



# VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS & WORKING REMOTELY

## A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

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# COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS AND REMOTE WORK



## 1 WHAT IS A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP?

A virtual internship is like an in-person internship, except that it's done entirely online. The intern gains valuable experience while working remotely, rather than being physically present within a "typical" office setting.

## 2 WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS/REMOTE WORK?

- **Flexibility:** Work hours are often more flexible, with students often completing their work outside of the standard 8-5 workday.
- **Convenient location:** Virtual internships allow interns to work from whichever locations are most convenient to them.
- **Affordability:** Virtual internships can lower the financial burden interns typically take on when completing an in-person internship such as relocation costs (some students incur housing costs both on campus and near the worksite) or travel costs incurred during the commute to work.
- **Project-oriented work:** Since virtual internships are entirely remote, employers often have to think more critically about an intern's workload and assign projects (rather than smaller, day-to-day tasks) that have greater impact on organizational outcomes and business needs. Maximized project work often translates into robust experiential learning.

## 3 HOW IS A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP DIFFERENT FROM AN ON-SITE INTERNSHIP?

- **Increased accountability:** Virtual internships offer flexibility but they also require greater accountability. Students need to remain vigilant, committed to deadlines, and have the drive to create a personal framework of accountability.
  - **Absence of in-person networking opportunities:** Although the opportunity for virtual networking is ever-present, these will need to be done with a fair bit of planning and intentionality (rather than the organic, spontaneous networking that comes from encountering others in a physical office).
  - **Different methods for communication:** In a virtual internship setting, interns primarily communicate with an employer through email, video or phone calls, and the employer's internal instant messaging application such as Slack, Webex, or Google Hangout Chat, among others.
  - **Delayed response time:** There's a natural communication delay that occurs when working remotely all of the time, as interns await responses from their supervisors typically by email or instant message.
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# HOW CAN STUDENTS WORK WITH EMPLOYERS TO CONVERT AN ON-SITE INTERNSHIP INTO A VIRTUAL FORMAT?

Below, you will find tips and advice on how to engage your potential employer to either transition an existing on-site internship into a virtual position or to create a virtual internship from scratch.

## 1 PITCHING A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP TO POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Although it can be intimidating to pitch a virtual internship to an employer, let's discuss some strategies for getting the conversation started:

- **Evaluate the external climate:** What might be going on in the world that could affect how receptive a company or organization is to your pitch for a virtual internship? Being mindful of the constraints that an employer is facing can help you develop a nuanced and self-aware initial ask.
- **Outline a virtual internship structure:** In making your pitch to your potential employer, it can be helpful to highlight that you've already thought about a structure for a virtual internship. Doing so may alleviate some employer concerns that they will have to build a model from scratch.
- **Kindness and compassion are core:** Be sure to thank your contact for exploring the possibility of a virtual internship, even if the answer is no. It may be that the organization simply doesn't have the capacity to shift an in-person internship into a virtual opportunity at this time. Communicating empathy and understanding will go a long way to laying the groundwork for a future internship and/or job opportunity.
- **Frame it as a value-add:** When discussing the proposal for a virtual internship with your potential employer, aim to highlight how a virtual opportunity can benefit the organization. Also, do the legwork of thinking through how your in-person internship can be adapted into a virtual format.
- **An email might be the best approach:** As you prepare to make your ask, it may be best to do so via email. A written message provides you with an opportunity to craft a compelling case and revise it as needed before sending it to your potential employer contact. Plus, it also gives your contact the time (and courtesy) to assess your idea and thoughtfully respond to you.

## 2 SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

The following is an overview of the components that constitute a quality, successful virtual internship experience.

### BEFORE YOU START:

- **Interview process:** Virtual internships should include an interview as part of the hiring process. Ideally, the interview is conducted via video but if not, a phone interview will suffice.
- **Commitment to fair and equitable work practices and an inclusive work setting:** As you explore organizations, it's important to consider how they create and support an environment that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Duration of internship:** Ideally, virtual internships are a minimum of 6 weeks long and have at least 10 hours of work per week. This helps ensure you walk away with an immersive and robust experiential learning opportunity. Explore this with your employer to find that balance with your goals and theirs.

