



Reflection Diary

How you can get more added value
from your internship



A self-developed tool of the project
“Making better use of student internships–
a nationwide desire in higher education“, 2018-2020, funded by
Stiftung Mercator,
an carried out by the Career Services of the Universities of
Düsseldorf, Hanover and Münster.

Why do a Reflection Diary?

Hello and welcome,



We're delighted that you are interested in our Reflection Diary.

Students want and, in some cases, need to gain practical experience during their studies. They usually do an internship for this purpose. This Reflection Diary serves to provide a simplified and individual description and evaluation of your internship. The diary is designed to be used exclusively by you and gives your space to record your experiences.

What actually is a reflection? We will explain to you how you can reflect on your internship experiences and use these reflections to generate added value from it. A reflection describes the writing process in which you look back on your experience with your personal opinion always in the foreground.

What is the purpose of an internship reflection? During your internship, you will gain initial professional experience that is ideally also closely linked to your studies. An internship reflection helps you to draw your own conclusions from the internship for both your further studies and your professional goals.

The Reflection Diary was created as part of our eLearning unit. You can use the diary either separately from or in combination with the unit – however you prefer to work. It covers phases before, during and after your internship and supports you in exploring and analyzing your experiences.

Tip: You can also print out the Reflection Diary if you would rather fill it out in writing.

We hope that you will have a lot of fun working on your personal Reflection Diary!

Have
fun!

content

Why do a Reflection Diary?.....	2
content.....	3
Searching and Applying for an Internship.....	4
What goals do you want to achieve in your internship?	4
Your strenghts	5
Your ideal working environment	8
Use what you have: your knowledge and skills	10
Use what you have: your contacts and networks	12
The interview.....	13
What are your expectations going into the internship?	14
Life as an intern	15
The first day of work	15
Your own project.....	17
Reflection on your feedback diary	18
Self-Reflection	19
Achievement and expectation check	19
Transfer reflection	19
Input for your studies	25
Notes	27

Searching and Applying for an Internship

Reflecting on your own strengths, your plans for the future and your way of working is helpful even before the internship. It gives you the opportunity to get to know yourself better, which in turn allows you to be prepared for the application process and leave a good impression in your interview with your reflective answers.

What goals do you want to achieve in your internship?

Setting yourself goals gives you motivation and orientation. They make it easier for you to make decisions and protect you from giving up too soon.

Use the space below to define your personal goals in relation to your internship. Remember to make your goals “smart” (specific, measurable, attractive, realistic and timed).



Your strengths

Answering the following questions can already give you a clear idea of the area in which you want to complete your internship and what your focus might be. Being aware of your strengths will show you in which area your internship could be located or which work routines are appealing to you. Think about what you find particularly easy compared to your friends.



1. Which strengths come to your mind spontaneously?

2. Ask your fellow students, parents or colleagues from side jobs or volunteer jobs: What do they value most about you?

3. Which hobbies and interests come to your mind spontaneously?

4. What aspect of your studies are you most interested in? What do you find easy?

5. For what have you already received praised or positive feedback from others?

6. What activities make you completely lose track of time?

7. What have you needed to cope with difficult situations successfully?

8. What qualities of your fellow human beings annoy you?

9. Is there anything that you find particularly easy while others find it hard?

Here are some explanations for the questions:

1. Many people find it difficult to instantly name their own strengths. Take your time and add to your list over time.
2. You can also write down hobbies that you currently do not have time for or that you used to love.
3. Answering this question could already give you a clear idea of the area in which you would like to complete your internship or what your major field of study might be.
4. You often already find out in school whether you are more linguistically gifted, creative, mathematical or technically versed. Perhaps you have lost sight of a direction that you would like to reintegrate into professional development during internships or after your studies. If you have always liked languages and art and are now studying design, for example, you could consider doing an internship abroad to enable you to apply your foreign language skills again.
5. Sometimes we are not even aware of our strengths. Positive feedback can help you perceive the characteristics for which you are praised as a strength. If you already have attracted positive attention due to a characteristic or knowledge on several occasions, you can assume that this is a valuable talent.
6. The more joy an activity brings, the faster time flies. Such so-called “flow states” are associated with high concentration and are special indicators of your strengths and interests.
7. Your true strengths come through in difficult moments. Maybe one of your strengths is to always stay calm in stressful situations, or you can easily improvise when everything threatens to sink into chaos?
8. Disturbing characteristics in others are often values that are important to you. If you are disturbed by the fact that your best friend is always late, it may well be that punctuality is very important to you and therefore one of your great strengths.
9. Maybe you are not aware of your existing strengths, and it would be helpful for you to think about what you find particularly easy compared to your friends. Maybe people always turn to you for one thing. If you are the first person they contact for IT issues, for example, you are sure to have a strength here.

