

Best practices in Work-Integrated Learning activities

INTERNSHIP



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About Internship



Purpose of the Booklet

This is a guide on the best practices in conducting meaningful internship experiences for internship hosts, students, and programme organizers. These activities are designed to facilitate students' acquisition of industry knowledge as well as workplace soft skills, career decision-making, and study-to-work transition. This booklet will cover the best practices for conducting internships. It is based on findings from the study "Work-integrated learning Study 2: Student learning from company visit, career mentorship and internship", conducted by Professor Kara Chan from April 2025 to October 2025 among CLAP-TECH Higher Diploma students who participated in these activities and the insights of CLAP-TECH staff involved.

Internship

The internship opportunities are arranged by the CLAP-TECH Centre in cooperation with the programme's industry partners. CLAP-TECH internships are designed to provide Higher Diploma students with first-hand industry working experience in professional settings at IT and creative media companies in Hong Kong. These experiences help students build industry-relevant experience, learn about the workplace, and aid young graduates in their transition into the workforce by informing their career decisions and building their professional networks.

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01

Best Practices: Employers





Best practices for employers:

Designing meaningful internship experiences

Research-informed tips for Higher Diploma students

As an employer, you have an important role in making internship experiences fruitful for your interns. Interns can be your valuable colleagues. You can design, support, and manage your internship programme that is friendly to the interns. Findings from interns' reflections suggest that positive experiences are not spontaneous. They are the result of thoughtful organization, while some less-than-satisfactory experiences often stem from gaps in structure, communication, or support. The following best practices can help employers enhance internship quality and interns' productivity and learning during the programme.

Create positive experiences through meaningful deliverables

Interns have the most positive experiences when their assigned work is authentic, leading to clear, visible outcomes that matter to the organization. It is important to design internship tasks that lead to outcomes valuable to the organization. Tasks should also be planned around final presentations or major projects that allow interns to bring together what they have learned. Below are several recommendations.

Major / Large projects

- Ensure projects have real value for the team or organization, so interns can see how their work contributes to actual goals.
- Give interns opportunities to present their work to supervisors, teams, or mixed audiences, increasing their visibility and recognition within the organization.
- Use projects to reinforce learning and confidence to support skill development and reduce a sense of incompetence.
- Treat major projects as learning milestones, not just tasks to be completed.
- Involve interns in different roles within a project so they experience collaboration and responsibility.



