

2. SUPERVISOR'S ROLE DURING THE INTERNSHIP

In this stage, the focus is on the development of the intern's professional skills through practical and authentic tasks assigned to him by the supervisor. Supervisor's role is to provide task mentoring and guidance. Constant communication and feedback between student and supervisor is the key for the success of digital internship.

The main activities of supervisor during the internship include:

- Helping an intern to onboard
- Planning and giving work tasks to an intern
- Ensure productive communication and feedback to review progress
- Helping an intern to integrate into the organisation

2.1. HELP AN INTERN TO ONBOARD

Meeting an intern on the first day of internship is important for an intern's successful adaptation. In case of digital internship, virtual onboarding is the process of introducing and acclimating internship to a virtual office and team.

- Make sure that intern has all the necessary information and technologies for starting the internship (access to all applicable programs, set up logins and passwords)
- Encourage them to test the software, and give demonstrations if necessary.
- If the internship takes place remotely, you can give an intern a virtual tour by sharing screens during a video call. In case of in-person internship, showing intern the office rooms and equipment, and having them greet other employees is crucial.
- Make an introduction to the rest of the team (virtual or in-person). If possible, plan a team bonding activity (virtual or in-person) to help the intern feel welcome.
- Provide contact information on who to contact for problems, questions or concerns.
- Try to address the intern's questions and concerns.

Keeping an eye on an intern in the first days doesn't mean to watch their every move, but do make sure you know what's happening with their daily tasks. Try to make sure that the intern is not confused or bored. As often as silence means that an intern is busy, it also could mean that he or she is confused and shy about telling you so.

Please, see some ideas about virtual onboarding on this site [Virtual Onboarding Ideas to Welcome New Employees in 2023 \(teambuilding.com\)](https://teambuilding.com)

2.2. PLAN AND ASSIGN WORK TASKS TO THE INTERN

Your role as a supervisor is to assign work tasks to the intern that provide opportunities to learn and obtain new professional skills and competencies. It will be up to you to define and schedule work tasks that concord with internship objectives and provide guidance on how to carry them out.

Interns can acquire new knowledge and skills in the workplace in different ways. We recommend to use as many of these ways of learning as possible:

- observing how other employees carry out the task;
- carrying out the task under the supervision of other person;
- carrying out task independently;
- carrying out task in cooperation with other employees;
- looking for solutions to a particular work problem independently;
- explaining how to carry out a task to another person.

Remember that interns benefit from work tasks being contextualized rather than just assigning “to do” deliverables. It means that you should communicate why the work is important and how it will contribute to the project/department/organisation. Providing opportunities to interns to work in collaboration with other employees or in a team is very beneficial.

Recommended characteristics of work tasks:

- Concordant with the internship objectives
Useful for your organisation
- Meaningful and challenging for a student
- Suitable for remote work in case of digital internship
- Clear outcome (deliverable) of the task defined (e.g., a new document developed; a number of customers contacted and informed about the sales campaign)
- Clear, realistic deadline set for delivery of the task (this can be flexible but it will provide structure to an offsite intern)
- Method for carrying out the task is clearly described
- Information is provided about the level autonomy and available support (which parts of tasks he can would do with/without supervision or where he/she can generate his own solutions and ideas)
- Involves some degree of independent problem solving and proactivity of intern
Involves collaboration with other employee/-s (assign at least 1 team project)
- Information is provided about the digital tools needed for carrying out the tasks and for collaboration, review, and delivery of work (e.g., shared network folder).

Below is a list of free online tools for assigning and managing work tasks which can be useful for giving and following-up the progress of work tasks.

Free Work Tasks flow and Project Management Tools

- Asana (Free Basic plan),
- Freedcamp (Free Basic plan),
- OpenProject,
- nTask,
- Monday,
- Trello,
- Zapier (14 days free trial),
- todoist (Free Basic plan),
- Weekdone - free up to 3 users

Online file sharing platforms

- Google Drive,
- DropBox,
- OneDrive,
- Box,
- GoFile, etc.

[Template of work tasks sheet](#) (available for uploading on Google Sheets and adaptable to your context)

TIPS FOR IDEAS FOR INTERN'S ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

- Complete a backburner project that has been bogging down permanent staff.
- Create a proposal on a potential social media strategy, evaluate various social media platforms, or come up with suggestions for how your current social media strategy might be improved.
- Critique your company's website from a user perspective and brainstorm ideas for boosting usability.
- Propose solutions for a mid-level problem that no one has had time to address.
- Research and identify the most influential blogs in your industry, follow them and provide weekly reports.
- Scan industry media for news items; provide regularly scheduled updates.
- Accompany employees to client, sales, or meetings held online; have them take an observer role, but ask for their input and ideas and answer any questions they have after the event.
- Take responsibility for some regular task. Even if it's as simple as taking, and placing, the weekly supply order, it will demonstrate follow-through and an ability to take ownership.
- Create support materials, such as charts, graphs, or other visuals.
- Manage the organisation's social media
- Plan and coordinate an event or meeting.
- Produce a video or slide presentation.
- Perform a study or survey; analyze and present results.
- Compile employee manuals or develop process directions for tasks with high employee turnover.
- Source goods or search for lower-cost sources for high-volume materials.
- Clean up a database.
- Aid in the modification or enhancement of your internship program.
- Train new other interns prior to departure.

