

To excel in a virtual international internship, you'll need to cultivate a diverse range of skills. Focus on the areas highlighted below and you'll be setting yourself up for success:

Discipline & Time Management Skills



Self-discipline: This is the top skill for virtual interns! It can be a challenge to stay focused when you're not in an office. Create clear routines, task management systems and to-do lists.



Time management: Block social media and other distractions. If you live in a house with other people, tell them when your working hours are to avoid distraction.



Take breaks: Part of a balanced and productive workday is taking breaks to recharge. Schedule a five- or ten-minute break every 90 minutes.

Cross-cultural Skills



Working across borders:

It takes effort to adapt to foreign work styles. Research, inquire and study your employer's work culture, as well as your own. Remember that your own culture is largely a blind spot for you. You'll need to read a few articles to gain perspective on North American work styles.

Listening & observing:

Keep in mind that you're immersing in a foreign culture every time you participate in a Zoom call. It's challenging to pick up on non-verbal cues via video; but pay close attention and try to analyze cultural signals and communication patterns.

Self-awareness:

Take stock of your own work and communication styles regularly. This type of reflection helps you recognize your strengths and weaknesses, and compare your home culture with your employer's.

Communication Skills



Clarity of written and verbal communication:

When working in cross-cultural contexts online, clarity of communication is of paramount importance. Double check every piece of communication, and make sure that all discussions during meetings are understood by all parties. If necessary, in online meetings, repeat key points back to your manager to confirm your understanding.

Projecting professionalism:

Behave as if you're in an office environment, even if you're in your living room. Always dress professionally and keep your hair groomed. Be prepared to receive a professional video call at short notice. Sit up straight, speak and write in a professional tone, matching the style used by your supervisor. Don't eat on video meetings (though sipping a coffee is fine if others are also doing it).

Show yourself!

Although email communication and audio calls might feel easier, you will make far better connections with colleagues and supervisors if you prioritize video calls. Video lets you communicate non-verbally, allowing you to project professionalism and enthusiasm in ways that aren't possible via audio or text. And never turn off your video during an online meeting.

Understand the power of small talk:

Depending on the culture you're working in, the approach to workplace small talk will vary.

In North America, for example, it's not uncommon to chat casually with colleagues at the start of a Zoom meeting, sharing personal information and asking casual questions. It's also rarely considered impolite to socialize with managers and supervisors, and participating in these pre-meeting chats can boost your career. But in some parts of the world (Scandinavia, for instance), small talk can be considered unprofessional or unnecessary, and starting a video conference with a personal chat can be seen as undermining your professional persona.

No matter what culture you work with, watch your colleagues for hints and follow their lead.

Organization Skills

Become a top-notch organizer

As a virtual intern, you'll be responsible for managing your workflow independently. Impress your supervisors by demonstrating your organizing skills from the get-go.

Use file sharing software

A well-organized file sharing system is crucial for online work. Create a folder for each project. Use standardized file naming procedures so that your supervisor can easily find your work.

Embrace project management

Always plan before taking action. For small projects, write a one-paragraph plan and share it with your manager. For large projects, break your plan into phases with detailed tasks and design control tools to document progress.



Always have a working to-do list

In addition to your project files, you'll still need somewhere to write the day's priorities. The format is up to you: a hand-written to-do list, a Word document, or a bulleted list in the Notes app on a cell.

Track your progress

Be sure to track and communicate your progress. This can be as simple as putting a strikethrough over the task in your planning file. Keep project plans in a shared file and inform your manager when progress is recorded.

Avoid sending files as attachments

If you're sharing a drive with the employer, this is an important rule. It creates confusion when multiple copies of the same file are floating around. Update files in the shared drive and then notify your employer via email.

Create agendas for every meeting

Help your manager by writing a simple agenda and sending it ahead of time for review. Consider keeping all your meeting agendas in a central file for review.

Team Building Across Cultures

Make note of cultural differences: Your employer may not provide cross-cultural training, so it will be up to you to observe and analyze cultural differences. You may recognize different ways of managing new ideas, making decisions, collaborating or acknowledging achievement. Stay observant and adaptable.

Understand the hierarchy: In some regions of the world, strict hierarchies govern the workplace. Be on the lookout for clues related to workplace structure. Get a sense of how the hierarchy functions in your new work environment, and adhere to it.

Build trust: The best way of building trust while working remotely is to communicate clearly, and to deliver quality results. Respect your employer's time, take ownership of any mistakes and always communicate in a professional and friendly manner.

Suggest a cross-cultural coffee break: If your host office is open to it, suggest a video coffee break to socialize with team members and learn more about their lives. This can replace some of the casual conversation you might have in an office. Keep in mind that some cultures will be more open to this than others.



Bonus Strategies for Virtual Interns

As a virtual international intern, there are several additional ways to impress your manager and make yourself stand out.



Be proactive, take initiative: If you've got extra time, request more work. Are there other areas where you could be of service, or other supervisors who might need support? In some countries, it's unusual for entry-level candidates to take initiative, so be aware of the norms in your workplace before demonstrating your entrepreneurial spirit.



Ask for a mentor: It's likely that your supervisor will be busy and unable to answer all your questions on short notice. When the moment is appropriate, ask if there's another team member who might serve as a mentor or touchstone for you in your work.



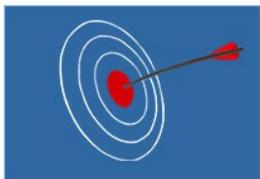
Make every minute count: Create a list of "self-study" items (documents, essential articles, websites, competitors' information) to fill breaks in your schedule. Ask your boss for additional reading materials related to current projects and the industry as a whole.



Be social, build relationships: If culturally appropriate, include short social messages in your email correspondence and at the start of meetings. Balance your messages so that you're asking more about your contacts than sharing about yourself. Consider maintaining a private file to track names of family members and key points of interest about your colleagues.



Be a master communicator: Every company has a unique communication style. Pay close attention in order to match the tone used by your colleagues. Find well-written communications and aim to write at the same level.



Be clear about what's expected of you: Use meeting minutes, verbal and email confirmations and project planning documents to confirm your responsibilities and tasks. Even if you're confident about the tasks assigned, don't be afraid to check in. This is especially important in the early stages of your internship, when your supervisor is still getting to know you.



Be patient during challenges: Virtual internships have come to the foreground quickly in the wake of Covid-19. Many (including advisors, placement agencies and employers) are experiencing a steep learning curve facilitating virtual internships. If there are challenges in how your internship program is managed, be patient and forgiving. The goal isn't to have a perfectly smooth ride, but rather to meet challenges with a positive attitude.



Propose solutions whenever you uncover a problem: Managers find it refreshing to manage subordinates who not only identify problems but also offer solutions. Take ownership and be a problem-solver.



Don't take on too much: Although we recommend doing something to go above and beyond the expectations for your internship, be sure that you only volunteer for tasks that you're confident you'll be able to complete. A golden phrase is: underpromise, overdeliver!

Before your virtual internship begins, hone in on the skills you want to demonstrate. Recognize the specific skills that will help you excel as part of an online team, and hit the ground running in your remote placement. Good luck!



*Read the
Extended Article*

Want more advice?
Login or register for free access to
MyWorldAbroad.com

Your free subscription paid for by your school.