HOW TO ABSOLUTELY CRUSH YOUR NEXT INTERNSHIP

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How to Absolutely Crush Your Next Internship

(An Unofficial Guide)

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Get ready.

This 25-page comprehensive guide will help students knock their internships out of the park and managers set their interns up for success. You'll take a deep dive into all stages of the internship process—search, application, setting expectations, communicating with your team, delivering tangible results, and thoughtful reflection. Please send feedback and success stories to **hello@alliekmiller.com**. A big thank you to everyone who shared their favorite internship advice and provided feedback on previous drafts. And of course, thank you to all my previous internship supervisors and interns. All proceeds go to Girls Who Code.

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Who is this guide for?

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Introduction

Whether you're in high school, college, graduate school, or even looking to pivot industries, you may be exploring internships. This comprehensive guide will help you make the most out of the opportunity and reflects 30+ years of combined experience (and many years of watching internships go badly).

What is an internship?

"Internship" comes from the same root as "internal"—it's a time to look inward, to explore and gain experience, think critically about your personal development goals, and identify ways to best achieve them.

Format: An internship can be as short as 1 month or as long as a year. Generally, an internship will be ~3 months, as they tend to cycle with school breaks or semesters. Some people may choose to do an internship full-time (usually 9-5, Monday-Friday), part-time (e.g., 5 days a week 9a-1p, or full days M/W/F), or sometimes even 2 internships at once.

There is a wide range of internships out there—paid and unpaid, in an office or remote, domestic or international. There are "extended" and "rotational" internships and co-op opportunities that provide a rolling experience with a company every summer or semester. Before you start your search, make sure to identify what you're open to and what's a dealbreaker.

Why do internships exist?

Companies provide internships for several reasons. Though it's not necessary, you may want to ask the recruiter or hiring manager why they added an internship to their job board. Reasons generally include: they love to teach and upskill students, they believe an internship provides a well-rounded education (it's not just what you learn in a classroom—it's also putting it into practice!), they benefit from cheaper talent, it allows the company to better understand younger talent, and hopefully, because they would like to build a talent pool to hire from.

Opening Up Your Options: The Search and Interviews

Be ready for an opportunity.

The internship process varies greatly. Some may take many rounds of interviews, while others may be more spontaneous opportunities.

How can you prepare for interviews?
- Set a meeting in your calendar every 3 months to review and update your resume. My resume tips video can be found here.
- Be ready to jump into informational interviews (keep a running document of your success stories in the "STAR format"). STAR stands for Situation-Task-Action-Result. Details on the format and examples of answers can be found in this *Muse* article here.
- Always be networking—share your interests with others, ask if they know of openings.
- Attending career fairs is a great way to meet your favorite companies.
- Proactively reach out for informational interviews with companies you are interested in.
- Get your hype squad to encourage you (having an accountability buddy during the interview process is a huge productivity boost!).
- Connect with your Career Center. Your college or grad school's career center is an untapped wealth of information—especially helpful if you're looking for an alum or fellow classmate who may have interned at a specific company or in a specific field.

What if your dream company doesn't offer a formal internship?

Just because a company hasn't listed a formal internship on their job board doesn't mean they aren't interested in hiring. Don't be afraid to contact employers and express interest directly. To create your own internship, network as much as you can into the company and specific team and write a strong pitch email.

How do you write a pitch email?
1. A brief introduction (school, major, relevant experience, skills and accomplishments, specific reasons why you LOVE the company)
2. The value you want to drive for them
3. Three relevant projects that you could own start to finish (make these *very* specific to the company and the value you have identified based on research)
4. A few helpful logistics (if you can work for free/school credit, target start and end date, your contact information)

Send your email to the appropriate leadership contacts (e.g., Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO), and Vice President of Engineering (VPE) if it's a small startup) or HR/potential manager if it's a larger company. Don't be afraid to email multiple contacts or follow up if you haven't heard back. Everyone has an overflowing inbox, and a follow-up or two might pique their interest. Be confident—you miss 100% of the shots you don't take!

Digging Deep: Questions to Ask Yourself and Your Target Companies to Pick the Right Internship

What parameters are you working within?

- Location: Do you have preferences or restrictions? (e.g., visa, cost of rent/transportation, part-time student, wanting to be close to home, looking to try out a new city, etc.)
  - Get creative. I negotiated a dual-city paid internship (Boston and Austin) because I wanted to travel and experience two different work atmospheres. The manager was willing to endorse this as long as I paid for my flights. The trade-off was worth it for the ability to learn about two different cities in one internship.
  - If you're prioritizing one company, stay flexible. Some companies have the same internship in multiple cities, some of which might be "less competitive" than others. I have friends and mentees who opted for less competitive cities to significantly increase their chances of landing at their dream company.
- Cost of Living: Is the internship unpaid? Can you get a stipend? Does your college provide grant opportunities? Unpaid internships can sound scary, but there are opportunities to land funding. In fact, TikTok has become a ripe source of scholarship and grant information. Here are three creators to follow for information on scholarships:
  - Scholarship Guru: https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMe3UDPCG/
  - Access Scholarships: https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMe3U56T6/
  - Growing with Gabby: https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMe3Ufa4E/
- Time Frame: Is the length of your internship restricted by anything? (e.g., finals)
- Credit: Are there specific requirements to meet to earn university credit?
- Full or Part-time: How many hours can you dedicate to your internship? Do you plan to work while taking classes or full-time during school break?

