



# Virtual International Internships

Define Your Experience for Employers

## Overview

In recent months, the global workforce has been forced to reimagine employee training, support, and engagement. As a student participating in a virtual international internship, you're an early adopter of the tools and technologies redefining the professional work world.

To fully leverage your international experience, it's important to reflect on how your new skills will benefit future employers or graduate and professional school programs. By articulating your skills using language relevant to the organization, you'll gain a competitive advantage.

## Career-Related Skills

Your virtual international experience likely provided many opportunities to navigate cross-cultural differences, and with the added barrier of collaborating virtually, you've gained some unique skills. These skills are amplified because you navigated your virtual internship during a time when virtual work was still very new in many fields and countries. Integrate specific references to these skills into how you articulate your experience on your cover letter, resumé, and during interviews. Always highlight the skills that are most relevant to the position you're applying for.

### Skills

- Digital literacy
- Observation and listening skills
- Problem-solving
- Leadership skills
- Self-direction and self-advocacy within a virtual work setting
- Open-mindedness and high tolerance for ambiguity
- Ability to contribute in an unfamiliar, shifting environment
- Ability to build authentic, cross-cultural relationships
- Ability to adapt to virtual environments and expectations
- Effective communication across cultural and linguistic barriers
- Time management and accountability across international time zones
- Appreciation for diverse perspectives

*"This internship definitely helped me broaden my skills. My dream as of now is to become a retail buyer, but I could also end up in a completely different direction. Getting experience with social media gave me another path if I need it."*

—Lindsay, College of Design, intern at small jewelry designer in Florence, Italy



## Reflection & Articulation

Use the questions below to describe specific scenarios you navigated and the skills you used or gained. This reflection can give you a competitive advantage in future job interviews.

- How did your intercultural work experience enhance your knowledge, skills, and understanding of your intended career field? How did it enhance your understanding of remote work environments?
- What was the most challenging situation you faced? What skills and personal qualities did you tap into to handle it? How did the experience help you grow?
- In what ways did you adapt to the intercultural dimensions of the internship? How were your academic, social, and work settings influenced by the internship's remote nature?
- What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself? How did the experience help you understand your work style, clarify your values, or improve your interpersonal skills?

*“Even if I don’t end up working abroad, the soft skills that I’ve gotten from this can be applicable to basically any sort of communications or journalism or editing field that I go into. I’ve proven that I can work independently and write X amount of articles in a certain amount of time, and I can come up with those ideas and work with my supervisor who’s in a different country.”*

—Jessica, *Florence News* (English news magazine), Florence, Italy

## Interviews

During an interview, you have the employer’s attention, so take the opportunity to showcase the skills you learned in your virtual international experience. Employers will often ask behavioral interview questions such as: “Tell me about a time when you had to problem-solve” or “Explain how you contributed to a team.” The STAR technique gives you a competitive advantage by helping you build concise, descriptive responses:



**Situation:** Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?



**Task:** Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?



**Action:** Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?



**Results:** Explain the results. Quantify accomplishments, recognitions, and skills.

Highlight the **skills most important to employers**, such as problem-solving and analytical skills, the ability to work in a team, leadership and initiative, a strong work ethic, communication and interpersonal skills, flexibility/adaptability, and strategic planning.

## Cover Letter

In your cover letter, include an example of your virtual international internship experience that demonstrates how your skills can contribute to the organization's needs. For example:

*During my virtual international internship experience through the Learning Abroad Center, I demonstrated my adaptability by successfully completing various tasks that evolved due to COVID-19. I learned about the creativity and flexibility needed to navigate a variety of challenges, including funding, technology barriers, resource accessibility, and availability of staff working remotely. I gained insight into my placement country's professional norms and cultural context compared to the US and other countries. I also gained a strong understanding of the complexity of intercultural communication and ways to develop and sustain relationships during transitions. My new skills will help me succeed in future virtual experiences as well as in ambiguous, challenging in-person opportunities*



## Resume

A career counselor or career coach can help you update your resume to articulate the skills you gained during your international virtual internship program. For example:

### INTERNSHIP

Virtual International Internships course (FOST 3896) and intern at [company or organization], hosted in [location], fall 2020

- Established rapport and effective communication with internship supervisor, colleagues, and fellow cohort members through virtual meetings and projects despite linguistic, cultural, and technological barriers
- Gained self-sufficiency implementing own schedule and completing assignments without support of in-person team
- Researched and analyzed host country's workplace—comparing it to US language, norms, values, economic assumptions—and examined how COVID-19 affected host country and US differently
- Engaged in guided reflection and analysis to best understand internship experience

## Resources

UofM Career Offices: [career.umn.edu](https://career.umn.edu)

Learning Abroad Center: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/career-rel](https://umabroad.umn.edu/students/career-rel)

NAFSA: Incorporating Education Abroad into Your Career Plan