Creating Structure in Your Unstructured Internship/Practicum

If you create an internship with an organization that does not have a formalized internship program or a formal position description, you can create a more meaningful experience if you create a mutually agreed upon internship description, set supervision expectations, prepare for your internship experience, and take initiative.

These steps will allow you to craft a meaningful and productive experience that benefits both you and your employer. Once you work with your employer to create a meaningful and productive internship, they’ll never forget you.

Establish a Job/Project Description & Supervision Structure
First, create your job description or project description (link to offer letter/job description) and negotiate the final version with your supervisor to determine exactly what your internship will entail, so you can:

- Incorporate work experiences or projects you wish to have
- Identify the skills and tools you will need to complete your work
- Create a reasonable timetable for your responsibilities to be completed
- Understand what is expected of you by your supervisor

Once you have a mutually agreed upon job/project description, you can initiate a discussion about on-going supervision:

- Communicate the supervision style that would be most helpful to you
- Learn what communication styles and mediums work best for your supervisor
- Agree upon how frequent supervision meetings and evaluations will occur

Learn Everything You Can About the Field and Organization
Be ready to learn. Take time before your internship to familiarize yourself with your organization, including their products/services/clients. Read everything you can about the organization, past, present and future.

Show Initiative
When you start your internship, ask your supervisor, “What should I work on when you’re busy and I have completed the work I’ve been assigned?” This question shows that you’re a go-getter who wants to contribute as much as possible. You may get assigned a project that no one else was smart enough to ask for. Remember, the potential to raise an internship from the “busy work/no experience” level to “real experience” level is in your hands.

Get to know colleagues in the office who might be able to support you in your work and offer feedback. Listen for clues from management and coworkers about the challenges they’re facing as they could give you an idea that you could develop into a great project proposal.

When you’ve finished a project, email your supervisor to let her/him know you are looking forward to sharing the results of the completed project with him/her and are moving on to your next project.

If you find you’re spending most of your time on busy work or no work at all, approach your supervisor respectfully with ideas of how you might be able to help her/him with specific projects.