

Guide to Virtual Internships: Student Edition



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THE BASICS

What is a virtual internship?

Virtual internships are work opportunities that enable you to complete projects and collaborate with colleagues without requiring you to travel to a specific work location.

What are the benefits of virtual internships?

- **Location:** Relocation can often be a limitation when searching for an internship because it can make it difficult to address competing priorities such as summer classes, family obligations, cost considerations, etc. Virtual internships enable you to work from anywhere, which opens up the possibility of managing all the individual demands on your time without eliminating the opportunity for professional work experience.
- **Flexibility:** Virtual internships may offer flexibility for interns to decide their own work hours based on their individual schedules. This can enable you to work at times when you'll be most productive rather than attempting to be productive during a preset workday. You'll want to check in with your employer to understand their approach to work hours.
- **Demonstrate Your Work Ethic:** Individuals with a strong work ethic add great value to teams, but often work ethic is showcased on resumes as "worked independently doing X project". Virtual internships require people to manage their time effectively without the physical presence of an authority figure. The independent nature of virtual internships enables you to demonstrate to an employer that you can produce high quality results consistently.

What are some of the challenges of virtual internships?

- **Understanding Organizational Culture:** Many students use internships as a way to determine the company's work culture and style which is typically acquired through meeting with fellow employees at the organization. While it can be easier to get to know your colleagues in an in person environment, people can also foster community in virtual internships through intentionality and team building activities.
 - **Access to Networking:** Connections built during in person networking can be very helpful in fostering future opportunities. You want to get to know people who have been successful in the field and identify a mentor who can help to navigate your career. Virtual internships can make networking more difficult due to a lack of opportunity for in-person interactions, such as grabbing coffee or getting lunch with a colleague.
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FINDING VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS

- **Engineering Careers:** As remote opportunities become more popular, you can find virtual internships in Engineering Careers by going to the Jobs section and clicking “Position Type” then selecting “Remote” and “Internship” as filters.
- **Job Boards:** To find remote internship opportunities, you can utilize remote work filters on common job boards like the ones found on [LinkedIn](#) and [Google Job Search Platform](#). But there are also job boards specific for remote opportunities. Here is a list of some of the common remote job boards: [Remote in Tech Github List](#), [The 18 Best Remote Job Boards](#), [Remote Work Jobs Portal](#), [Dice Remote Jobs](#), [AngelList](#), [Still Hiring](#), [Parker Dewey](#), [Remotive](#), [Nodesk](#), [Jobspresso](#), [The Muse](#), [Stack Overflow](#), [We Work Remotely](#), [Working Nomads](#), [JustRemote](#), [Pangian](#)
- **Networking:** Connecting to people working remotely can help facilitate your understanding of remote work and internship opportunities available. Ensure your online presence is professional and use LinkedIn to identify possible contacts and request informational interviews to learn more about working virtually. The ECRC is happy to talk with you about networking strategies and how to utilize LinkedIn to reach out to alumni.

HOW DO I IDENTIFY A STRONG VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP?

- **Authenticity:** When applying to a position through any method, the ECRC encourages all job seekers to evaluate the full job description and research the company prior to submitting an application. ECRC advises job seekers **never** to disclose bank, financial or any other type of potentially sensitive personal information. If money, payment, or transactions of any type are requested as part of the application process or job itself, **notify** the ECRC immediately. Please reference the [ECRC website](#) to learn more about identifying fraudulent job postings.
- **Structure:** You want to pay close attention to the structure of the internship. Are there specific projects outlined in the internship posting. Does the employer define what virtual internships look like at their organization? Do you have a reasonable idea of what you’ll be able to learn and what skills will be required?
- **Communication:** Do you understand how your virtual internship will operate? Do they provide regular updates? Do they share information about what to expect in terms of onboarding? Do you know what team you’ll be joining?
- **Professional Development:** Virtual internships are not simply about completing tasks. Well-designed virtual internships help students explore different career fields and build on their skillsets in a variety of ways. So you’ll want to ask yourself, “How is this opportunity going to help me in the next steps of my career?”

