

# Internship Success Guide

Political Science Department

University of Dayton

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## Professionalism

### Professional Dress

Dressing professionally is one of the most basic functions an intern needs to accomplish, however what constitutes ‘professional dress’ is often misunderstood. After you have accepted an internship position within an organization, one of the first questions you should ask your new manager is for details about the organization’s dress code. Organizational dress code will vary from office to office, but some details remain constant. Here are some tips to help navigate you through this process.

#### DOs:

- Ask your supervisor or an same-gender co-worker for advice,
- Observe what others in the office are wearing during your interviews and first few days on the job,
- Error on the side of caution when dressing yourself for your internship,
- Cloths with the office logo are generally always acceptable,
- Clean, and if necessary iron, your work clothes often.

#### DON'Ts:

- Wear clothing that has any sort of offensive images or wording,
- Wear clothing that is revealing or otherwise sexually suggestive,
- Open toed sandals and flip-flops are always discouraged.

The follow is basic guide for men and woman depending on the type of office dress code:

#### The Jeans Office:

- Women
  - Nice, clean jeans with no holes
    - NO skin tight jeans
  - Button-up or polo shirt
  - Nice belt
- Men
  - Nice, clean jeans with no holes

- Button-up or polo shirt
- Nice sandals are a 'maybe' in the summer.

### **The Business Casual Office:**

- Women
  - Khakis or dress pants,
  - Nice belt,
  - Button up shirt, polo shirt, or other nice collared shirt,
  - Pull over sweaters or cardigans,
  - Closed toed and closed back shoes,
  - No more than one earring per ear,
  - Hair neatly styled.
- Men
  - Dress slacks or khakis, matching dress shoes, button up shirt or polo shirt,
  - Sport jackets and sweater can provide good combinations in colder weather,
  - Facial hair well trimmed,
  - Generally facial piercings are discouraged.

### **The Formal Office:**

- Women
  - Dress pants or skirt
    - Pants- iron appropriately
    - Skirt- NO flared, clingy or short skirts; must be at least knee length,
      - Stockings MUST be worn with skirt
  - Nice belt,
  - Button-up collared shirt,
  - Suit jacket,
  - Closed toe and closed back shoes
    - If wearing heels, no more than 3 inches in height
  - No more than one earring per ear,
  - Hair neatly styled.
- Men
  - Dress slacks & shoes, button up shirt, and tie required every day,
  - No strange belt buckles,
  - Suit jackets and sweaters can provide a good combinations in colder weather,
  - Facial hair well trimmed,
  - Facial piercings are not tolerated.

### **Professional Manners**

Other than dressing inappropriately, the fastest way to have problems in your internships is to violate modern office etiquette. To help avoid this, we've provided a list of DOs and DONTs to help guide you:

#### **DOs:**

- Say 'Please' and 'Thank You',

- Be nice to people, they will be nice back to you,
- Shake hands firmly, ensuring you grip the webbing on the other person's hand,
- Always be polite to a customer, **ALWAYS**,
- Take notes, especially when your supervisor is assigning work to you,
- Stay home when you are sick. Talk with your supervisor about how to report sickness when you start your internship,
- Ask questions if you are unsure of something. **It is always better to ask questions about something you don't understand than ask forgiveness for something you didn't do or did poorly.**
- Arrive to work on time and prepared to work.

#### **DON'Ts:**

- Talk about religion or politics in the work place. (Unless you work for a religious or political organization.)
- Talk about what you did last weekend, or any other aspect of your free time, in graphic detail,
- Play music or talk on the phone loud enough to disturb your co-workers,
- Spend more than a few minutes a day using your cell phone (never in meetings!),
- Rumormonger or talk about co-workers behind their backs,
- Speak badly about any product or service your organization sells/provides in public, especially in front of a customer,
- Arrive to work hung-over, impaired, or otherwise unable to work,

#### **Tips for Meetings:**

- Most meetings you sit through as an intern will not directly involve you. If they do, it will only be a limited amount of time. Once this is completed, you are expected to sit there and at minimum don't fall asleep. This is the way the professional world.
- Don't play with your phone, doodle excessively or anything else to call attention to yourself,
- Try to pay attention, you might learn something,
- Take notes if needed,
- Ask questions if you've been directed to perform a task but do not fully understand.

#### **Tips for Phone Conversations:**

- Speak slowly and clearly! The first and most important rule!
- Always identify yourself and your organization at the beginning every conversation,
- When providing a phone number or other data over the phone, speak slowly and clearly so that you don't have to repeat yourself and the other person can write it down,
- Let the other party complete what they are saying before you respond,
- Keep a positive attitude and smile when you are speaking with someone, people can sense warmth through the phone.

