

Internships are valuable learning experiences in the early or transitional stages of your practice, whether it be across art, craft or design. These experiences give invaluable professional exposure; help you form meaningful working relationships and strengthen your network; give you an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to live situations; and at a minimum add a couple of lines to the experience section on your CV.

Internships may be established formally through university programs, found through call-outs or develop casually through your social network. Regardless of the courtship or application process, it is critical to establish clear guidelines for your working relationship to ensure it's a good deal for all parties involved. Having clarity on the role will allow you to work effectively and confidently.

Approaching employers

If independently seeking an internship, consider your gaps in knowledge, experience or professional relationships and which employers or role may fill this need. Do your research and be ambitious! Assemble a list of dream employers or practitioners working locally or internationally, and consider what you might learn from them. Keep in mind that internships sometimes develop into ongoing work.

When applying for an internship (independently or via application), be aware of your communication style. This is relative to the context you are in, but it is important to be polite, succinct and accurate. You will need to provide a:

- **Cover letter** - no more than one page, this should outline the state of your practice, your interest in the specific role, and your relevant skills.
- **CV** - likewise, no more than one page, your CV should be a curated and highly relevant document listing your education, professional experience (paid or voluntary), relevant workshops, awards and/or grants received, published works and professional references (three is usually appropriate).

Managing expectations

In the courtship phase of your internship, make sure to have conversations with your employer to ensure mutual expectations of the role. Some elements may be negotiated, and if committing to the internship it is important to have the expectations confirmed in writing.

- **Key learning outcomes.** What are the skills and experiences you wish to gain from the internship and how can the employer integrate this into your role?
- **Time limit.** Establish a clear duration for the internship period. This may include stages for each party to review the progress.
- **Working hours.** It's important to be clear on working hours and their tolerance. Have a conversation around other work, study or personal commitments to negotiate a realistic arrangement. While you likely will be working for free (or for a small fee), being professional and consistent is important.
- **Getting paid.** Whether this is the case or not, be clear about the expectations here. Is it paid or unpaid? Will you be given a per diem or travel compensation? Will you be remunerated through other services or goods, and is this appropriate?
- **Responsibilities.** Be clear what your work will be so you can make a fair judgement on the value of the internship to your professional development. If you will be working on a specific project, ask for a project description or brief outlining the scope, resources and timeline.

Getting paid in peanuts

Like many industries in Australia and around the world, unpaid internships are common. While it is possible that employers offer a fee for your work, the crux of the situation is that it is an educational exchange. The [Fair Work Ombudsman's](#) position on Unpaid Internships is that:

- The person must not be doing "productive" work
- The main benefit of the arrangement should be to the person doing the placement, and
- It must be clear that the person is receiving a meaningful learning experience, training or skill development.

Further information can be found via the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#).