

Virtual Internships – Checklist for Success

Due to its ubiquity and ease-of-use, technology has opened greater opportunities for virtual internships. They are growing in popularity among employers and your fellow students.

Advantages

- 1) No need to relocate
- 2) Often allows for flexible work hours
- 3) Allows for casual dress except for formal presentations (see the chapter on Virtual Meetings),
- 4) Those who are more introverted may gain a greater sense of empowerment through online work

Disadvantages

- 1) Possible lack of quality supervision
- 2) More difficult to understand organizational culture and to make sense of office “politics”
- 3) Difficult if you are not a self-starter and need a lot of interaction and instruction
- 4) Most likely must use your own hardware and sometimes your own software

To ensure the best possible chance of success use the following checklist:

- The organization should be an established, legitimate business or non-profit, as evidenced by having –
 - a physical location
 - website
 - history of offering paid employment
 - listed telephone number
 - tax ID number
- If the organization consists of a single individual, are they willing to show you results of their criminal background check?
- The organization must agree to offer an experience that meets the criteria of a legitimate internship as outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers:
 - The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
 - The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
 - The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
 - There are clearly defined learning objectives related to the student’s professional goals.
 - There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.
 - There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor.
 - There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

- You and the organization, with approval of your campus internship coordinator, need to agree on a clear, detailed position description, which covers all expectations and constitutes a successful internship.
- The organization's internship site mentor must provide you with regular supervision, mentoring, and feedback as outlined above. This will include:
 - Use of a company intranet or virtual workspace on a server, or an online project management or document-sharing tool, such as Office 365, Google Docs, or a similar program. This will allow the supervisor to go online and monitor the work to be completed. The work is stored in the "cloud," not on a single PC, so it is always available to those who need it.
 - A regularly scheduled email report in which you provide information to the internship site mentor and the academic advisor, such as hours worked, challenges or problems encountered, progress toward learning objectives, and any questions you may have.
 - A weekly virtual meeting on Skype, Zoom, GoToWebinar, Google Hangouts, or a similar technology to provide more personalized feedback to you.
 - If the virtual internship is within a reasonable drive from your campus, the employer needs to meet with you in a public place (e.g., coffee shop, restaurant) once a week. This face-to-face meeting is a time for project planning, review of progress made, feedback, and mentoring.
- The organization should make you part of regular operations as much as possible; for example, including you in face-to-face opportunities such as company meetings or client visits.
- The organization must be willing to host a site visit from a representative of the college.
- You should be able to provide your faculty advisor or internship coordinator with materials produced during your experience.

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