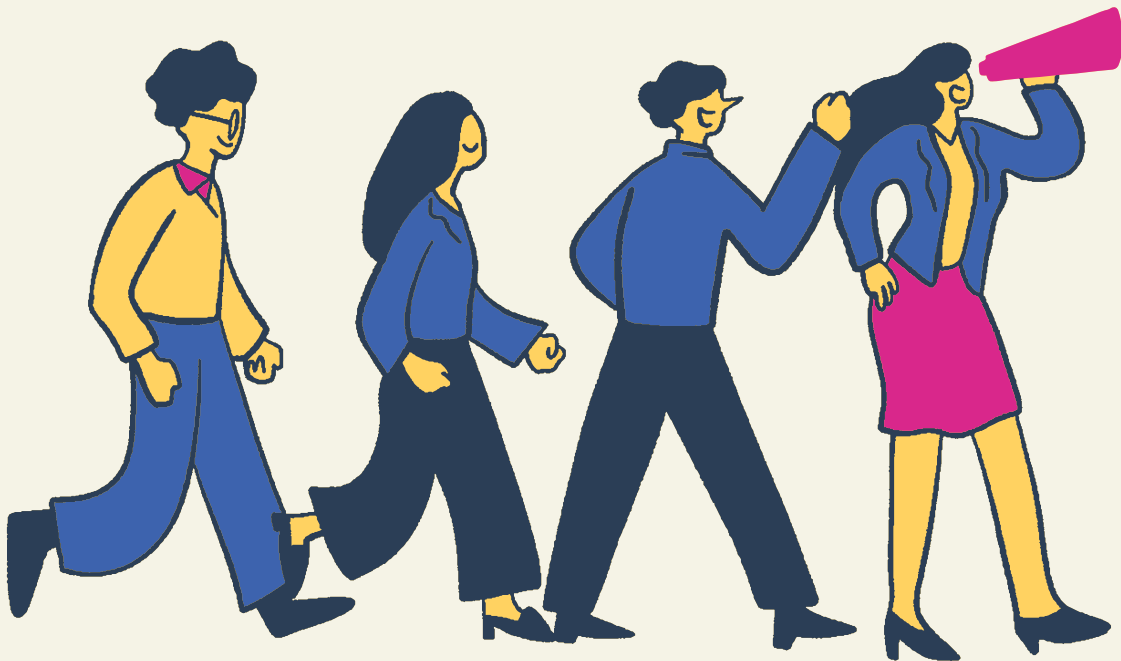


Emotional/psychological support

Supervisors' and employers' support significantly influences interns' first experiences as working employees who are new to the world of work. Thus, employers who seek to improve interns' confidence in achieving goals should make sure to support interns' technical training as well as their mental wellbeing in the workplace. Early affirmation from supervisors and employers also serves as motivation to achieve more for interns, especially when efforts are acknowledged.

Acknowledge interns' efforts and results, as recognition strongly reinforces confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging.

- Offer timely feedback and reassurance, especially in customer-facing or operational roles where interns may feel insecure.
- Properly introduce interns to their immediate supervisor and key colleagues that they will work with
- Show appreciation for interns' effort
- Provide constructive feedback on how their work can be improved



Workplace management

Interns' negative experiences may stem from people issues, skill mismatches, or environmental stress, rather than from workload alone.

- Foster a supportive team culture where colleagues cooperate with interns and treat them respectfully.
- Provide clear guidance to teams on how to work with interns, including expectations around communication and supervision.
- Manage workplace relationships and conflicts carefully
- Intervene early when conflicts, harsh language, or inappropriate supervision arise, as these strongly affect interns' well-being.

Task design and assignment

- Match tasks to interns' current skill levels, while progressively increasing the level of difficulty.
- Provide basic onboarding or training, so interns understand task requirements and workplace expectations.
- Provide an example of finished work to interns if you expect them to follow certain corporate styles or standards.
- Direct interns towards self-learning materials if certain knowledge or skills need to be acquired via self-study.
- Explain to interns how their finished tasks contribute to the organizational workflow process so that interns can see how their efforts fit in the big picture of company operations.





- Improve the work environment where possible
- Pay attention to physical working conditions related to occupational health, such as space, noise, and ergonomics, as these affect concentration and comfort.
- For duties that may be physically challenging (eg. outdoor fieldwork or events), prepare interns for demanding conditions and provide clear instructions and support.
- Consider commuting demands, weather risks, and scheduling, especially for interns with limited work experience.
- Check with interns if additional hardware or equipment is needed for the assigned tasks.



Key takeaway for employers

Interns' best experiences come from seeing their work matter, while their worst experiences often come from poor communication, lack of support, or stressful environments. By designing internships with meaningful deliverables, clear guidance, supportive supervision, and a respectful workplace culture, employers can greatly enhance interns' learning, well-being, and professional growth.

Well-organized internship programmes not only benefit students — they also help organizations develop future talent, strengthen team culture, and build a positive employer reputation.

02

Best Practices: Interns





From Student to Professional:

A Practical Guide to Getting Internship-Ready

Research-informed tips for Higher Diploma students

Identity transformation

Congratulations on landing the great opportunity of an internship position. Starting an internship is more than learning new tasks — it's about becoming a professional. Based on real interns' experiences, here are five key areas you can prepare for before stepping into the workplace.