What are you looking for in an internship?

- Are you looking for wild exploration, a new experience, gaining depth, or a career pivot? Identify your anchoring question, and use it to drive your internship experience.

If you're looking for...	Then the question you're exploring is...
Wild exploration	What do I like?
New experience	Do I like this?
Gaining depth	Do I want a career in this industry?
Meaningful pivot	Is this worth changing course?

- What value, experience, or training will you gain from this internship? What do you plan to do with that? What do you want to do *after* the internship? It's okay if you don't know. To the best of your ability, align the internship experience with your bigger career goals.
- Why do you want this particular internship? Be prepared to answer this in your interview.
- Do you know anyone in your field who could mentor you through the interview process? Maybe someone that is 1-2 classes above you?
  - Ex. My grad school had a program where second-year students mentored first-years. They reviewed our resume and cover letters, gave mock interviews and provided feedback, etc.
  - Ex. My college had a database listing students and their previous internships. If I wanted to intern at Tesla and saw someone had worked there, I could ping them with questions. If your school doesn't have one, start one!
- Keep in mind that recognizing what you DON'T like is just as important as identifying what you do like. I had an internship after my freshman year in college and never wanted to go back to that industry. Looking back, I'm still grateful for the experience and how it helped shape my future career decisions.
- What sort of culture does the company have? Is it the same across all teams/departments?

What structure will your internship have?
- What days will you work? How many days per week? How many hours per day? Is there an expectation that you will be available outside of those hours?
- Who is your manager? Who is in charge of your projects? Do they oversee a business, or do they run an internship program?
- Is there a formal internship program (with a whole cohort of other students/interns) or are the internships more on an ad hoc basis?
- If there are other interns, will you get a chance to work and socialize with them?
- Is there a formal mentorship program offered?
- Is your role primarily in an office, virtual, or on location?
- Will you be expected to travel as part of your internship?

What will the work look like?
- What is your day-to-day role? What is *not* included in this role?
- How much flexibility or say do interns have in the type of projects they'll be working on?
- What are you measured on? What does success look like?
- Can you look up reviews of internships at the company (e.g., on Glassdoor)?
- What teams will you be working with and exposed to?
- What will you complete by the end?
- Could this convert to a full-time offer? If so, what will that decision be based on?

Setting Internship Goals and Solving Challenges

Setting Goals for Your Internship

Now that we've identified *which* internship to select, it's time to set goals for what to *gain* from the experience.

Here's a rule of thumb: Clear is kind, and the more clarity you have with yourself and your manager, the better.

If you're looking to...	*Set a goal like...*
Develop a network / gain references	Tell your Manager on your first day that one of your goals is to form a strong network. Ask your manager for internal introductions. Add value to their workflows. Meet 10+ full-time employees at the company, collaborate with 3-5 employees on 1-2 projects lasting 4+ weeks. Capture project details, personal contributions, and results. Following a successful project, ask collaborators if they would like to connect on LinkedIn and/or be willing to write a short recommendation for your LinkedIn profile. After building a rapport with your manager, ask what they would like to see from you to feel comfortable writing a recommendation on LinkedIn or serving as a reference for future employment opportunities.
Build up your resume	Deliver 1-3 robust projects during your internship (e.g., research reports, an app, a pitch deck, a robot demo). Bonus points for projects that allow you to collaborate cross-team, train others, build something new, have executive exposure, and continue to influence the company beyond your internship end date. Every Friday, review your week; draft top progress and results.
Learn new skills	Tell your manager on your first day that you are looking to develop new skills ("I have always wanted to learn X and would welcome opportunities for projects or collaborations

	that allow me the chance to learn it."). Skills can range from learning a new programming language or ad campaign to giving a data/analysis presentation. Depending on the skill, your company may offer free or funded training on those topics. Be sure to inquire about training platforms you have free access to during your internship—use them wisely!
Learn other things (e.g., whether you love a city)	Block off time (not during work hours) to ask yourself the hard questions. Are you thriving? Are you challenged? Do you admire the people you're meeting? Why or why not? Do you feel seen? Do you feel understood and appreciated? Journaling with a glass of wine on a comfy couch in slippers brings me more answers than I could ever expect.
Finish a "meaty" project	Internships can often develop into non-stop daily tedium—getting coffee, making copies, folding boxes. Do not let that happen! Build something. This could be a new app, business line, research project, or process. Be very clear with your manager on the project you will complete (details, metrics, timeline, presentation). Track milestones throughout the internship. If something is falling behind, bring it up sooner rather than later. A portion of your day will always include admin work, so set expectations on *percent* of plate dedicated to admin versus each project. Most importantly, communicate the long-term *value* of the project. Reinforce this with your manager and remind them why it's a worthy investment of your time.
Deliver results for the company	Work towards a measurable impact statement—save the company money, increase sales, launch a new product or feature, grow their Instagram followers, improve workflows, etc. Avoid the trap of "internship in a vacuum". When you lack understanding of how your project ties to the larger organization (or worse, it *doesn't* at all!). Don't be afraid to ask

