

Reflecting on Your Internship

Internships are only as good as you make them. Key components that increase the likelihood of a good experience are 1) setting specific learning goals at the beginning of the internship, 2) receiving feedback on your performance and growth through regular meetings with your site supervisor, and 3) reflecting on the experience.

This guide will help you reflect back on the internship experience. By understanding our workplace preferences, we are able to clarify what we want more of, what we want to avoid next time around, and we significantly increase our chances of figuring out a career path that is meaningful to us.

Reflection Exercise 1:

Evaluating your Internship - Work Content, Work Culture, Supervision

Work Content

Did your work feel meaningful to you?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, did any of the following help make your work meaningful? Can you think of any other ways in which your work felt important to you?

- Related to a subject that interested me.
- Made me think harder or in a different way about something.
- Challenged me in some way (learned a new skill, expanded an old one, placed me outside my “comfort zone”, expanded my world view).
- Made me see that I was competent in specific areas.
- Made me feel that I was contributing to the office’s mission.
- Made me feel that I was contributing to a greater good.
- Made me feel that my work had an impact on furthering the organization’s mission.

If no, were any of the following items missing from your work? Can you think of any other reasons why your work lacked meaning for you?

- Tasks were not related enough to what I wanted to learn.
- Didn’t learn much that felt significant to me.
- Didn’t see the impact of my work on the department or organization.
- Didn’t have enough preparation to accomplish tasks.
- Realized that this was not the career for me.

Was there anything that could have made your work more meaningful to you?

- Job shadow or talk with other employees to learn about additional careers within the company.

- Have my supervisor explain or show me how my work contributed to the mission of the organization.
- Receive more training in certain areas.
- Be matched with a mentor to learn more about the company and my career development.

Work Culture

I felt comfortable and “at home” in my workplace.

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, which of the following contributed to your feeling of comfort? Any other reasons?

- Shared many of the organization’s values.
- Shared many of the values of my co-workers and supervisor.
- People welcomed me and made me feel part of the group.
- People were willing to answer my questions.
- People were respectful of each other.
- The department was organized and well-run.

If no, did any of the following contribute to your not being comfortable in your work place? Any other reasons?

- Didn’t share the values of the organization.
- Didn’t share the values of my co-workers or supervisor.
- People treated me as an outsider.
- The department was poorly run and disorganized.
- People were not particularly respectful of each other.

Supervision

In general, was your relationship to your supervisor a productive one for you?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, did any of the following help make it so? Any other reasons?

- She/he gave me the right amount and right kind of feedback.
- She/he gave me significant responsibility.
- She/he was encouraging and positive.
- She/he made it clear what was expected of me and was accessible to answer my questions.
- She/he took an active interest in my learning.

If no, did any of the following make it less productive than it could have been? Any other reasons?

- Supervisor was not accessible to answer my questions or to give feedback.
- She/he was not very interested in my learning.

- She/he was not clear in giving direction.
- She/he gave me little responsibility.
- She/he was not encouraging or gave me very little feedback about my work.

Reflection Exercise 2:

Summarize What You Have Learned

Once you've identified what you value in the content of your work, in a work culture and in a supervisory relationship, you are much better equipped to find a job which shares, if not all, then most of your core work values.

What are the biggest take-aways or lessons learned from reflection exercise 1? Try to answer the following questions *out loud*. This is a great way to practice communicating your professional skills and preferences.

- What does meaningful work look like for you? Talk about both general themes (helping others, contributing to the mission, etc.) and specific examples from your internship.
- What is your ideal work culture?
- Describe your ideal supervisor.

Reflection Exercise 3:

Presenting Your Experience in Application Materials

One of the best ways to show a potential employer or graduate school admissions counselor how qualified you are for a position is to talk about your successes in past internships, jobs, or activities. In thinking about your internship, ask yourself what skills you gained or improved through your work?

Identifying Related and Transferable Skills

Place a check mark next to the skills you developed through your internship:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking initiative | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing to a team |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working under pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Coming up with ideas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating well | <input type="checkbox"/> Following through on details |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing statistics and data | <input type="checkbox"/> Being accurate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building collaborative relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing databases |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making a presentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing articles or reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting deadlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Being persuasive |

These are just a few possible skills you may have learned or enhanced through your internship. What else can you add to this list?

Describing Your Internship on a Resume

Choose a skill or a cluster of related skills that you developed during your internship, and think of an example of your work that illustrates your proficiency with this skill(s).

For instance, because of the type of position Amina is seeking, she wants to emphasize her abilities to communicate well, and to persuade and motivate others.

On a resume, Amina included the following example of her work as an intern at a food bank to illustrate her proficiency with these skills:

- Researched local business owners and contacted them in-person and by phone to describe food bank needs, and to solicit auction donations.
- Convinced 90% of local businesses to donate items for auction. Bids on items solicited brought in over 35% of total funds raised for the year.

Presenting Your Skills at an Interview

Amina's job interview gave her the chance to expand on her illustrative example. She spoke about how she convinced an initially unwilling receptionist to let her in to speak with the company's director. She let her interviewer know that she was not demoralized by uninterested or rude business owners. These details provided further evidence of Amina's mastery of communication and persuasion skills.

Build on Your Internship

If you think that you may want to pursue the career field in which you interned, look for ways to continue gaining experience in that area. Set up informational meetings or telephone appointments with Augsburg alumni or other people to learn more about the field. If there are relevant professional associations, find out if you can attend an event or get a student membership

Staying in Touch

If you haven't written thank you notes to your supervisor and to anyone else who was helpful to you during your internship, do so now. It's better late than never. Send an email or call your supervisor or co-workers from time to time to let them know what you're up to and find out how they are. Drop by and say hello during a vacation if you're in the vicinity. When you start job hunting and could use some help, it will be easier to contact your internship supervisor and co-workers for advice and guidance or to serve as references, if you've stayed in touch.

References

A reference is a person willing to be contacted by people who are considering you for jobs or graduate schools to speak about the quality of your work performance. If you would like your internship supervisor to act as reference for you, contact them to ask permission to list them as a reference, and describe the nature of the job or graduate school to which you are applying.