You have now compiled a list of your strengths, interests and talents. You should now have some good reference points for the application process and at the same time be better prepared for your interview, in which you are likely to be asked about your strengths.

Your ideal working environment

Have you ever thought about where you would most like to work? Do you prefer to work on your own or in a team? Do you need a lot of guidance or a lot of space? Do you want tasks that are more recurring or more creative? What do you think you need in order to work well? Try out the following activity: Set a stopwatch for 5 minutes and write down (without thinking) everything that comes to mind on the topic of "My ideal workspace". Try to keep your pen on the paper and write down every single thought that comes to mind (even if it is not related to the actual task).

After the activity:

Read through everything again and see which notes relate to your ideal workplace. Check whether you have answered all of the questions above and if not, add your thoughts on them.

Now that you have sketched out your ideal workplace, think about the industries and areas of responsibility in which this work environment may be possible. This will ideally bring you a big step closer to the idea of where you want to do your internship.

Use what you have: your knowledge and skills

Would you like to address a specific connection between your knowledge from your studies in your internship? If so, the following questions will help you to find the right transfer content and the appropriate field of application.

Look back on your last two semesters: Which lecture/seminar do you have particularly positive memories of? Which theory, area of application, or method did you find particularly interesting?

If you have come up with something: What exactly do you know about this subject content? Where can you get more information?

Can you think of any activities or practical projects that are closely related to your favorite topic from your studies?

You now need to consider where this study content could be of interest in the world of work or how it is used: In which areas can you think of examples where it is used? Are there certain sectors that are particularly suited to this content?

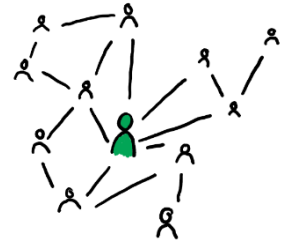
Picture this company or organization: How could you apply your favorite topic from your studies here?

Imagine that you are completing an internship at this company or organization and the supervisor 'grants' you 10–20% of your working hours for your own internship project: What would you like to work on? What would you work on if the internship project needed to be closely related to your favorite topic from your studies?

Do your ideas match your work environment with regard to your transfer idea? If not, go back a step and think about how you can combine the two – or decide which aspect is more important to you.

Use what you have: your contacts and networks

In addition to your own knowledge, you can also use your contacts and networks to find your ideal internship.



You should therefore consider: Are there people or networks in your life that can help you in your search for an internship placement?

- A fellow student who has told you about exciting aspects of their internship?
- A friend who volunteers in an attractive field of work?
- A relative who works at an interesting company?
- A lecturer who presented suitable institutions for your field during their lecture?
- An internship representative from your field of study with insights into where other students have already had good experiences?

Write down three people who spontaneously come to mind within this context and write down what kind of additional information you expect them to provide. These may be content-related questions or organizational ones – how did the person get the internship? What do I have to consider when applying?

The interview

You should reflect on each interview in order to be better prepared for the next one. Write down your evaluation so that you can remind yourself before your next interview.

Were you satisfied with yourself and your answers? What was good, and what can go better next time?

How did the self-presentation go? What, if anything, can you improve?

Did you prepare yourself well enough? What should you invest more time in?

How did you come across to the interviewers? What should pay more attention to next time (e.g. smile more often, ask more questions)?

Did you feel comfortable in your outfit or should you change it next time?

Were your questions appropriate, well prepared and asked in the right places?

What are your expectations going into the internship?

You have found an internship and are on the verge of starting it. Think about the expectations you have for the internship: What do you think you are going to learn? What kind of tasks will await you? What knowledge from your studies will be useful for your internship? What skills and abilities do you want to have learned or strengthened at the end of your internship?

Write down your answers to these questions here so that you can look back on them after the internship.

Life as an intern

The first day of work

You have mastered your first day of work, wonderful! In this Reflection Diary, you can write down how your first day went and what you experienced. Were you introduced to the company and were you able to meet your new colleagues? Were your expectations of your first day met?

Use this page to describe your first day of work.

Think about what you particularly liked and what you found difficult.

How did you feel and what feelings did you have throughout the day?

What influence did your first impressions have on the expectations and goals that you wrote down in advance?

Your own project

Have you already had an opportunity to present your own project? Write down what ideas and wishes you already have in your Reflection Diary. This will help you to make your ideas clear and to structure your thoughts, thus enabling your project to be better presented at a later point in time.

What are you interested in? Show courage and realize your own project! If you have not already done so before the internship, now is the time to use the chapter “Use what you have: your knowledge and skills” in your Reflection Diary.

Reflection on your feedback diary

Were you given the opportunity to receive qualified feedback? Great! Now we need to reflect on this feedback in order to get the most out of the discussion.



Write down what you were praised for and what was criticized.

What suggestions were made?

How did you feel during the feedback discussion?