	about the bigger picture. In a 1-on-1 with your supervisor, try, "I can't wait to work on this new survey design. Can you help me understand the larger initiative this is part of and how this helps support it? I want to make sure this is delivered on time with the highest standards in mind and knowing the context will help." And never forget the question: "What does success look like for this?"
Get a job offer	Set clear expectations with your manager (preferably before starting your internship) and understand the return offer timeline. A question to ask your supervisor could be: "Is this internship designed to lead to a full-time offer? If so, what will that decision be based on?"

Top Challenges as an Intern and How to Solve Them

Internships aren't always easy. Here are some common challenges and how to handle them.

You're not assigned enough work. *Tell your manager, and continue to fill your time appropriately.*	You might not have the time or resources to support all the incoming requests. *Tell your manager, and share your list of priorities.*	You may not know who you report to. *This is not unusual—tell your manager or ask HR.*
You may be afraid to ask questions or speak up. *This is normal—push through and ask!*	You may doubt your skills and abilities. *This is normal—you're just getting started!*	You may experience several existential crises as you figure out what you like and dislike. *This is actually a good thing— it means you're learning!*

Starting Your Internship on the Right Foot

Standards and Expectations

Every company will have different standards and expectations. This is a sample of what we've seen and is not reflective of any particular company (and as painful as it can be to hear this, yes, interns can be fired for breaking these rules). Your company will likely have a Code of Conduct that you will have to review and sign prior to starting. Note that many of these guidelines are for in-person internships, but virtual interactions also require a high bar.

1. Remember that you are in a professional environment whenever you are in the building or on a company outing/event. Be courteous and responsible in remembering the following:
   a. If you are working in an office, it's best to keep a neat desk with as little "clutter" as possible. More relaxed atmospheres (e.g., tech startups) may allow for more decorations/clutter.
   b. Be mindful of work-appropriate interactions through both physical and verbal interactions.
2. Be mindful of your attire
   a. Ask if there is a dress code. If there is a range, it is generally a best practice not to be the most casual in the room. Dress for success.
   b. If your company allows you to workout during the day, this is a work benefit – do not abuse it. Do not linger in your gym clothes when you are not working out, and if you have a strenuous workout, use the shower at your earliest convenience.
3. Be mindful of work entertainment
   a. Listening to music during work can be a great way to stay motivated and productive, but don't get carried away (check with friends/roommates if your music can be heard outside of your headphones and possibly distract others).
   b. Avoid online content that is distracting or inappropriate.
   c. Do not watch videos, television shows, etc., while working unless they are directly related to a competitor or research.
4. Do not flaunt leisure time
   a. Interns that walk around saying, "I have nothing to do!" do not get hired. If you do not have any projects to work on:
      i. Ask your manager for any ideas as to what you should work on next.
      ii. Pursue a project that you believe will benefit the company and/or your future self. Create something new.
      iii. Ask someone from your department if you can help with any of their current projects.
5. Do not engage in conversations that are inappropriate for the workplace or that jeopardize you/your coworkers' reputations
   a. Do not casually talk about a "late night" you had or an "apocalyptic hangover" – this generally is not well received.

       b. Do not outwardly call someone out for anything related to the above (e.g., "Wow, you look terrible…late night?").

       c. Do not comment on another team member's work schedule or "comings and goings."

6. Picture it on the front page of the newspaper

       a. For anything you're tasked with, ask yourself: "How would I feel if my actions were on the front page of the *New York Times*?"

       b. You are allowed to say no to projects that feel "wrong." If something feels off or wrong, go to your manager. If your manager is making you uncomfortable, go to HR. If you need outside advice, contact your school's Career Center.

Top Working Tips to be a Great Intern

Show up every day on time and with a great attitude.

Some companies are more flexible than others (some may require you to clock in, some may allow you to work from Puerto Rico beaches the whole summer). Do not take advantage of work flexibility and always communicate your schedule to your manager. It is also important to recognize that many of your coworkers work more hours than you can "see," both in the office and at home.

Understand the expectations of your work schedule and be ready to contribute at the beginning of your day, every day. Remember: "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable!"

Offer to pitch in whenever, wherever.

You are not tied to the work you have been given. I've had friends initiate joint venture projects across departments or initiate a project that began as an idea to a team member. If you recognize a problem with your respective service or system, offer to make recommendations with the member designated to that piece of the company.

Similarly, if you are in a meeting where a discussion is going on that you are not a part of, do not sit idly. Always keep an ear open and speak with someone to see if you can assist in solving any problems that may have been discussed.