PREPARING FOR A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

- **Dress Code:** While pajamas or workout clothes might be some of the most *comfortable* clothing, they don't necessarily provide a productive mindset for your day. Best practice is to dress as if you were going to the office. You never know when you might need to have a last minute meeting with your team or supervisor. Business casual is always a safe bet, unless you're giving an important presentation, and then you might want to dress up.
- **Workspace:** As you select your workspace, you want to pick a place that is going to have fewer distractions and will be comfortable for you to have virtual meetings. Some popular spaces include dining room tables and living rooms. You don't want your team to be distracted by your model car collection or posters of all the concerts you've attended. You want to try to select a location for virtual meetings that has a more neutral background. If you are limited in space and can't find a neutral background, you might consider changing the background on whatever virtual meeting tool you use.
- **Productivity:** Feeling productive can be one of the greatest challenges to adapting to a remote work environment. Many people have found that setting a schedule for the day and creating structured breaks enables them to avoid burnout and measure their success each day. You could also be intentional about how you schedule your day. If you work better independently in the morning and find the afternoons tend to go on forever, then you might schedule project time for your mornings and time for meetings in the afternoon. [Trello](#) and [Taskboard](#) are free popular project management tools to help manage your productivity.
- **Working Hours:** One of the positive aspects of virtual internships can be the freedom to set your own hours. But every organization's culture is different. Some may still require their employees to follow the standard 8-5pm schedule, while others may allow each employee to determine their own work schedule. You'll want to communicate with your supervisor before the internship begins to find out what their preferences are for work hours.
- **Communication:** Veterans of remote work often emphasize the importance of over-communication because the virtual environment can lessen your ability to communicate face to face. Over-communication means taking extra care to explain background and contextual information and providing clear action items for the other person. It also means requesting clarification on assigned tasks and projects to ensure expectations are understood and delivered. If you find it challenging to communicate this type of information concisely through email, you can always ask the other person to jump on a quick video call so you can explain the situation faster.
- **Resources for Virtual Internships:** You'll want to familiarize yourself with some of the tools below to make sure you're as effective and engaged in your virtual internships as possible.

Meetings: [Zoom](#), [Webex](#), [BlueJeans](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Skype](#), [Microsoft Teams](#), [Gotomeeting](#)

Communication: [Slack](#), IMs, [Group Me](#), [Remote Work Dictionary](#)

Productivity: [Trello](#), [Taskboard](#)

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

- **Networking:** While you won't be running into people in the hallways or the office kitchen, networking is still possible in virtual internships. It requires you to be more intentional about how you establish new connections. In the first couple weeks, take the initiative to get to know your co-workers by scheduling brief video meetings to introduce yourself and learn about their role. You can continue building connections within the organization by asking the people you meet with for referrals to other people in the organization that share your interests.
- **Feedback:** Your mission in any internship is to get feedback on your strengths and what skills you need to develop further. This is especially important in a virtual internship where you don't have the same interactions you have in person with your manager and team. If your manager isn't providing feedback, it's your responsibility to check in and ask what they think about your work performance and if there are any areas for improvement. If you were successful in your internship, submit a LinkedIn recommendation request to your supervisor to showcase the value you added during your internship.
- **Reflect on your experience:** As working remotely increases in popularity, it may be something you want to pursue in a full-time role. A virtual internship can be a great trial run for determining if working remotely would be a good fit for your career. By reflecting throughout the experience and keeping notes, you'll have a better sense of what you're looking for in your next opportunity and will be better equipped to identify opportunities of interest.

Some questions you might explore are: Is remote work a feasible option for your full-time job search? What challenges are you experiencing? Do you have enough projects to keep you busy? Does the organizational culture align with your values?

- **Communicate:** Virtual internships require you to be productive while working independently, but your productivity can be greatly diminished if you don't speak up when you're stuck or have concerns. Talk to your manager early on in your internship about their preferred communication approach if you have a question or concern.
 - **Participate in Events:** Virtual internships can limit your interactions to a set group of people; unless you take opportunities to meet people beyond that group. When you see opportunities for virtual team building or informal chats, seize those opportunities. Internships are a great way to develop social capital, but virtual internships require you to be more proactive to establish those social connections and learn more about the company culture. Events are great opportunities to find a mentor or learn about new projects and opportunities.
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