1. PREPARATION FOR THE INTERNSHIP

Preparation for the internship is very important for its successful start and proceeding. It will help you to stay focused and productive during the internship and have productive communication with your supervisors. Technological readiness is crucial in the case of a digital or hybrid internship model – it involves agreeing on ICT technologies needed for communication and for performing the work tasks in an effective manner.

The main steps you should take before the internship:
- Introduce yourself to internship requirements set by higher education institution (HEI)
- Find and/or decide on the receiving organisation
- Define your internship objectives
- Start to build relationships with your supervisors
- Have initial meeting with your supervisors
- Establish a dedicated workspace (in case of digital or hybrid internship)

1.1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO INTERNSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Explore all the available information about the internship – be it documents or other resources provided by HEI. It is important that you know the objectives, duration, deliverables of the internship as well as your responsibilities as an intern. Do not hesitate to ask employees from HEI any questions important to prepare for an internship.

1.2. PREPARE MATERIALS FOR INTERNSHIP

Some HEIs provide to students the list of organisations ready to receive interns, however, if that is not the case, you will have to devote time to look for an internship site that can provide an internship that is interesting and valuable to you. You should begin your search early and use every resource to find a suitable internship site.

Internship search strategies

Leverage your network: talk to friends and family members with similar career interests for potential internship sites; possibly, former employers, mentors, and coaches can also provide valuable advice; additionally, HEI faculty and administrators can provide connections.

Use Internship Search Sites at local level: organisations which are interested in receiving interns often provide information about it on sites devoted particularly for internships.

Contact local companies or businesses: many local companies and businesses offer internships with hidden benefits; you might want to contact some local organisation that you are interested in for an internship.

Use internship search sites at international level: there are companies which are open to receiving interns from other countries; web search will provide you with information about these opportunities; you will have to find out if an organisation provides internship in virtual/remot form. See the section at the end of this booklet about resources where to look for international internships: *RESOURCES TO FIND INTERNSHIP IN GLOBAL COMPANIES*.

Use Job Search Sites: job search sites are also a good resource for finding internship opportunities; these sites allow you to narrow your scope based on criteria such as industry or field, location, and type of internship.

Getting an internship

Getting an internship requires you to plan and navigate the application process carefully. Think about strengthening your resume, cover letters, and professional portfolio.

Apply early and widely: internship opportunities can be highly competitive, so apply early to a variety of positions; submitting a well-crafted application before the deadline offers potential employers a positive first impression.

Strengthen your resume: building an effective resume takes time and planning; try to make it professional, include specific details that will appeal to the company you want to intern at, don't hesitate to showcase your accomplishments, underscore personal attributes and activities that highlight individual characteristics.

Write a unique cover letter: the cover letter for an internship offers applicants a chance to highlight the personal, professional, and academic attributes that make them a valuable intern and potential future employee.

Build and attach a portfolio (if needed): purpose of a portfolio is to provide concrete evidence of your skills, abilities and achievements. Besides, it shows the prospective employer that you have been keeping a track record and that you are organized. In the portfolio, compile your academic achievements, work experience, highlights from extra-curricular activities, and also include volunteering experiences and projects that you have done. You can borrow some tips for making portfolio here: Create a professional portfolio for job applications | Help Centre | The Open University

Prepare for an interview: interview is often the final step in securing an internship. During an interview, try to display both professionalism and a knowledge of the position, organisation, and mission. Don't hesitate to ask questions in case interviewers give you time for it.

1.3. DEFINE YOUR INTERNSHIP OBJECTIVES

An intentional focus on student learning is what distinguishes internships from jobs. As an intern, you should consider yourself a learner first and a contributor second, regardless of whether you are earning credit associated with your internship. To get the most out of your internship, set 3 to 5 learning or performance objectives and review them with your supervisor before, during, and at the end of your internship. If HEI provides detailed internship objectives in internship documentation, you might leave them as they are. However, you might want to set some additional objectives that are personally important to you. Also, if HEI provides rather general internship goals, you have a chance to define more specific objectives.