Every day, be *proactive* and ask yourself: "What can I do to add value to my team?"

Get to know your coworkers.

Strike a balance between work and network. Small talk before and after meetings is great because it helps to build personal relationships with people at your company, but it should be kept to a limit (you are, after all, there to work). Networking can be the difference maker as far as feeling part of the team. Hobbies (especially ones you have in common), non-political news, and weekend plans are safer bets. Here are some sample questions to get you started:
- *"I noticed there was a guitar in your office, do you play? I played piano for 10 years."*
- *"Ellie mentioned you're a twin. I'm actually a twin too!"*
- *"Any plans coming up for the long weekend?"*
- *"Did you see the thing about the dinosaur fossils over the weekend?"*

Take notes, all the time.

Take them in a physical notebook, or on your laptop in OneNote/Evernote/etc. Do not take notes on your phone (you may appear distracted). Notes will: 1) allow you to focus on the project, raising the bar and collaborating with others (rather than memorizing every detail), and 2) earn trust and signal to others that you appreciate their time and insights and don't let things drop.

Understand the project, fully.

When you receive a request or if you are asked to work on a project, think of the following:

- What is the **purpose** of this request?
  - Do you understand the request? Do you understand why the request exists? What is the goal of the project? Do you need more information to perform the request?
- What can you **learn** while performing this request?
  - For example, if you are working in Excel, can you learn how to write a Macro to solve a problem? Can you learn how to use VLOOKUP to identify information? Would it be easier to do this a different way?
- What should the **final** product look like?
  - How can your work be best utilized by the requesting user? Is your final product client-ready? Does it need to be? Could the requesting user or manager forward the final product to Senior Management as you have delivered it? Should it be a deck, email, spreadsheet, program, etc.? What does success look like? What other projects might this one influence? Are there specific individuals or teams you should be engaging with?
- What is the **timeline** of this request?
  - If you have not been given a timeline, ask for one. Create a first step ("Okay, I'll start with the [data pull] first!") and check-in date with your manager. As a rule of thumb, I tell interns to check-in at the 20% mark. It's enough to show progress but also early enough to reorient and adjust if needed.

Find a way to say yes.

The thing your boss wants to hear most is "it's handled"—work backward from this and make your boss's job easier. If a manager asks you something unreasonable ("Can you make this Android app by tomorrow?"), find a way to say yes. Examples include:

- Push your current workload: *"I still have X and Y to complete. If those two things can wait until Monday, yes, I can finish this new ask by tomorrow."*
- Offer support: *"I still have X and Y to complete, but if Lucas is already working on this project, I can give him 6 hours of support over the next two days."*
- Deliver a smaller piece: *"This sounds like a really exciting opportunity, and I would love to support. Projects like this one can easily take 4 weeks, and I want to set reasonable expectations. I would be happy to deliver wireframes by Tuesday, but I cannot create a working app in that timeframe - would that help?"*
- Move the deadline: *"This sounds like a really exciting opportunity, and I would love to support. Is the timeframe flexible at all? Projects like this one tend to take closer to 4 weeks, and if there is wiggle room in the schedule, I can probably get an MVP to you in 2 weeks. Would that work?"*

Learn the tools.
You are surrounded by new tools (Salesforce, Airtable, Slack). Take time to learn how these systems work—even seemingly simple ones may be difficult to navigate your first time. A great first step in identifying tools that may be important, tricky, or helpful is connecting with someone who interned in a similar role recently and ask what tools they had to learn on the job. If you're unsure how to do something (especially if it comes up daily, like learning to transfer a phone call or access a file), look it up now, so you don't have to scramble in real-time. Companies may use these tools differently, so ask if your company has a set of standard operating procedures or best practices for these tools, and follow them. Ask for guidebooks or onboarding tools. If a guide doesn't exist, search internal resource pages. If those don't exist, make your own to share with all future interns. Remember, some companies may be willing to pay for skill learning (e.g., a data visualization course) which benefits both you and the company—be sure to ask if your company sponsors certifications (then take it and add your new skill to your resume!).

Email or talk to your manager every day.
Communicate with your manager what you are working on (email, Slack, or a quick in-person visit) and let them know if you will have any extra bandwidth throughout the day. It may not be front of mind for your manager to assign you to a new project if he/she does not know how you are progressing on your current work. When in doubt, overcommunicate.
- Example*: "Today, I'm working on the competitive report for XYZ and searching for articles on cyborgs. I should finish up around 2pm and would love to send you the documents and get your feedback. Other than that, I have a few hours free if you need me to help out on anything!"*

Get the basic questions out of the way.
Better to get the "silly" questions answered sooner rather than a month in when you have to admit you still don't understand a specific concept. Get ahead of the learning curve. Also, don't be afraid to ask the "stupid" questions—in fact, these questions can often uncover simple solutions that your full-time team members missed because they were too deep in the project to consider alternative solutions. In reality, these questions are neither silly nor stupid. **Your company didn't hire you because you're an expert; they hired you because you were the one they wanted to teach.**

If you have spare time, research your clients or your competitors.
Your company might have hundreds of customers and partners and dozens of competitors. The better you understand these "[forces](#)" and how these companies operate, the more you will be able to contribute to your organization's success. When in doubt, research something specific (like the rise of a new technology that could affect the company or the threat of a new entrant) and share your findings in a well-researched and organized report with your manager.
- Example: 10-page deck with stats/sources of how 5G will affect agriculture in 5 years.
- Example: Headlines, links, and quick summaries for five recent news articles on Competitor X.