1. Shift your mindset: Think like a professional

- See yourself as an employee rather than a student, and approach your work with professionalism, commitment, and a sense of responsibility.
- Take ownership of your learning by actively finding information, observing how things are done, and asking questions instead of waiting for step-by-step instructions.
- Be proactive in solving problems and improving your work, even when tasks are unfamiliar or unclear at the beginning.
- Put team and company goals before your personal preferences and understand that workplace decisions are often based on collective needs rather than individual interests.
- Be self-aware and identify the workplace values that are important to you, as well as personal strengths to help you make better-informed career decisions.
- Becoming a professional is a gradual process; allow yourself time to adjust while staying open to feedback and self-improvement.

2. Adjust your behaviour: Fit into workplace routines

- Be punctual and treat working hours seriously, as established schedules signal reliability and professionalism in the workplace.
- Working hours in the workplace is much longer than a normal school day. You may feel tired or stressed out. You need to manage your energy by planning tasks, prioritising responsibilities, and taking occasional breaks for refreshment.
- Adapt to a structured and formal environment by demonstrating discipline, appropriate conduct, and respect for office norms.
- Communicate clearly and effectively at work, focusing on tasks and solutions rather than casual or emotional expression.
- Observe how colleagues behave and interact and adjust your own behaviour to align with the organisation's culture and expectations.

3. Take responsibility: Respect rules and constraints

- Accept assigned tasks responsibly. Find out what is expected of you in this assignment and ask if there is a deadline for completion.
- Recognise that your performance affects not only yourself but also your team, supervisor, and the organisation.
- Follow workplace rules, procedures, and regulations, especially regarding confidentiality, data protection, and internal processes.
- Be mindful of the organisation's reputation and act in ways that protect its public image, including responsible use of social media.





4. Turn knowledge into skills: Connect learning to practice

- Apply classroom theories and concepts to real-world tasks, especially the latest trends, by understanding how knowledge is used in actual workplace situations.
- Develop practical, job-specific skills that are valued in your industry, such as using tools, software, or professional methods.
- Learn actively through hands-on tasks, observing experienced colleagues, and reflecting on feedback from supervisors.
- Gain a realistic understanding of how your industry operates, including workflows, performance standards, and approval processes.

5. Learn to engage: Communicate in professional contexts

- Shift from talking mainly about yourself to thinking about what others need, whether it's your supervisor, teammates, or clients. Ask, "How can I help?"
- Be a supportive team member by sharing information, helping others when needed, and aiming for team success.
- Communicate politely and respectfully at work, using language that fits the workplace.
- Keep healthy boundaries with colleagues, understanding that work relationships are usually more formal than school friendships.
- Be professional when communicating with clients or external partners, because you are representing the company, not just yourself.
- Build connections with experienced industry practitioners and learn from their professional experience.

Challenges that you may face

As you transition from a student to a professional, you will face real and unexpected challenges at work. These difficulties can feel stressful at first, but they are also a normal form of learning through experience. Based on real interns' experiences, the following five challenges are very common — especially at the beginning. Understanding them can help you prepare mentally and cope better.

1. Unfamiliar work content: I don't know what I'm doing yet

- You may feel confused or anxious when you are asked to handle tasks with unfamiliar software, equipment, or systems.
- Sometimes, you may not fully understand the background of the task, the product, or the project, which makes it hard to see the purpose of your work.
- When goals or expectations are unclear, you may worry about making mistakes or not completing tasks properly.
- These situations can make you doubt your ability, especially in the early stage of your internship.





2. Unclear requirements and lack of support: I'm not sure what they want

- You may receive limited guidance at the beginning, making it difficult to know what is expected of you.
- Task instructions may sometimes be vague or incomplete, which can be frustrating.
- Training on company culture, workflow, or basic job skills may be brief, leaving you feeling unprepared.
- When you face problems and support is not available in time, you may feel stressed.

3. Teamwork and worries: I don't want to trouble others

- Working in a team may feel challenging, especially if members have very different working styles.
- You might hesitate to ask questions because you are afraid of bothering colleagues or appearing incompetent.
- Communication can feel awkward when you are unfamiliar with workplace norms and expectations.