### GETTING STARTED:

- **Orientation:** Like in-person internships, virtual internships should include an orientation program and/or onboarding process so that you can be introduced to the organization and any staff you would regularly interact with. Be sure to review the website to become familiar with the faces and names of who you might be working with and the structure of the organization. You may want to request to review the company's HR practices and guidelines.
- **Remote work practices:** Each organization has their own practices around remote work, so you will want to explore this with your employer to make sure there is a shared expectation of understanding.
- **Share your internship goals:** What do you hope to gain from the internship in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience? What do you want to learn about the role or industry? How do you want to apply your classroom learnings and education to this internship? Are there experienced professionals you'd like to get to know and learn from at the organization?
- **Project-based:** Given that virtual internships are entirely remote, it is important that you ask for meaningful projects that can be actively completed over the course of the virtual internship. Please see the accompanying template located at the bottom of this document for ideas on structuring your virtual internship that you can recommend to your employer.

### COMMUNICATION:

- **Clarify preferred modes of communication:** Discuss how your supervisor prefers to connect and through which platforms (email, phone, Slack, text, etc.).
- **Weekly check-in:** Ideally, you'll want a weekly video or phone meeting with your supervisor to discuss your progress and receive constructive feedback. If you and your employer have the technical capability, video check-ins are preferred as they enhance relationship-building.
- **Consider submitting a regularly-scheduled report:** This will help inform your supervisor of challenges or problems you have encountered, your progress toward project objectives, and an opportunity to raise any questions you may have.



- **Feedback & support:** Regular feedback and support is pivotal in any internship, and even more so for virtual internships because of the absence of in-person interactions. As an intern, ask for always-on support and feedback so you can identify areas for improvement. This may be in the form of peer-to-peer feedback, supervisor evaluations, or online self-assessments.

## SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE:

- **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.
- **Preparing your technology:** Make sure your workspace also has optimal lighting and that your WiFi connectivity is sufficient to support your daily tasks, including video calls.

## DEVELOP A MOTIVATION PLAN:

- **Know your work habits:** The trick is knowing yourself by observing your habits. Do you get caught up in scrolling Instagram or TikTok? Know yourself and your habits and structure your internship in a way that works for you.
- **Consider utilizing a planner:** Adopt physical or digital planners to keep yourself on track. Free online apps, like Asana or Trello, or browser extensions, like Momentum, are a digital way to plan out projects and tasks.
- **Set your own deadlines to create structure:** The desire to procrastinate is fairly common. It can be helpful to complete assigned tasks and projects well in advance of the deadlines set by your supervisors. In a virtual internship, timeliness and the quality of your work is crucial in setting the right impressions.





# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKING WHILE WORKING REMOTELY

Below, you will find tips and advice on how to foster connections with professionals at the organization and also how to engage your supervisor in the process:

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

Due to the nature of virtual internships, you may want to explore the possibility of scheduling informational interviews, either by phone, video calls, and virtual brown bag sessions with professionals at the organization you are eager to build rapport with and gain insights from.

## PURSUE OPPORTUNITIES TO GET TO KNOW YOUR SUPERVISOR

Ask your supervisor if they are open to building time into your weekly check-ins to get to know one another. Video chats about everyday things can be a simple but powerful way to build trust and a productive working relationship.

## MAINTAIN THE CONNECTION

It's important to regularly reach out to your connections at the organization. Hub coaches and Internship Coordinators have helpful tips on how to best approach your professional contacts.

# QUESTIONS?

If you have questions or need support, feel free to contact the Hub at [lsa-opphub@umich.edu](mailto:lsa-opphub@umich.edu) and request an appointment with an Internship Coordinator. If your potential employer has questions on how to set-up a virtual internship that you cannot answer, you can always connect them with one of the Hub's Internship Coordinators or feel free to direct them to this *Employer's Guide to a Virtual Internship* document on the LSA Opportunity Hub's website.