2.3. ENSURE PRODUCTIVE COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK TO REVIEW PROGRESS

Regular communication between you and the intern is very important. This might seem like an added constraint on your time, but it's important to help the intern to stay on track with her/his goals and feel like a part of the team. For an intern, there's nothing worse than being forgotten about.

Supervisor's communication with intern should be directed to:

- assigning work tasks and explaining how to carry them out giving feedback about intern's performance
- facilitating intern's reflection about his progress towards internship objectives and reviewing them
- encouraging and motivating intern
- listening to and discussing intern's concerns if such arise

Try to communicate with the intern face-to-face (online or in-person) at least once a week to discuss the points listed above. Apart from that, short check-in meetings to briefly inquire about an intern's well-being and needs are also a very good additional option (e.g., some supervisors choose to meet interns several times a week).

Criteria of effective communication:

- Clarity (understandable message)
- Conciseness (straight and short message; no wordiness, empty phrases, and redundancies)
- Correctness (accurate, fact-based and grammatically correct information)
- Completeness (message which reveals the whole picture and leaves no guesswork)
- Coherence (logical, organized and relevant information, smoothly presented)
- Consideration (before speaking, consider your words and their potential effects on the listener).
- Courtesy (avoid inappropriate jokes, insults, or an aggressive tone)

Effective feedback about intern's performance and progress

Feedback is:

- information about how one is doing in effort to reach a goal;
- any response regarding an intern's performance or behavior (verbal, written or gestural);
- both giving and receiving information;
- helpful for the intern and the supervisor to assess and adjust internship objectives, work tasks and workload.

Types of feedback:

1. Positive feedback (e.g., "I think you managed to speak to this customer and handle his problem very well").
2. Developmental (e.g., "I would like you to be able to calculate the bicarbonate dose on your own next time.")
3. Negative feedback (e.g., "You did not manage to do the work in time")

Feedback on an intern's performance should be provided on a regular basis. It is recommended to schedule weekly feedback face-to-face meetings for a minimum of 30 minutes to engage in conversation with the intern regarding his/her progress towards assigned tasks, areas of desired learning goals and professional development.

The purpose of feedback in the learning process is to improve a student's performance - not put a damper on it therefore it is suggested to focus on positive and developmental feedback types. If you provide negative feedback, make sure that it is balanced with positive and developmental feedback types.

Characteristics of effective feedback

Clear	Provide feedback in a way that is easy to understand for the intern. When you give feedback, try to focus not only on what you want to say, but also help the intern to receive and understand what you want to say.
Specific	Direct feedback at what the intern did and how the intern did it. Base it on concrete facts. For example, "Anna, I love the new interactive buttons you've added to our fitness app. I just feel that they're conflicting with the theme. Can you reduce the sizes?" Avoid making only general statements such as "Good job!".
Timely	Give feedback as soon as possible after observing the intern's performance or behaviour or receiving the output. You can give feedback while the intern is doing a task, right after he has done it, in the middle or at the end of the project.

Respectful	Give feedback in a way that is thoughtful and understanding, provide a suitable context for it (time for feedback should be free from phone calls and other disturbances). Don't be hurried in the discussion because you have other things to do. Conversation at no point should be accusatory but rather, observational in nature.
Balanced	Balance positive, developmental and positive feedback. Provide positive feedback on how the intern is using his/her strengths to achieve beneficial results and ask to maintain or improve their behaviors or results by making continued or more intensive use of their strengths. When giving feedback about the weak points of performance, provide also a developmental feedback type and focus it on knowledge and skills rather than talents.
Behaviour-focused	Feedback should focus on behaviors, on the WHAT was done, not the WHO. Feedback should be directed on things which the intern can change or control. For example, "I think you did a good job assigning roles to everyone during that emergency case" or "For future cases, I'd like you to think about how you can reply to a customer more quickly".

How to structure a feedback session?

There are different techniques for the delivery process of feedback. We propose these six steps, partly adapted from the Pendleton model, and extended:

1. Invite the intern to share how he feels about his internship at the moment.
2. Ask the intern to share his impressions about the work task and his performance in it, about what went well, in which ways he succeeded in the task.
3. Confirm and extend upon areas of intern's success and his strengths.
4. Ask the intern to identify things that he thinks should be improved or done differently and what skills and knowledge he thinks would be necessary to develop for that.
5. Share your impressions of what should be improved in the performance and provide suggestions to how that could be done.
6. Invite the intern to share his overall impressions and gains from the feedback session, and to reflect on the usefulness of a particular work task (what he learned) and the feedback to reach the internship objectives that were defined before the internship.

2.4. HELP THE INTERN TO INTEGRATE INTO ORGANISATION

Intern's sense of belonging to the organisation is an important aspect of internship. Facilitate intern's interaction with other employees not only in formal work-related projects, tasks and staff meetings (through videoconferences or in-person), but also in informal contexts. If possible, schedule social activities that are in-person. This could be sporting events, celebrations, etc. It will encourage deeper engagement and connection between an intern and organisation's staff.

Ideas for virtual events for socialization and team building in organisation:

- Virtual coffee breaks
- Virtual tours of local organisations (e.g., museums)
- Virtual talent show/game show
- Sharing personal experiences and adventures (e.g., ask team members to share photos from a recent trip).
- Teamwork on informal topics (e.g., "Never-ending story": one team member creates an Instagram story that ends with a challenge to another teammate. That teammates responds via story, prompting another colleague).

You can find more ideas for team building and socialisation on [20 Virtual Team Building Activities for Remote Teams](#)