4. Workload and time pressure: Everything feels rushed

- You may be surprised by the amount of work you are expected to handle in a short time.
- Tight deadlines or unanticipated tasks can create time pressure, especially when you are still learning.
- Balancing work speed and quality can be difficult when you are new to the job.
- Over time, constant pressure may leave you feeling overwhelmed.

5. Adapting to the workplace environment: I don't quite fit in yet

- You may need time to adjust to management styles that are different from what you expected.
- Unfamiliar rules and workplace culture can be confusing and cause anxiety.
- Using new technologies or tools that were not taught in school may increase your stress and self-doubt.
- Physical working conditions, such as limited space, a noisy environment, or uncomfortable conditions, may affect your comfort.



Coping strategies: How you can deal with internship challenges

Facing challenges during an internship is normal, but how you respond to them makes a big difference. Based on real interns' experiences, you may consider the following three coping strategies that may help you overcome difficulties.

1. Seeking help

- Turn to your supervisor when you need clear decisions and direction.
- Talk to other interns, as they often face similar struggles.
- Ask colleagues for guidance with tasks, tools, or procedures you are unfamiliar with.
- Asking for help shows responsibility and willingness to learn, not weakness.



2. Self-improvement

- Treat self-learning as your first option and try to solve problems on your own first by searching online or watching “how-to” tutorials related to your tasks.
- Practise skills repeatedly through trial and error, knowing that improvement comes with experience. Embrace a growth mindset.
- Build confidence by tracking how your skills improve through independent effort.

3. Adaptation and tolerance

- Accept that feeling stressed or uncomfortable at the beginning is part of adapting to a new environment.
- Stay positive and know that adjustment takes time.
- Take small, active steps to fit in, such as starting conversations or checking in with teammates.
- Use proactive communication to reduce misunderstandings.



Learning from your internship experience

Your internship is a key learning journey that shapes how you act, think, and grow as a future professional. Based on real experiences, there are areas that you shall gain from your internship experience:

1. Collaboration

- You learn how to work with different people as part of a team by observing and taking on roles, interpersonal boundaries, and different working styles.
- You improve your people skills by keeping relationships professional and task-focused.
- You develop ways to manage teammates with different working styles tactfully and focus on getting the job done.

2. Communication skills

- You learn to ask questions in a clearer and more organised way.
- You adjust how you communicate with supervisors, colleagues, and clients based on the situation.
- You learn how to structure your questions to get the right information.



3. Problem-solving

- You learn to try solving problems on your own first, using online resources and past examples.
- You become better at knowing when to ask for help after making a genuine effort.
- This “try first, ask later” habit builds confidence and independence.

4. Professional skills

- You learn how to apply classroom knowledge to real work tasks.
- You gain job-specific skills such as using tools, software, or professional techniques.

5. Organizational workflow

- You learn how tasks move through an organisation, from assignment to completion.
- Your experience helps you understand what it may look like to work in small, medium, or large companies.

6. Shifted mindset

- You move from a student mindset to taking initiative and responsibility at work.
- You learn to persist and remain resilient through challenges instead of giving up easily.
- You start thinking more about solutions and team goals, not just yourself.

7. Work habits

- You develop punctuality and learn to follow structured work schedules.
- You improve time management by prioritising tasks and managing deadlines.

Your internship is a turning point

Your internship is an important turning point where you begin to move from being a student to becoming a professional. As this guide shows, the transition is not always smooth. You will need to adjust your mindset and behaviour, take on real responsibilities, learn new skills, and interact with people in ways that may feel unfamiliar at first.

You may face challenges such as unclear tasks, heavy workload, teamwork difficulties, or feeling unsure about fitting into the workplace. These experiences are normal and shared by many interns. What matters most is how you respond. Seeking help at the right time, improving yourself through independent learning, and staying adaptable and positive can help you cope and grow.

Internships offer valuable learning beyond technical skills. You will learn how to collaborate, communicate clearly, solve problems, manage your time, and develop professional habits.