IMPORTANCE

Creating learning objectives:
- Signals that you are invested in the experience.
- Helps ensure everybody is on the same page, resulting in a better experience for all.
- Helps you develop and demonstrate important professional skills such as prioritizing, 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.

Objective-setting is a process:
- **Before the internship starts,** think of a few potential learning objectives and to flesh out their objectives in writing.
- **Present your objectives to your supervisor(s)** and receive their opinion.
- **When the internship starts,** review learning objectives.
- **After a few weeks,** talk to your supervisor about how you feel you are progressing towards your learning objectives, what action plan you have in place to achieve them, and how you might want to modify your original objectives.

- At the **end of the internship**, review your progress towards stated learning objectives s as part of a your self-assessment.

Advice from interns:
- "Setting very **specific** objectives is important; when objectives are vague, they can seem daunting."
- "It is okay to **modify** your objectives."
- "**Share** your objectives with someone who can keep you accountable to it."

Examples of specific learning objectives in digital internship:
- 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.

1.4. CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISORS

Before the internship starts, interns usually are assigned to two supervisors – one from the higher education institution (HEI) and one – from the receiving organisation. In special cases, interns have only one supervisor – either in HEI or in the receiving organisation. Supervisors are sometimes called mentors or tutors.

Intern's supervisor in the receiving organisation is one of the key persons in the internship. They play a vital role by giving work tasks, providing feedback, support and guidance to an intern as they transition from student to independent competent professional.

You should contact your supervisors before the internship starts (in some cases, supervisors might be the first who initiate the contact). It might involve sending him/her an introductory email. It is important that the supervisor from the receiving organisation receives the main information about you and the internship program before the internship starts (you might want to use the sample of introductory email to the supervisor in the receiving organisation).

1.5. HAVE THE INITIAL MEETING WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR(S)

Qualitative internship should be subject to an initial meeting between the supervisor from the receiving organisation and the student before the internship. It is an opportunity for detailed discussion of supervisor's and your expectations. Initial connection that you and the supervisor make sets the tone for the remainder of the relationship. If possible, try to set this meeting as face-to-face communication (online or in-person). Of course, contacting your supervisor from HEI before the internship is also useful, but, most probably, this meeting will not be so extended.

During the initial meeting with supervisors:
- Agree on the objectives of the internship
- Agree on the conditions of communication during the internship
- Receive basic information about the organisation (with supervisor from the receiving organisation)
- Receive basic information about working conditions (with supervisor from the receiving organisation)

Detailed explanation about the four points mentioned above:

Agree on the objectives of the internship.
The success of the internship and its smooth proceeding depends on the joint understanding of internship objectives by you and by the supervisor. Introduce the supervisor from the receiving organisation to your internship objectives (formal and/or personal). You and supervisor should agree on these objectives (optimally – 3) and be open to reviewing and assessing them during the internship, and document them before the internship starts.

Agree on the conditions of communication during the internship.
Regular communication is critical for the success of internships and digital internships in particular. You and your supervisors should agree on the conditions of regular (scheduled) communication and communication outside the scheduled meetings.

The frequency and channels of regular communication

> ***Ask your supervisors how they prefer to communicate.*** It is very important that you can agree on regular face-to-face communication (video conferences or in person meetings). Make sure that you can use an online platform for video conferences that is available both to you and to supervisors. Ask your supervisor which platform for online collaboration you should utilize for video conferencing, chatting, scheduling, and project management. Coordinate with your supervisor on any training needs for these platforms.

> Email is also a good channel of communication. You might agree with supevisor(s) that you send weekly email recaps of your progress. If a supervisor prefers phone calls, schedule regular phone calls with them.

