

Making the Most of Your Summer Internship

Best Practices in a Virtual World

Take advantage of these best practices to be successful in your virtual role. These recommendations include planning for success, considerations to optimize your performance, communication best practices, and building community while virtual.

Plan For Success

1. **Have an initial conversation with your manager on goals, timing, and communication preferences.** Use this conversation to understand the work and your role in it. Consider these questions:
 - a. Will it be one large project that you independently drive, or will you receive assignments throughout the timeframe?
 - b. What is the expected timeframe for completion?
 - c. Will there be any “pop-up” requests that you need to be alert for?
 - d. What is your supervisor’s preference for communication format and frequency (e.g., weekly Zoom calls, weekly email updates from you to them, etc.)?
 - e. What format should your work product take? (e.g., email, attachment, phone call, etc.)
 - f. What hours are considered official work hours? Be sure you are at your desk and available during the work hours that are considered ‘official’. That also means all apps on your computer are turned on (i.e. Outlook, Teams, etc.), so your manager can get in touch with you via the normal means of virtual communication.

2. **Set up a dedicated workspace free of clutter before you start your internship.** Create a space that is optimized for the virtual meeting environment.
 - a. Ideally, avoid spaces where light is directly behind you (i.e. an open window) as it makes your face difficult to see over video.
 - b. Prop your computer so that it is eye level. Be sure to look at the camera while speaking.
 - c. Consider other items that will be in view (i.e. your bed), and make sure to tidy up so that your background reinforces the professional presence you wish to showcase. *Use a blurred background filter if available through your video collaboration applications (e.g., Teams, Zoom, etc.).*

Optimize Your Performance

1. **Set aside regular, specific days and times each week to work on specific tasks for your internship.** Remote-work internships naturally have less structure than in-person internships so being proactive about your schedule will be essential. This becomes even more important when your role is part-time. For part-time internships, be sure to communicate and agree on your dedicated work time with your manager ahead of time.
 - a. Set up a recurring check-in with your supervisor. Communicate with your internship supervisor to arrange a specific day each week when you will call, email, Zoom, or text each other that works best with your supervisor’s schedule (see #1d above!). This check-in should include:

- i. A discussion of the assignments that you have turned in most recently or progress thereof
 - ii. Your work performance overall and upcoming assignments
 - iii. Progress on goals that both you and your supervisor have for the remainder of the internship
 - b. Be sure to monitor your email for correspondence from your supervisor every day. Unless you have agreed upon days and times that you will be working, you'll need to be attentive and responsive to emails throughout the week.
 - c. Stay organized by utilizing Outlook Calendar/Google Calendar. Integrate work time 'holds' and meetings within one calendar system. Download the app on your phone so you stay on top of your tasks and commitments while mobile.
2. **Look for ways to benefit the organization and yourself by completing additional tasks.**
 - a. Be a self-starter. If you have finished your assignments, do not wait for work to flow to you; ask your supervisor what else you could do to support them or the team.
 - b. Think about what your internship organization does, how that relates to what you do and your interests, and then see how you could combine them. Keep an eye out for possible side projects that you could take on to this end.
 - c. Display your passion to work with others and learn about what other teams are working on. This is a great way to build lasting professional connections that can stay with you beyond the internship.
3. **Be flexible.** The internship position and needs of the organization may change over your time with them. Conditions and the priorities of the organization and the people involved regularly evolve.
 - a. Communicate regularly and make sure that you fully understand each assignment and what goal it helps the organization achieve. This will help you adapt to modified assignment parameters or deadlines.
 - b. Be patient with individuals with whom you are working with in the organization, including your manager. They may need to postpone check-ins or meetings last minute once in a while.
4. **Keep track of the assignments that you complete, the documents that you create, and the skills that you learn.** Over the course of one internship, you will create or edit many documents, complete assignments of different kinds/formats, and learn new skills. These assignments, documents, and skills will come in handy when you apply for future internships and jobs as elements of the experience that you can highlight which evidence your qualifications.
 - a. Remember to track (e.g., spreadsheet, email list, etc.) what you did and keep physical records whenever you can (though ensure you comply with any confidentiality that is required with your employer!).
 - i. This record of your work should then be used to update your resume *before* you begin to apply for your next opportunity!

- b. Utilize the software/interface that the company uses to organize your materials and daily work (Google Drive/Microsoft Outlook, etc.). These will be interfaces you will use throughout your career so learn them and learn them well!

Communication Best Practices

1. **Practice overcommunication.** When you don't have the benefit of physical proximity, it can be hard to feel connected to your manager. Chat with your manager about how they would like updates about your work, and make sure to follow through via those channels.
 - a. If they prefer email, consider sending a weekly email recap on project progress and any questions that might have arisen during the week. Monitor your email and respond promptly (immediately or within an hour or two) to emails from your supervisor.
 - b. If they prefer face-to-face meetings, come to your video check-ins prepared with notes, questions, and ideas – and remember to be aware of your surroundings and plan accordingly (see Plan for Success #2).
2. **Be professional in your written communication.** Email communication should be formal. Communication over chat (i.e. Teams, Skype, Slack) can be more conversational but should also remain professional.
 - a. Emails should begin with a greeting (not “Hey” or launching directly into your message); include full sentences and appropriate spelling and punctuation. Always begin with “Dear”, unless they tell you otherwise and end with a “Thank you!”.
 - b. Avoid the use of an informal “texting tone” and style, such as using abbreviations (BTW, IRL, etc.).
 - c. Avoid long written communication generally. If the issue is complex, request a time to discuss with your manager over a phone call.
 - d. Organize your thoughts before composing the email and structure them using natural groups. This allows your recipient to easily digest and respond to you. For example, if you're providing an update on your progress on two projects, consider using the following structure:
 - i. Project 1
 1. Update: *Insert updates here.*
 2. Outstanding Questions: *Insert questions here.*
 - ii. Project 2
 1. Update: *Insert updates here.*
 2. Outstanding Questions: *Insert questions here.*
3. **Set up a professional voicemail and email signature.** Since you are using your phone and email as primary means of communication, professional voicemails and signatures will help convey your brand as a professional.
 - a. Your voicemail can be something simple such as: *“Thank you for you call! You have reached [INSERT NAME HERE]. I am unable to respond right now. Please share your name and phone number and I will call you back as soon as possible.”*

- b. Your email signature can also simple:
Jane Doe
Intern | Organization A
University of Chicago – Class of 20XX
312-222-2222

Build Community (virtually) and Find Time to Recharge

When we work remotely, we must be more overt about building community and finding time away. Our work product will benefit when we can find balance and support from others.

1. **Get to know your fellow interns.** If you are interning with a cohort of interns, find time to get to know them through virtual coffee chats. These interns are likely sharing similar challenges that you face and may be a good resource on your project.

Network with others within the organization as time allows. An internship is a chance to showcase your talents to the employer but also an opportunity to understand if the industry, department, or role is a good fit for you. As time allows and if your manager is in support, set up virtual coffee chats with current employees at the organization. They may have tips for your project or your career, generally. These connections just may result in lasting connections that you may tap throughout your career!

Find time to step away. It's easy to work 24/7 when work and home are taking place in the same physical space. Time away allows you to recharge, and your work product will benefit. Step away daily in a way that energizes you – through exercise, connecting with friends, or another pastime.

Use these tips to ensure you have a successful virtual internship this summer! As always, if you have any questions or run into any challenges, feel free to set up an appointment with an adviser through [Handshake](#) or email careeradvancement@uchicago.edu any time.