Treat your internship as a learning journey. Be patient with yourself, stay open to feedback, and use every task and challenge as an opportunity to grow. The effort you put in now will help you succeed in this internship and prepare you well for your future career.



03

Best Practices: Programme Organizers



Best practices for Programme Organizers: Supporting successful internships

Research-informed tips for internship programme organizers

To support fruitful internships, appropriate preparation is necessary to ensure that the internship experiences will help students develop skills and gain a better understanding of the industry to make future career decisions.

Insights from interns and programme organizers have highlighted good practices to prepare interns for success, such as CV preparation workshops, mock interviews, preparatory information on companies, setting appropriate expectations, briefing students on their rights as employees, regular check-ins, and supplying resources.





CV preparation:

Programme organizers should conduct CV workshops and provide CV-editing assistance to students applying for internships. The ability to write a good CV tailored to an organization that a student is targeting is a crucial career-building and adaptability skill to manage career paths and employment market changes. Given that this may be the first time students are applying for a job, assistance in identifying valuable experiences from students' academic journey and translating these into skills relevant to the workplace could represent an important milestone in their development.

Workshops assisting in optimizing students' CVs also help them learn what a good CV should look like and provide them with a better chance at landing an internship. Working with students to develop their CV can also assist them in articulating their personal employment narratives, clarifying how they are fit for a role and career path.

- Guide them to focus on clarity, relevance, and impact of their achievements and skills to the role that is being applied for.
- Highlight key skills employers are looking for in the internship role or company-aligned skills.
- Give examples of evidence of students' skills (projects, jobs).
- List skills and qualifications clearly.



Mock interviews

Experience in the interview process is greatly beneficial for students in preparing them for interview opportunities in their future. Mock interviews help students acclimate to the pressures and challenging questions they may face during an interview. These interviews give them experience, build confidence, and reduce stress for their future interviews, allowing them to perform better.

- Prepare 10 -15 typical questions asked by organisations in an industry for the interns' target roles.
- Conduct multiple mock interviews to build confidence and experience.
- *Practice with a timer:* Train students to deliver answers effectively and concisely under time pressure.
- *Constructive feedback:* Immediate feedback from a mock interview should help students improve their mock interview strategies and performance.

Preparatory information

Students preparing for internships should be supplied with information that will prepare them for fruitful internships.

- Professional behaviours: collaboration, communication, teamwork, client perspectives, and punctuality.
- Company background: Information about the company's industry, business operations, different jobs, and clientele.
- Knowledge and training on industry tools and techniques (industry workflows).
- Workers' rights: Program organizers should also provide resources and information on interns' workers' rights so they are aware of how they should be treated and how to identify situations where they should seek help or escalate issues to the appropriate company authorities or programme organizers.





Setting expectations

Programme organizers should inform students applying for internships about the potential challenges/ stressful situations they may encounter. Based on feedback from interviews with interns, it is recommended that programme organizers should inform students about the following:

- *Workplace culture:* How to interact with colleagues, fitting into the workplace, communication channels, inter-department collaboration, and appropriate interactions.
- *Professional behaviours and expectations:* Punctuality and communication methods.
- *Work conditions:* Availability of equipment and workplace noise levels.
- *Challenges:* Unclear expectations, heavy workload, teamwork difficulties, stressful situations, and ad-hoc tasks/work arrangements.



Brief students on their rights as employees

Workplace safety

- Interns are expected to work in a safe working environment.
- Interns are covered by employee insurance (or by the university's insurance) and should be compensated for work injuries. In case of an injury incident, the intern should inform the employer and the internship organizer immediately.

Pay and leave

- Interns should be paid according to the agreed compensation.
- Interns should enjoy rest days, statutory holidays, and sick leave according to the company's employment policy.

Harassment

- Interns are expected to work in a harassment-free working environment. They should not be discriminated against based on their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, or disabilities.

Conflict of interest

- According to the "Prevention of Bribery Ordinance", interns should not accept any form of monetary tips, gifts, or other benefits during their work to avoid violating the law. There should be no monetary transactions between workplace supervisors and interns, such as lending money or engaging in inappropriate buying and selling relationships.

