

HOW TO CO-CREATE LEARNING OBJECTIVES WITH INTERNS

An intentional focus on student learning is what distinguishes internships from jobs. Interns should be considered learners first and contributors second, regardless of whether they are earning credit associated with their internship. Below are some tips to help you facilitate intern learning through the use of learning objectives.

IMPORTANCE

Co-creating learning objectives with interns:

- Signals that you **care** about their experience, which can increase their commitment, productivity, and desire to stay long-term
- Helps ensure everybody is on the **same page**, resulting in a better experience for all
- **Models** professional objective-setting, action-planning, and accountability
- Most importantly, helps set the stage for maximum intern **learning**

FOCUS AREAS

Objectives can focus on different areas:

- **Skill** development
- **Knowledge** acquisition
- **Personal/professional** development

SMART OBJECTIVES

Effective objectives share some commonalities:

- **S** – Specific
- **M** – Measurable
- **A** – Action-oriented
- **R** – Relevant
- **T** – Time-oriented

Examples of SMART objectives:

- > By the middle of my internship, I will be able to **write a one-page long press release** using AP style.
- > By July 30th, I will be able to **troubleshoot Microsoft Excel questions** with 95% accuracy.
- > By week 5, I will be able to identify **3 career paths** in this field & **1 way to learn about each**.

Smart objective's prompts:

- What do you **specifically** hope to accomplish?
- How will you **measure** your progress towards this objective?
- What **actions** will you take to achieve this objective?
- How is this objective **relevant** to your internship, academic interests, and/or career aspirations?
- What is your **timeline** for meeting this objective?

TIPS

Objective-setting caveats:

- Try to **avoid** broad objective like “understand” or “learn” because they cannot be easily measured.
- **Three** objectives is typically sufficient for a quarter-long internship.
- Writing SMART objectives may require several feedback and revision loops.

PROCESS

Objective-setting is a process:

- **Before an intern starts**, encourage them to think of a few potential learning objectives
- During the **first week**, schedule an hour with your intern to flesh out their objectives in writing
- Set up a **weekly** or **biweekly** time to check in
- **After a few weeks**, meet with your intern about how they are progressing towards their objectives, what action plan they have in place to achieve them, and how they might want to modify their original objectives
- At the **end of the internship**, review progress towards stated learning objectives as part of a formal performance evaluation meeting

Specific learning objectives may be included in digital internship:

Example:

- Acquire hands-on experience and demonstrate skills of working in a virtual team.
- Explore and recognize the different information acquisition styles and preferred information handling strategies of virtual team members.
- Use the diverse working styles and traits of virtual team members to successfully collaborate in virtual environments.
- Explore effective general learning strategies and those applicable specifically to virtual learning environments.
- Carry out self-directed learning and learning in an online environment.
- Recognize how various learning approaches and strategies have direct workplace application.

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