#### **Office Correspondence**

Most official office correspondence now takes place via email. However, occasionally correspondence will occur via normal mail. This depends greatly on the organization. Interns should be proficient in the basic manner in which this sort of correspondence occurs. Each organization will have a different culture when it comes to their correspondence. It is better to be more formal at the beginning of your internship and then adapt as you begin to better understand the culture. Here is the example of a very formal email from an intern to a director of another department within their organization.

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To: j.smith@polisville.gov  
CC: b.appleton@polisville.gov  
From: a.williamson@polisville.gov  
Title: Requesting Meeting between Planning and Information Technology Departments

Hello Mr. Smith,

I am emailing you on behalf of my supervisor, Brian Appleton, to request a meeting between the two of you. Brian is interested in meeting to discuss the recent unforeseen complications with the latest GIS update. He is available to meet this Friday any time after 1 pm as well as Monday and Tuesday mornings next week.

Additionally, if possible, can you please send over the new zoning data for downtown? Brian would like to review the most updated to date information before speaking with you.

Thanks,  
Annie Williamson

Planning Intern  
City of Polisville  
999-888-7777  
a.williamson@polisville.gov  
\*\*\*

## **Working an Internship**

### **Your Responsibility is to Learn!**

Working an internship is a big step in your life as a working professional. For many of you, this may be the first job you've ever had. If not, you have likely worked in the types of jobs that high school and colleges students work in; retail, food service, clerical, etc. This job is different. This job is the transition step between being a student—what you have done since you were in kindergarten—and being a working adult. While your organization may have all sorts of goals and expectations about what you are going to accomplish while working there, it is important to remember that you are still a student. As a student, your first goal is always to be learning. You should try hard to do well in your internship, but regardless if you like or don't like, if you do well or you struggle, you should always be learning.

If you are interested in specific questions to be asking yourself as you work at your internships, check out **Reflect on your Experience!** on page 15.

### **Work your Heart Out!**

Taking into account the previous section, working and working hard in your internships is very important. Your host organization is doing you a great service by selecting you to work within their organization for a short period of time. Yes they may be paying you, but it is important to realize that they very likely could easily get a full-time staffer to work on the projects that you are completing. Your organization likely hired you because they are committed to young people and the value what you can bring to their organization. Don't disappoint them! Even if you find after some time that you do not enjoy the type of work that you are doing on a day to day basis, be grateful to your employer for providing you the opportunity to allow you to learn that fact. Continue to provide a quality product to your supervisor and take pride in working! Finally, always remember that you can never ask too many questions!

### **The Rule of 'Many Eyes'**

As college student, you have likely become use to the concept of crafting something that your professor requires as part of the homework for their class. You turn this homework in, the professor may critique it, then will give you a grade and your relationship with that piece of work likely ends. This is generally not the case in the working world. To ensure a quality project, working professionals critique each other's work to ensure whatever is bring produced is the error free and the best product possible. The supervisor for that project then normally is responsible for signing off on that project and releasing or implementing it. This concept is true of many ideas produced in the working world, examples include: any published communication, official proposals to clients, reports to clients, reports to upper management, any legal documents, internal office goal setting, etc.

During your internship, you will likely work on some documents mentioned in this list, or portions thereof. After you have completed the work and submitted it to your supervisor, do not be surprised if the supervisor either makes major changes to the document or gives it back to you with a list of changes. The document that you submitted may be flawless, both mechanically and topically from your perspective, but it important to remember that you don't know everything there is to know about your project and external factors that may be influencing it. Take the revisions and changes in stride and remember that through the 'many eyes' examining something, your product will improve!

### **Networking**

Networking is the process of developing a base of people that work in and around your organization and industry. Individuals with well developed networks are able to gather information about goings-on, new products, news about companies, and new job postings with an industry. Successful professionals cultivate and maintain a healthy network of contacts.

### Tips for Developing a Network:

- Talk to people! This may be more difficult for introvert people, but it is an important skill that everyone needs to develop,
- Get business cards from people,
- Send follow up emails a few days after you meet people—these emails can be very basic, “It was nice to discuss X with you,” but they will help remind the person who you are,
- Buy business cards for yourself and pass them out,
- Take an interest in what people do within an organization and follow up to learn more,
- Ask the question, “Is there other people I know that work with \*something\*?”