Further details about interns' labour rights can be found at <https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/erb/>

Further details about the prevention of bribery can be found at <https://cpas.icac.hk/>

Internship support: Regular check-ins, resources, and other student needs

Feedback from interns revealed that some felt they couldn't or shouldn't share their internship-related issues with their programme lecturers. Many reported not seeking support from school lecturers or programme organizers during their internships. They believed they should not ask outsiders for help with their internship-related matters, and that the programme organizers could not help them based on the specificity of their work challenges. This highlights an area worthy of attention as interns were not engaging with programme organizers for support when they faced challenges. Programme organizers should regularly check in with interns throughout their internship to:

- Regularly check and address any student needs and connect them with the resources and information (ie. hardware support, learning resources...).
- Provide interns with mental support and advice when they encounter challenges.
- Support interns with workplace-related challenges or provide advice on professional conduct.
- To ensure 24-hour support for the interns (especially outside the office hours of the internship organizer), an AI-powered online chatbot could be developed to provide students with the opportunity to seek assistance at any time.





Internship social platform

It is also recommended that programme organizers set up online social platforms such as messaging groups and forums where interns can share challenges and seek help or advice from fellow interns. This also serves as a networking platform for students to begin developing their career networks.

- Programme instructor-led topic discussions weekly
- Interns sharing challenges and insights
- Interns networking and being aware of different career opportunities and organizational cultures.

Internship opportunity selection

Some interns also reflected that they would have appreciated a wider range of industry and employer selection, as some could not find internships that matched their exact interests.

- Scout out more varied industry partners to include a range of internship opportunities.
- Leverage industry partner networks to contact out-of-network organizations and companies.

04

Sample Reflection Questions for Internship Learning





Reflection on Internship Learning

- How did your internship change your understanding or view of working in this industry?
- Did you find any concepts you learned about in school that were used during your internship?
- What are the fun parts of working in this company?
- What are the challenges of working in this company?
- Did you discover any personal strengths or weaknesses from the internship experience?
- Based on your experience, what do you think you need to learn to work at this company?
- How do you think you can work towards your personal goals based on what you learned at your internship?

05

Sample Worksheets for Interns



Internship

Interview preparation



Company Name:

- What services and/or products does this company provide?
- Who are the clients and service users of this company?
- How does your employing company differ from similar companies in the industry?
- Why are you suitable for working in this company? What skills and experiences do you have that make you a good choice to hire?



Internship

Weekly Reflection

Company name:

1. What were your work tasks this week?
2. What important skills did you need to accomplish your tasks this week?
3. What challenges did you face in this week? How did you solve these challenges?
4. How did you interact with other staff or departments in your organization? How does your work contribute to the overall goals of the company?

06

Further Reading



Further Reading

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Jockey Club Multiple Pathways Initiative

CLAPTECH Pathway

Launched in 2020 and funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, Jockey Club Multiple Pathways Initiative – CLAP-TECH Pathway (CLAP-TECH) is Hong Kong's first through-train Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) pathway in mainstream senior secondary and post-secondary education. CLAP-TECH is a tripartite partnership among Hong Kong Baptist University, industry partners, and secondary schools. It currently consists of two Applied Learning Courses (i.e. Tech Basics and Multimedia Storytelling) and two Higher Diplomas (in Data Science and Art Tech Design). The programme equips students with technical and soft skills for the future workforce by incorporating career and life development into the curriculum. Since its establishment, over 40 industry partners have been involved in the programme, guiding and inspiring over 1,800 students from 90 secondary schools, with over 6,100 instances of programme participation.

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HONG KONG
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



傳理學院
School of Communication

Phone 3411 8122; 3411 7253 **Email** ctc@hkbu.edu.hk **Website** www.claptech.hk/en/

Address CLAP-TECH Centre, 2/F, Franki Centre, 320 Junction Road, Kowloon Tong.