedule for full service

Script: Late Arrival

- “To ensure you get the full appointment time, we’ll need to reschedule. The next available is ____.”

11.6 Special Situation: Walk-Ins During Peak Times

Options (Based on Policy)

- convert to drop-off
- schedule next available
- limited same-day if gaps exist

Script: Walk-In

- “We can help in one of three ways today: (1) schedule the next available appointment, (2) accept documents for drop-off and follow up with missing items, or (3) if we have an opening, we can see you today.”

11.7 Special Situation: “Urgent Deadline” Requests (April 14/15 Reality)

Key Rules

- don’t promise same-day filing
- explain what is required to file
- offer realistic options (extension, drop-off, schedule)

Table: Urgent Deadline Options

Client Need	Office Option	Notes
Missing major docs	Offer extension discussion with preparer	Admin does not advise, routes
Wants same-day file	Intake + checklist + realistic timeline	Avoid guarantees
Can’t meet full appointment	Drop-off with receipt + follow-up	Must track missing items

Script (No Guarantees)

- “We can start intake today, but completion depends on receiving required documents and the office workflow. I can help you with the next available steps.”
-

11.8 Special Situation: Identity Mismatch or Potential Fraud Concerns

Red Flags

- name/SSN mismatch
- documents belong to someone else
- caller refuses verification
- request to email return to new address suddenly
- inconsistent personal details

Table: Red Flag → Action

Red Flag	Safe Response	Next Step
Caller won't verify	"We can't discuss without verification."	Call-back to number on file
Different name on W-2	Ask clarifying question	Document + flag preparer
"Email return to new address"	Follow policy	Verify + manager approval
Docs appear altered	Do not accuse	Escalate to manager

Script

- "For privacy and accuracy, we'll need to verify and confirm these details. I'm going to escalate this for review."

11.9 Special Situation: Third-Party Requests (Spouses, Relatives, Employers)

Rule

Do not share status or documents without:

- identity verification and
- written authorization (per policy)

Script

- "I understand you're helping them, but we can't release information or documents without authorization. If the client signs an authorization, we can assist."

11.10 Handling Complaints and Fee Disputes (Without Escalation Spiral)

Complaint Response Steps

1. Listen and acknowledge
2. Check policy/documentation
3. Explain neutrally
4. Offer next steps (manager review if needed)
5. Document everything

Script

- “Thank you for sharing that. I understand your concern. Let me review the agreement and invoice so we can apply our policy consistently. If needed, I can escalate this to the manager.”

11.11 Documentation: How to Write Incident and Difficulty Notes

Rules for Notes

- factual, not emotional
- include date/time
- include exact actions and statements when important
- include next step + escalation
- include witnesses if relevant

Table: Bad Note vs Good Note

Bad Note	Good Note
“Client was rude and crazy.”	“2/19 4:05pm: Client raised voice and used profanity after being advised file is incomplete due to missing 1099-NEC. Staff provided boundary warning and offered drop-off option. Manager notified. Client left at 4:12pm.”

Template: Incident Note

- Date/Time: _____
- Client: _____
- What happened (facts): _____
- Policy applied: _____
- Actions taken: _____
- Escalated to: _____
- Outcome: _____
- Witnesses (if any): _____