You have a unique perspective—share it.

Your opinions are based on your life experiences, your education, your family and friends, everything you read, even the shows you watch or people you follow on Twitter. As an intern, you are not expected to sit quietly in a corner and do busy work; this is your time to add value to the company, and oftentimes that looks like sharing your opinions. In meetings with upper leadership, try to participate. Though an SVP (Senior Vice President) meeting with the intern class for an afternoon won't remember your name or even the question you asked, intern coordinators or supervisors attending the meeting will. If you find speaking up a bit harder to do, try writing three tally marks (| | |) in your notebook—every time you speak, cross one off. Research shows if you speak up once, you're twice as likely to speak up again, so try and share your voice early in the meeting to gain momentum!

Ask your manager for feedback.

Every week or every few weeks, check in with your manager and make sure you're on the right track. You can incorporate feedback sessions into your manager check-ins, or you can set up larger feedback conversations once every few weeks (aim for about four "large" conversations during the internship). You can ask for feedback on a variety of things (work, performance, projects, skills), but it's generally easiest to check in on projects and goals. It's helpful to reiterate that you are looking for both positive and negative feedback *and* that you have a growth mindset and are open to feedback.

Here are some example questions to try out:
- *"How did the presentation go? Was the deck what you expected? Can you share any feedback (positive or negative) on it? What should I know before making another one?"*
- *"Was that script able to be used? Did the team share any suggestions that you can pass along? Was our review process and structure helpful? I appreciate constructive feedback and am extremely open-minded and grateful for edits."*
- *"My goal is to make your life easier and to accelerate your team's work. How do you think this internship is going? I'm 50% done with Project X - how do you feel it's progressing? Do you want to review my work more or less often?"*
- *"Is there any project that I'm working on that you're even slightly worried about? What information can I get you to make the process better (stronger project description/more check-ins/gut check it with someone else)?"*

Use your manager to connect with other members of the organization.

If you do not know how a group, product, process works, ask your manager for more information. If they don't know enough to educate you properly, ask them if they wouldn't mind putting you in touch with someone from that specific department. These connections do not have to be with senior leaders; oftentimes, meeting with more junior members can be a better window into the job responsibilities of entry-level talent. When you get connected, send an introductory email with your role, your interests, 1-3 specific questions on your mind, and ask for a 15-30min meeting.

Make friends with other interns.

The internship experience is enhanced through community, and what better group to make friends with than your fellow interns! You can lean on your fellow interns for work questions, networking, and fun breaks during the day.

If the group is small, you likely already know everyone. If the group is large, ask your intern supervisor to introduce the group over email. Set up two chat groups: (1) one for work (e.g., Slack) to coordinate projects, learning sessions, or lunches, and (2) one for socializing outside of work (e.g., WhatsApp or GroupMe). When I was an intern, I organized an ice cream night, a rollercoaster trip, trivia lunches, a beach day, and reunion lunch. If the company schedules an intern social event, go. These are great opportunities to network (we're all still friends!).

The same standards and expectations apply to other interns as fellow coworkers—respect your fellow interns, don't gossip, and keep communication appropriate.

Every Friday, write your bullets.

At the end of every week, set 20 minutes aside to write down what you worked on and accomplished that week. It is preferable to do this on your personal device or in a notebook (not on your work laptop) to make sure you have permanent access. These bullets will eventually influence the new resume section you create at the end of your internship and a report if your school requires it. Include details like who was involved, the quantitative results of your work, tools you used, etc. Trust me—you will be grateful at the end of your internship that you did this.

Toward the end, get your resume and references ready.

A few weeks before the end of your internship, politely ask your supervisor to look over your resume (based on your Friday bullets above). Your manager has likely reviewed hundreds of resumes and knows what recruiters are looking for. If you collaborated with multiple teams, you could share it with other people at the company. If you are interested in a full-time position, be sure to share your final resume with your manager and HR. Here is my video on resume tips.

Always say thank you.

At the end of your internship, handwrite a thank you note to your boss. I also recommend writing additional notes for employees who served as informal mentors to you (e.g., you worked with them on a project or they allowed you to shadow them for a week). These are folks that went beyond their expected responsibilities to help you grow. Even if they are not involved with your performance review or full-time offer, word gets around. Call out specific moments of the internship you loved or moments of mentorship you'll remember. You may be unsurprised to learn that I kept every intern thank you note I received! If you elect to give your manager a gift, it does not have to be big (one of my interns baked cupcakes). If you had an intern supervisor (someone who managed all 30 interns), organize a group thank you card and a small gift (e.g., cookies, balloons). Your manager and intern supervisor logged hours each week helping you all learn and grow; be sure to show gratitude and end the internship on a high note. Also, consider

writing a recommendation on LinkedIn for your manager, especially if they're a first-time manager.