> ***Frequency of communication.*** It is recommended to schedule at least weekly face-to-face meetings (online or in-person) with a supervisor from the receiving organisation. Consider setting up a meeting at the same time each week so that you can monitor your progress, discuss on-going tasks, and keep your site supervisor up-to-date, receive support and answers to your questions. Frequency of meetings with a supervisor from HEI depend on your agreement, usually these are biweekly or less frequent meetings.

Communication apart from the regular meetings

> It will be needed if you have questions to the supervisor or issues to be resolved as soon as possible. Ask supervisors which are the most appropriate channels to reach them outside regular scheduled communication and the terms under which they will be able to engage (for example, you might agree that if sudden questions arise, you contact supervisor in *WhatsApp* Chat or by e-mail and they will be able to reply in the next work day).

Technological resources for online communication:
- Face to Face Communication – *Zoom, MS Teams, FaceTime, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Zoho Meetings, WhatsApp,* etc.
- Other communication tools – Slack, Email, Instant Messenger, WhatsApp Chat, etc.

Receive basic information about the organisation.

During the initial meeting with the supervisor from the receiving organisation you should ask about the organisation and about the resources where you could find out more about it or about its particular entity (e.g., department). Ask a supervisor if it is possible to get acquainted with other employees, especially those with whom you might be in closer collaboration during the internship. If meeting other employees is impossible, ask the supervisor at least the names and positions of employees you will be in contact with during the internship.

In general, before the internship it is recommended to learn about:
- Products or services provided by organisation
- History, mission and objectives of organisation
- Structure of organisation (e.g., organisational chart)
- Employees or team with whom you will collaborate
- Resources where you can find out more about the organisation
- Next formal or informal team meeting in an organisation where you need or may participate

Receive basic information about working conditions.

Work environment, work regulations and technological issues should be the topics on which you preferably need to receive information from the supervisor before the internship. Information about the digital tools that you will need to carry out work tasks is very important, and, possibly, you will have to acquire knowledge about certain IT tools or programs before the internship – do not hesitate to ask your supervisor about the ways to do it. Sometimes, in larger organisations, an IT team member is assigned to an intern, someone who will be responsible for ensuring you have quick access to all the resources you need as soon as you start.

In general, before the internship it is recommended to learn about:
- Regulations of work safety
- Data protection rules
- Code of ethics
- Security or confidentiality issues that you should be aware of
- Schedule of working day and working hours
- Internal communication channels in organisation
- Communication etiquette for videoconferences, phone, email etc.
- Digital tools, programs and networks used in organisation needed for you to carry out work tasks.

1.6. ESTABLISH A WORKSPACE

Before the internship starts, establish a workspace away from distractions and organise your desk with necessary supplies.

- **Designate a location as your primary workspace.** This could be a home office, bedroom, or dining room table. It also helps to have a back-up location, in case your primary workspace becomes unavailable. The criteria for determining an optimal workspace is a distraction-free area where you can quietly focus on your work and take meetings. Most probably, you will have to discuss work arrangements with anyone you live with to avoid interruptions and distractions during the workday.
- **Prepare technology for work.** Technological readiness for internship means providing appropriate software and hardware. By checking your technological capacity before your first day, you help ensure that the first few days on the job are stress-free from technological surprises.

If you are using a personal computer for your internship, take advice from your supervisor from the receiving organisation or their IT department to determine that you have all appropriate software and ensure that your computer has the necessary computing capabilities. You may also have to submit a report detailing your computer's and WiFi security protocols. Make sure you have a stable connection to the internet with speeds of at least 25Mbps and a webcam. A microphone/headset combination will alleviate background noise and improve the clarity of your conversations in videoconferences. You might want to look into guides for using platform for videoconferences on Youtube.

If a computer is provided by the receiving organisation, make sure you set aside some time to ensure that the computer is set up properly and is ready for your first day of work. This is also an opportunity to refresh yourself on the software you will be using. Even if you feel technologically experienced it is still important to test the provided technology as it can be a different version from what you are accustomed to. Companies like SkillShare and Coursera provide a wide variety of training videos for free.