Internships abroad have always been a popular way of building global career skills. But with the spread of Covid-19 and resulting travel restrictions, many students are turning to virtual internships to boost international experience without leaving home. But is it possible to build quality cross-cultural experience from your laptop? Luckily, the answer is a resounding “yes!” And as long as you have access to a computer and decent Wi-Fi, you’re a candidate for a virtual international internship.

Virtual opportunities are now available in a range of formats, too. Universities and placement agencies are now offering a variety of virtual programs, from volunteering to study abroad and cultural exchange. Keep an open mind when searching for programs.

**Benefits of Virtual International Internships**

**The future of work is online!** Nowadays, remote work experience is an important addition to every CV. Virtual internships prove your ability to communicate, collaborate and manage projects online.

**It’s great value:** At $600 - $3,000, virtual internships are far more accessible than in-person internships abroad, which can cost upwards of $10,000.

**Stand out from the crowd:** A role with a company abroad will set you apart from your peers, who may be working online with North American companies, or simply taking time off during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Boost cross-cultural business skills:** Although you’ll be working from home, you’ll be part of a foreign workplace, gaining insight into another country’s professional culture and building your International IQ.

**Network with global professionals:** You’ll be widening your network to include foreign experts in your field, who may mentor you or provide career assistance in the future.

**Benefit from increased focus:** As a virtual intern, you won’t have to carry out menial office tasks. Instead, you and your employer will develop clear projects and goals, making it easier to focus.

**Improved work-life balance:** The flexible nature of remote work makes it easier to continue coursework, maintain a part-time job, pursue hobbies or manage childcare.

**Enhance communication skills:** Working online, clarity of communication is crucial. You’ll have to level up your written and verbal communication skills, which will then be transferrable to future professional opportunities.

**Improve language skills:** If your position is partially or fully conducted in a foreign language, you’ll be surprised how quickly your language skills improve.

**Boost self-discipline:** As a virtual intern, you’ll have to deliver results without constant supervision. You’ll need to become disciplined, independent and self-motivated.

**No visa required:** You won’t need to apply for a work visa, which removes some of the tedious paperwork often involved in interning abroad.

**It’s ideal for introverts:** Anyone who naturally shies away from being super-social will find virtual opportunities to be a comfortable way of gaining experience.

**Flexibility can boost productivity:** Working across time zones, your employer’s workday won’t overlap fully with your own. This means you’ll be able to manage your own schedule and focus on increasing your productivity.
Challenges of Virtual International Internships

Less direct interaction: You won’t be physically located in an office, so you’ll miss out on casual interactions and face-to-face networking with colleagues. We suggest proposing a “virtual coffee break” with team members.

Sense of isolation: It’s your responsibility to manage your personal wellness during your internship. If you start to feel isolated or overwhelmed, reach out and connect with colleagues or friends.

Cross-cultural immersion is up to you: When you’re based abroad, it’s easy to immerse yourself in local culture. But during a virtual internship, you’ll need to undertake cultural immersion activities independently.

Lack of supervision: It may be a challenge to get instant feedback on questions, and to benefit from watching your manager in action. Combat this by scheduling frequent check-ins.

Self-discipline can be tough: As a virtual intern, you’ll be responsible for staying motivated, focused and on-task. Having a morning routine and a dedicated workspace will help with this.

Difficulty understanding office culture and politics: It’s a challenge to grasp the nuances of office politics. Consider asking your employer to connect you with an office mentor, office buddy or another intern working remotely.

How to Find a Virtual Internship

There are three main ways to search for a virtual international internship:

1. Work with your university: Talk to your career center, co-op or study abroad office. Inquire about virtual international internship placements. School advisors will ensure the quality of your internship experience, see that all support systems are in place and manage course credit.

2. Work with placement agency: Placement agencies guarantee an internship with a reliable employer in your field. You’ll also receive meaningful support alongside the experience. Agencies do cost money, but the service is often well worth the investment, and a range of prices is available.

3. Work directly with a company (the self-directed internship): Finally, you could opt to conduct a search of companies abroad working in your field. Some may already offer virtual internships, or you could propose your own. This independent approach is slightly riskier and lacks the support systems of working with a school or an agency, but it does allow you to target the best employers in your industry.
Ten Essential Components of a Good Virtual International Internship

Well-managed virtual internships share some common traits. Here are some best practices to look out for:

1. **Quality support systems**: A good internship will have staff dedicated to your success, available for online or real-time support.