Bonus tips for remote interns?

If your internship is remote, the importance of clear communication triples. Log into meetings on time, use your video when introducing yourself, and upload a profile photo for times when cameras are off. Check in with your manager every day over ping (it's okay to overcommunicate!), make a point to chat with your team members, and don't skip the non-work meetings (happy hours calls, trivia games, etc.) as they are important in building relationships.

Boundaries and workflow can be hard to nail down—even if your hours are flexible, you have to make a deliberate choice regarding when to fully be present at work and when to fully remove yourself from work and be "off the clock". Change out of your PJs every morning, make a handwritten to-do list, block your schedule throughout your calendar, reduce nearby distractions by doing things like putting your phone in airplane mode, and take outdoor breaks if you can.

Be vocal when you have questions and feedback because nobody will see confusion or lightbulb moments in your facial expressions. Although it can feel clunky and awkward, it will pay off in your learning and gained experiences!

If you're looking to network with other interns in a similar situation, I recommend forming a group chat with other interns from your program (as noted above), one with other students from your school (no matter where they're interning), joining one of the many online communities on Slack and Discord (e.g., The Intern Club on Slack), and if you're allowed to, posting about your experience online to act as a beacon for other similar interns to find you. In grad school, for example, we had group chats for interns in every major city so there was always a group to hang out with. Don't wait for your school to create these chats—take the initiative and start it yourself.

The Feel-Good Things You Should Remember

How to stay motivated

Less tactical, but no less important, this is the more "motivational" sectional containing things all interns should keep in mind during (and after) their internship experience.

- Your success and growth will rely on the support of your team members.
- Your internship will afford you several opportunities for personal and professional advancement—as long as you actively seek them. It is easy to get lost if you do not work to create your own path!
- If you're in college or post-grad, do not take this time for granted, as it will align you with success in your twenties. Connect what you're doing today with where you want to be tomorrow.
- Up to this point, you have likely succeeded in academia by your ability to memorize, write, and recite. While entry-level roles require these transferable skills, you'll need to pick up new ones quickly to succeed on the job. Get outside of your comfort zone (e.g., If you are a history major, don't be afraid to learn about insurance premiums, invoice processing, or economies of scale as they may come up in your day-to-day).
- Recognize that you are solely responsible for your professional development. As you progress in your career, your college major will become increasingly less relevant. It's a superpower to make yourself the "go-to" person for specific themes of questions.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions, but try to find out the solution *before* asking for help from your manager or colleagues. While it is not recommended that you blindly attempt to solve every problem thrown your way, it is often better to ask questions only when absolutely necessary (don't be afraid to ask Google first!) Asking too many questions is akin to cutting open a butterfly's cocoon—although you may find the answer to a problem faster, you eliminate the struggle essential to building strength and succeed in the future.
- Remember that companies of all sizes benefit from interns. And if you're working at a startup or smaller company, your input and support are not only recognized and appreciated but necessary (conversely, it is very easy to recognize when a team member is not putting in 100%).
- Your internship will hopefully have extraordinary benefits, not the least of which is your ability to participate in a professional, supportive corporate environment where you can learn critical business and developmental skills that will stay with you throughout your entire professional life. When times get tough, just remember that growth and comfort do not coexist.

The End & Next Steps: Reflecting on Your Internship

You did it. You absolutely nailed it. Now it's time to reflect and check in with yourself. An internship is a learning experience, so you can treat this as your "final exam".

Block 90 minutes on your calendar after your internship is over to journal and reflect on your entire experience. If you have a close friend or classmate who also completed an internship, it may be helpful to share your journal reflections with each other. Turn off all distractions as you write your answers to these questions.

Below are some sample questions to respond to. Remember to be as honest as possible:
- How did you find the internships? Was the process difficult or easy? What would you tell someone else going through the same process? What would you do differently?
- What made you pick this internship? Do those still feel like the right reasons?
- What projects did you work on during your internship? Did you enjoy the projects you worked on? Why or why not?
- Who was your manager? Did you enjoy working with them? Why or why not?
- Did you hit your goals? How did that feel?
- What surprised you the most about your internship?
- What made you the happiest about your internship?
- What would you change about your internship?
- What feedback did you receive from your manager/teammates? What will you do differently in the future?
- Is this an industry in which you can thrive? Is this a company at which you can thrive?
- Were you challenged? Did you enjoy the types of challenges you were exposed to?
- Do you respect the people, the industry, and what you would be doing?
- Did you enjoy networking and collaborating with your coworkers?
- Are you leaving the internship happier than when you started?
- If your best friend said, "tell me how it *really* was," how would you describe your internship to them?
- If you joined the company full-time, would you be proud to recruit your friends?
- Knowing what you know now, would you say yes to the internship again?