An integral part of feedback discussions is that you should not justify yourself. Did you feel the need to justify yourself? Where did you find it hard to accept criticism?

How do you want to integrate this feedback into your work as an intern?

Do you have any questions that came up after the feedback discussions and still need to be clarified – including those concerning the implementation of the criticism?

Self-Reflection

We are delighted that you have finished your internship. Here you have the opportunity to look back on your internship and experiences one more time. Are you satisfied with your decisions?



Achievement and expectation check

Look back again. Were your initial expectations met? Are there any new expectations that you might want to add next time?

If your expectations have not been met, why was this the case? Did you imagine that things would be different or were there any interpersonal problems?

Think about how you can specify your expectations more clearly in the future or what you can do to ensure that they are met.

What were your goals and have you achieved them?

What new skills have you gained?

To what extent have you been able to further develop your strenghts for the future?

Have you gained new knowledge and if so, which?

Which skills and abilities have you applied and possibly further developed?

Which of you abilities/skills do you want to further develop?

Transfer reflection

If you decided that you wanted your internship to be linked to your studies, you should now reflect on this transfer approach. You should first ask yourself: Did the transfer work or was it not able or only partially able to be integrated into the internship? Depending on your answer to this question, you can find corresponding further questions for your own personal reflection below.

The transfer was successful

Were you supported? Did you receive help (and maybe even ask for it yourself)?

Was the project highly compatible with the rest of your tasks?

Did your internship host make sure that you had enough time for your project?

Were there times at which you doubted the implementation of your transfer project and if so, how did you deal with them?

What experiences will you take with you from your transfer project?

How did the transfer project influence you, and what did you learn during the implementation?

What has your project brought to the company or institution?

Will you continue your transfer project? If you, for example, have developed a tool, will it continue to be used?

Was the knowledge you contributed documented in any form?

Is there a way for you and/or your employer to continue working on the project?

Reflect on all other tasks too and think about where content-based references to your studies could be made. As you reflect on this, you might find that in addition to successfully implementing your project, you were also able to establish links to your study content through other tasks.

The transfer was only partially or not at all successful

At what point did you notice that the transfer (project) would not succeed? Think about how you dealt with that realization.

When did you decide on the transfer project?

Did the decision-making process already take too long?

Were you unable to identify a suitable transfer-project? What could have been the reason for this?

How important was the implementation of the transfer project to you? Did its importance increase or decrease during the internship?

Who was open to your transfer project and what support did you get from this person?

Were there also people who openly rejected your project or the idea of the transfer project in general and thus demotivated you?

Think about the impact that you had on the implementation of your transfer project and how you might be able to seek or request more support next time.

Did your planned transfer project suit the company and your field of activity? In this respect, it is also important to consider which tasks you were assigned independent of your transfer project and how they related to your transfer project

At what point were the other tasks more important and how can you better allocate time in order to still have enough time for your project?

Reflect on all other tasks too and think about where content-based references to your studies could be made. As you reflect on this, you might find that although you were unable to implement your project, you were able to establish links to your study content through other tasks.

Input for your studies

An internship also requires follow-up work. Many of the aspects that you have already documented in your Reflection Diary play an important role in this. This follow-up work will provide you with a few more ideas and incentives for a deeper reflection regarding your studies and further career.

Have you been able to gain new motivation for your studies from the internship? If so, what kind of motivation and how do you intend to use it?

Do you see a new meaning in your studies because of your internship? If so, which one?

Which skills that you were able to develop in the internship will help you with your studies or in your day-to-day life as a student? In what situations will you be able to use them?

During your internship, did you come into contact with content that you could explore in more depth in a paper, thesis or presentation? Think about how your experience from the internship could be integrated into an examination or study component at your university.

Did your internship provide you with new prospects for your professional future?

What is the path that you need to take to explore these prospects? Are any new content-related study specializations helpful for this? Are there further courses of study (e.g. master's degree) that will help you on your way?

How would you assess the benefits of your internship for your professional career?

Is there a gap in your knowledge that you have identified and that you still want to close within the scope of your studies?

Have you discovered a specialization in which you would like to work in the future?

Notes

Imprint

Published by

Leibniz Universität Hannover
Zentrale Einrichtung für Qualitätsentwicklung in Studium und Lehre (ZQS)
Abteilung Schlüsselkompetenzen
Callinstraße 14
30167 Hannover



And

Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf
Studierendenakademie
Abteilung Career Service
Universitätsstraße 1
40225 Düsseldorf



Cover photo: Shutterstock.com/Mooshny

Developed by the ZQS, Key Competencies Department, LUH and the Career Service of the HHU.

Developed in the project "Making better use of the potential of student internships - a nationwide desideratum of higher education", funded by the Mercator Foundation.

In cooperation with



Dusseldorf, Dezember 2020

