

Checklist for Interns: Getting the Most out of Your Internship

As you can well imagine, internships have a double edge. You can be an incredible source of labor and creativity in your department; you can also be an incredible drain on the staff and resources of your host institution as you pick your way through museum culture and office etiquette. The following tips will help to make all aspects of your internship a rewarding experience that you'll long remember and draw upon as you rise through the museum world.

Before Your Internship Begins

- ✓ Have a clear plan and schedule. Make sure you and your supervisor (s) agree about the nature and extent of your project (s); have a consistent schedule and stick to it. If the department knows they can rely on you to be there, you will get more interesting and responsible tasks.
- ✓ Do some homework on the institution. Obtain a copy of the annual report, read it carefully to determine where the institution is, where it is headed, and how "your" department fits in.
- ✓ Get to know your supervisor (s). Ask how they got where they are, what and where they studied, where they see the department going, and where they see themselves going.

Once Your Internship Begins

- ✓ Keep a journal or scrapbook. It organizes initial feelings of being overwhelmed and helps you chart your progress.
- ✓ Keep your eyes and ears open. Through sheer osmosis you can learn a great deal about how departments and whole institutions work.
- ✓ Don't overlook the department secretary/ assistant, particularly in larger organizations. They're a fountain of information and often know the institutional culture better than anyone else. They may also have the ear of your supervisor and can serve as your advocate.
- ✓ Be sensitive to personal chemistry and department ebbs and flows. If your department is facing a deadline crunch, pitch in! Although you should have your own project, be flexible—and realistic. Make yourself indispensable and help ease some of the stress

for the regular staff. Even little jobs like photocopying and being a courier mean a lot. Your willingness to be a team player can have far-reaching benefits later.

- ✓ Request informational interviews with other staff members. Introduce yourself to your new colleagues. Set up appointments to learn about their departments and their individual jobs. Your supervisor may be able to give you names of people who would be willing to speak with you about their careers, backgrounds, and current activities. The broader you cast your net (work), the more your experience will have meaning to your career development.
- ✓ Schedule formal and informal periodic evaluation times.

After the Internship is Over

- ✓ Manners count! Write to your supervisor (s) thanking them for participating in your experience. Also drop thank you notes to others who were helpful personally and professionally, including the director and maybe even the trustees.
- ✓ Get formal recommendations and evaluations for later use.
- ✓ Keep in touch with “your” department/ institution. Attend future openings. Offer to help train the next intern (s) if you have the time and opportunity.
- ✓ One last word. Don’t expect a job with your host institution. You’re well on your way to being a full professional now. You want to be treated as such from your first day on the job, which can usually only happen when you go to another organization.

Remember!

- ✓ Internships are the single best way to find out what careers lie beyond college or graduate school.
 - ✓ A good internship will give you a chance to get a feel for where you’d like to go with your degree, while you’re making some good contacts or honing your professional skills.
 - ✓ The more people you talk to, the better you’ll know what’s out there.
 - ✓ Ask lots of questions.
 - ✓ Find out what the good professional publications are. Read them!
 - ✓ Establish good communication.
 - ✓ Do a research project. Attend events.
 - ✓ Visit other departments and talk with staff in each one.
 - ✓ Set up a support network. Avoid isolation.
 - ✓ Maintain a relationship with the museum after you leave.
 - ✓ The people you meet will be your resources for the future.
 - ✓ Have fun! Learn everything you can.
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