WORDS FROM THE WISE: WHAT OTHERS WANT TO SHARE

Words from the Wise: What Others Want to Share

I asked my 1+ million followers on Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to share their top advice for interns (be sure to follow @alliekmiller for more). Here is what they said.

(The #1 piece of advice that hundreds of people wrote in? "Ask questions.")

Note: not all responses have been included, and some responses have been edited for clarity/grammar. A huge thank you to everyone who shared their insights.

Guiding Principles
- Poke around. Ask Questions. Build relationships.
- Become comfortable with "'bothering" people. You'll learn a lot more if you're not afraid.
- Don't compromise your morals.
- Keep an open mind and stay positive.
- Be honest.
- Behavior, creativity, innovation, and out-of-box thinking matter.
- You might be overwhelmed right now, but remember that soon you'll be an up-skilled, better version of yourself.
- Be yourself — throughout the recruitment process & the internship.
- Always dare to try, and don't focus on perfection. It will come on its own.
- A lot happens after 5pm.
- Don't be afraid to speak up - know your voice is valued.
- Don't wait to be told. Take initiative. Feel empowered. You deserve to be here.
- Be brave, bold, and have an awareness of all opportunities you see. You have nothing to lose but everything to win.
- Learn to be accountable for the experience you have as an intern. Regardless of the foundation laid for you by the company and team, only you can make the best of it!
- Be willing to help others.
- Go in with the attitude of *learning it all* rather than *knowing it all*.
- Be coachable.
- Stay curious, constantly challenge yourself, and build genuine relationships.

Forming Relationships
- Never eat lunch alone. Get lunch meetings with different people. Make connections.
- Set up coffee chats to learn and grow from others (this includes working professionals & other interns). Get to know them — ask about their interests and hobbies outside of work.
- Stay connected with at least 3-5 decision-makers after the internship to jump-start your network.

- Sometimes interns tend to gravitate toward other interns or coworkers around their same age. The older folks are likely the managers that will eventually be doing most of the hiring! (And if they aren't hiring themselves, they probably have connections with those who do.)
- No matter what you end up doing during your internship, the most valuable thing you can do is build your network! It is the most important thing in your career.
- Don't make a negative impression on anyone. When the summer comes to an end, one dissenting voice around the table can erode so much of your hard work.
- Find a smaller list of people you're working with and build mentorship relationships with them.
- Ask to meet with different people within the department/office you are working on (don't just interface with the team on which you were hired/assigned). Meet with people at all levels (from Jr to Sr) and ask about their job responsibilities, background, and any hindsight they are willing to share.
- Building relationships is just as important as learning technical skills (sometimes even more).
- I recommend being observant of the soft skills that leaders possess. Pay attention to interactions, observe where people sit in meetings, and reflect on their communication styles.

Build a Better Supervisor Relationship
- If you feel like you're overworked, say something!
- Before you jump in, ask your manager and four other trusted seniors, "What is expected from me?"
- Be coachable and find unique ways to go above and beyond what is asked of you.
- A direct specific request is much more powerful than an indirect, vague request. Example: Asking if you could be connected with the best point of contact in an organization to learn about applying machine learning vs. asking if you could gain experience with machine learning. The first request is detailed, actionable, and gives your supervisor direction on how to execute the task. The second request is vague, requires interpretation, and assigns your supervisor the burden of determining your ask. That being said, make as many direct specific requests as you can get away with!
- Remember that all advice is personal, situational, and affected by survivorship & selection bias.
- Find a superior you want to be like, then be a sponge.
- Celebrate feedback and constructive criticism.

Lean In
- Action trumps intent. The person who is focused on the execution of ideas will be more effective and learn faster than the person who just talks about ideas but doesn't act on them. Break it down. Define the work. Write the JIRA ticket. Do the work. Rinse, repeat.
- Don't settle for doing just the basic task given. Find a better way, bring new ideas, be creative, and make an impact. It is truly your time to find your passion and learn how to bring value to the organization.

- If you are interning in one division but looking to transition to another field in the future, take on a side project! It's a great way to "test the waters" & determine if your expectations match reality.
- Don't wait for work. Create your own.
- "I don't know" is a great answer. "I don't know, but I can find it out—where would you suggest that I start?" is a better answer.
- If you're bored, ask for something to do. If I don't hear from interns, I just assume they are still busy with the last task I gave them.
- Come with solutions and opportunities, not problems. And it's okay not to know the answer, always focus on adding value over being right.
- Ask to shadow. I was able to shadow my manager putting in annual bonuses and learned how it works!
- Volunteer for new tasks as often as possible. Try to provide value wherever you can, whether creating/updating documentation or taking notes during meetings.
- For technical interns: even though code review might be daunting, you can still contribute to the conversations around code readability, syntax, etc.
- Show your curiosity and interest, even towards mundane tasks.
- Say yes to every opportunity given. No matter how small and menial or how completely unqualified you are to do it. If asked to do something, or if somebody is looking for a volunteer, go for it.