2. **Defined learning objectives**: An internship is primarily a learning experience, not solely a work project benefiting the company. Having defined learning objectives can help clarify your goals.

3. **Comprehensive job description**: You should be given a clear outline of expectations, including your role, the type of projects you’ll be working on, and any associated guidelines or procedures.

4. **Frequent check-ins**: Your virtual internship should include frequent communication with the experience providers to ensure that you feel confident and understand what’s expected of you.

5. **Additional career coaching**: Does your school, placement agency or employer offer additional training, career readiness tools or professional development assistance? These could take the form of professional skill-building modules, advising sessions or other career prep help.

6. **Cross-cultural training**: Internship facilitators should provide cross-cultural training and ensure that your experience is geared towards this type of learning. Arrangements should be made for intercultural learning activities, like a cross-cultural buddy system or office mentor.

7. **Feedback processes**: Getting feedback on your performance helps you recognize your best qualities and target weak points, which makes you better able to sell yourself to future employers. Ask if there are formal feedback processes in place. You should also be able to provide your own feedback on the experience.

8. **Reflection exercises**: It’s essential that you write about your cross-cultural and career development experiences. If you’re not writing, you’re not learning! Your school or agency should ensure that you’re writing reflections regularly. If you’re working directly with an employer, you’ll have to undertake this work independently.

9. **Technology**: It’s the intern’s responsibility to have an up-to-date computer and software, but the employer must provide access to necessary filesharing and collaboration platforms.

10. **Course credit certification**: If you require course credit, it’s important to confirm the eligibility of your internship with your university in advance. Always double check before proceeding.
Top Questions to Ask

Don’t be afraid to ask questions before accepting an opportunity. Confirming the details of an experience beforehand will help ensure that you have the most successful internship possible. Once on the job, make sure you’re getting all the information you need from your employer without making too many requests.

**Your University or Placement Agency**

1. What support systems are in place for interns?
2. Who are your specific points of contact?
3. Will you receive class credit for your internship?
4. What are the expected outcomes for all parties?
5. Is there support for your cross-cultural learning? What about career guidance?
6. Is an internship opportunity guaranteed?
7. How has the employer been vetted by your school and/or placement agency?
8. What is the intended timeline for your internship?

**Your Employer**

1. Who is your supervisor and how often will you be in contact?
2. Do you have a team? If so, how often will you be meeting with them?
3. Have you been provided with a clear job description and an understanding of your projects?
4. Have you been provided with additional points of contact for support? Can they arrange an office mentor?
5. What are the expected outcomes of your internship from the perspective of your employer?
6. How are you being “onboarded”? Will you receive training or manuals to acquaint you with company culture and guidelines?
7. Has your company addressed the cross-cultural aspect of your internship?
8. Has your company facilitated virtual internships in the past? Have they designed a program to support your learning objectives, including a formal feedback process?
Essential Application Strategies

Use these tactics to stand out from the crowd during a competitive application process:

**Target your resume:** Every employer and position is unique. Take the time to tailor your resume and skill set to each potential position.

**Boost your LinkedIn profile:** Don’t be satisfied with a basic LinkedIn profile! Take it to the next level by writing an engaging headline, loading a great headshot and tailoring your resume. Ask former bosses for recommendations, post about industry issues, and join relevant groups.

**Write your elevator pitch:** Be ready to introduce yourself! This short description of your hard and soft skills identifies key elements of your professional self.

**Practice your online interview skills:** Always prepare for interviews. Your environment should be spotless, your tech should work perfectly, and you should have practiced and prepared your answers and career stories in advance.

**Create a 10-minute self-interview video:** Want to make a strong first impression? Record a professional, upbeat video of yourself answering the most popular interview questions. Send a link to the employer using the “unlisted” or “private” YouTube post options during a cold call application. Use editing software to make your video look sleek.

**Create a web portfolio:** Showcase your best projects online. Highlight real examples of what you’ve accomplished in academia, as a volunteer, or during past work experiences (be careful not to share private material from previous employers).

**Go the extra mile:** For example, if you’re applying to work with a design firm, why not showcase your skills by developing a creative visual resume? The most successful young professionals do something extraordinary to set themselves apart from the crowd.

Nowadays, the world is online – and remote jobs are becoming more common. By completing a virtual international internship, you’re not only building your global network and international skills, you’re also proving that you’re effective in the online workplace, which future employers will appreciate.

*Don’t let world events slow you down. Start researching virtual internships today!*