### Tips for Maintaining a Network:

- Become skilled at remember people you do not see often. People are very impressed by this,
- Communicate with your network often, this can take many forms:
  - Call and discuss goings-on,
  - Send appropriate mass emails, including some new relevant news to encourage reading,
  - Invite your contacts to lunch/coffee/dinner/drinks (as appropriate),
- Get to know your contacts on a personal level, but be careful about venturing too far into personal territory.

## Office Romance

This is a difficult subject for working professionals. As an intern you should completely avoided it, especially between you and a supervisor! (See **Trouble on the Job!** below)

## **Trouble on the Job?**

### Personal Safety

Every student should have an internship under their belt by the time they receive their undergraduate degree. 99% of organizations where a student could potentially work at are ethical, safe work places in which the student and the employer will benefit from the experience. However, for that 1% of organizations out there, please remember this:

**IF, at anytime, you feel unsafe, threatened, or harassed at your work please, simply leave the situation! Then, contact a staffer within your organization you trust, a professor, your internships advisor, or if necessary the police! Whatever the issue might be, it is not worth compromising your health and well being.**

### Problems with a Supervisor

Conflict with a supervisor is reasonably common in the work place. It is something that the vast majority of working people have had to deal with at some point in their lives. Before continuing, please understand that being friends with ones supervisor is not required for you to be productive

in your job. However, if you plan to keep your job you need to be able to get along with your supervisor enough to get your work done.

As an intern, you will likely have no input about who is your supervisor within your organization. Hopefully, you will have a positive relationship with this person. However, this might not always be the case. Here are some ideas about why you and your supervisor might not get along as well as you might like:

- The choice to have you working for them may not have been their choice,
- You may have not performed well at a task and your supervisor was blamed for it,
- You may have acted inappropriately—consciously or not—and your supervisor was blamed for it,
- Other stresses that have nothing specifically to do with you may be affecting your supervisor.

Having a good relationship with your supervisor is important during an internship, as that person is likely to be the best source of knowledge about the organization you're working in and the quality of work you're performing. Since you are working your internship to learn—see Working an Internship—here are some suggestions to improve your relationship with your supervisor should it become strained:

- Start an open dialogue with your supervisor about your concerns. Be honest!
- Always try to complete your tasks correctly and with pride,
- Openly listen to constructive criticism or critique given to you and try to improve,
- Arrive on-time and be ready to work,
- Attempt to be positive about tasks you need to complete—even if they are menial.

If the above suggestions do not work, we have a few more suggestions for you. However, we caution you to handle discussion like this delicately. Sometimes you can very easily make a situation worse by involving others, however sometimes there is no choice:

- Start with your mentor in the organization, if you have one,
- Discuss with your internships advisor from school or a professor your trust,
- Speak with a representative from your organization's Human Resources, preferably the one that hired you.

## **After Your Internship Ends**

### **Reflect on your Experience!**

As we have previously discussed, learning is the most important activity you need to perform in your internships. Hopefully, you been learning throughout your internships, but as your internships comes to an end, setting some time aside to reflect on your experience can be very valuable.

Here are some great questions to ask yourself as your internship comes to a close:

- What did I like about this internship?
- What did I not like about this internship?

- What did I do well in this internship?
- What did I struggle with in this internship?
- Was the organization structure of the office a positive or negative influence on how much work was accomplished?
- How did the influence of your supervisor—or their supervisor—affect how much work was accomplished?
- What would you improve about your office—or department—if you were the manager?
- What did I like about working in this career field?
- What did I dislike about working in this career field?
- Am I interested in working this field in my future career?
- To eventually work in this field, I need to accomplish the following during my time in college?
- I want to find a career field that does not possess the following characteristics.

### **Update Your Resume**

Upon completion of your internship, make sure to update your resume to reflection completion of this new experience. Your supervisor—or someone else within your former organization—will likely be willing to critique your updated resume.

### **Letter of Recommendation**

If you had a positive experience within your internships, the conclusion of your experience may be the best time to ask your supervisor for a letter of recommendation. Such a letter can be useful in future job searches or applications to graduate school. Generally, letters of recommendation should be positive but honest in their approach, addressing your strengths but also constructively critiquing your weaknesses.

### **Working for your Organization after Graduation**

Depending on your organization and its currently financial health, your organization may be willing to hire you into a full-time position after you graduate with your degree. Be sure to remember that your potential employer will remember how well or how poorly you performed during your internship. If you are interested in working for your employer after graduation, communicate this fact to them as your internships period draws to a close and stay in touch with the organization as you continue your college experience.