We All Make Mistakes

- You're going to make mistakes, and don't be too hard on yourself when you do. Own up to it, make a concerted effort to learn from it, and realize that your internship won't be defined by it. You're still a rock-star intern!
- Don't be ashamed of mistakes. Learn from them. And don't repeat them.
- You're not going to have a solution to every problem, and that's okay (you're an intern, not a pro!). But at least have something—be it a compromise, alternative, or question. Being additive is better than nothing at all.
- Remember, there is nothing called failure, only feedback. They are all simple little lessons we must learn on the path to being great.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Nobody expects perfection. They will, however, expect that you're proactive, engaged, and humble.
- After the internship is over, reflect on what you could have done to increase the impact of or quality of the work.

Ask Questions

- An internship is a test that your boss, coworkers, and company WANT you to pass. Ask for the resources and opportunities you need or want to explore because, chances are, people want to help you!

- Be curious and never be afraid to ask: for clarification when you have questions, for more things to do when you feel that you have the energy and time, and for help when you get stuck.
- Ask questions! No one expects you to know everything on your first day, so don't be afraid to ask. This will show that you're genuinely interested, invested, and care about doing a great job!
- Do not hesitate to ask questions: What, Who, Where, When, How, Why?
- "The man who asks a question is a fool for a minute. The man who does not ask is a fool for life."
- Don't hesitate to question the existing processes. You don't have to accept everything as it is.
- Asking questions doesn't mean you aren't intelligent. It means you are driven enough to do it right.

Do Your Job Well
- Use your time to become the best at one thing and satisfactory at everything else. For example, if you are a software intern, try to be the best jest unit tester in the whole team by the end of the internship. It could be something as specific as being the best at writing binary data API headers—it doesn't matter what.
- Learn to structure: 1) What did I do (tidying up SharePoint) and 2) what impact this had (department spent 10% less time searching documents)
- Don't be afraid to give your honest perspective—your fresh eyes are valuable. Connect with leaders and build rapport. Research the company or field and ask questions about what you've learned.
- Always do what's asked of you but be deliberate in understanding "why" you are doing what you're doing and how it fits into the overall value proposition. By understanding the bigger picture, you have more credibility to make suggestions, support innovation, and grow into additional responsibility.

Listen and Learn
- Listen, observe and soak in the knowledge that surrounds you. We often learn more by listening than by questioning.
- Be sincere. Do your best. Be like a sponge and soak knowledge in.
- Try to figure out the fundamentals of as many functions as possible. Ask about everything that interests you, how (and why) things are defined the way they are, and their underlying structure. Work to understand every detail imaginable.
- Improve your learning curve. Learn something new every day. Then identify the areas of scope that you need to explore in-depth.
- Take the chance to learn about how things work on a higher level. Workplace cultures, processes, policies—that knowledge is invaluable.
- Try to connect all the dots (at the team, department, and organization level). Understand how the team adds value to the organization.
- Analyzing how other orgs have tackled similar problems can provide powerful insights (this can be done by reading/implementing blogs, Reddit threads, or research papers).

Tips for Managers

- I tell each of my interns on day one that at the end of this rotation, they will be given one final assignment: update their resume and share it with me. I set the tone that they'll need to seek out meaningful experiences and accomplishments to fill that space.
- Understand that interns are a helpful fresh pair of eyes. I encourage every intern to challenge the status quo and follow leads only when they understand the underlying "why."
- I remind interns that there are fewer rules than they think. This encourages them to speak up and take risks. More generally, this advice is designed to help interns see the environment as permissive, not restrictive.

Full-Time Offer

- If you receive a full-time offer during or after your internship from the company you are interning for, don't feel obligated to take it.
- Don't worry about converting this opportunity into a full-time position. Think about how much you can learn and how you can make yourself more marketable.
- Treat this internship as a 12-week interview process.

Interview

- As someone that conducts lots of interviews, I love when candidates share not only what they'd like to gain from an experience but also how they plan to meaningfully contribute. Bring something innovative to the table—we'd love to hear it.

Other Helpful Info

- Journal everything you do, every single day! (add quantifiable info if possible).
- Make perfect notes of everything.
- Reflect on your overall experience and present it to your team at the end of your internship.
- Focus on giving and not on receiving.
- Make a running list of all the acronyms the team uses.
- Don't be afraid to give feedback.
- Know what you'd like to gain from the program. Create systems and processes to ensure those goals are met. Measure your progress daily.
- At the very beginning of the internship, work to deeply understand what your stakeholders expect of you. Clarify what good and great look like.
- Plan your day in the morning, execute it, and report daily progress to your mentor.
- This is a golden opportunity to see firsthand the value of your academic studies and how they are used/applied in the real world. Once your internship is over, reevaluate your academic degree or electives, and identify ways to optimize your skillset.
- How will you make this internship better for the next intern in the role? (Improve processes, onboarding, knowledge-sharing, etc.) Plan your legacy!

Above all else: network, learn, contribute, and have fun! 🎉

I wish you all the best on your next internship. You're going to be great.