

**Virtual Internships:**

**10 Top Tips for Remote Working**

**1. Create a Work Space**

A dedicated workspace helps you to approach working from home in an organised and efficient manner. If your home does not have a separate home office, use a well-lit and least used space in your home that can provides you with enough room for your equipment and resources, ideally away from your rest areas. When we sit down for so long during the day, you might like to consider creating a space to stand and work for part of the day, as long as it also follows [working safely with display screen equipment guidance.](https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/) [Reasonable adjustments](https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments) can be made for an employee who has a disability.

You may be sharing your home with your family or flatmates so a protected work space may not be easy. Some ideas you could use include using headphones; have a sign on your room door or laptop ‘please do not disturb until …’; build in regular breaks, perhaps to play with the children in the household; or agree with others to not use domestic appliances during a certain time period

**2. Equipment and Technology**

You will need to discuss what equipment and technology you need to work remotely with your employer. Employers usually provide you with this and the support you need to access the right systems e.g. shared inboxes and cloud file storage such as [MS One Drive](https://products.office.com/en-gb/onedrive/online-cloud-storage) or [Trello.](https://trello.com/) You will also need to ensure you can access the right communication platforms such as [Skype for Business](https://www.skype.com/en/business/); [Cisco Webex Meetings](https://www.cisco.com/c/en_uk/products/conferencing/webex-meetings/index.html); [Meeting Owl](https://www.owllabs.com/meeting-owl?utm_campaign=brand-uk&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=ppc&msclkid=1b5c07f8a3db1418ba905965dc492dca); [Google Hangouts Meet](https://gsuite.google.com/intl/en_uk/products/meet/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=emea-gb-all-en-dr-bkws-all-all-trial-e-t1-1008069&utm_content=text-ad-crnurturectrl-none-DEV_c-CRE_430903515059-ADGP_Hybrid%20%7C%20AW%20SEM%20%7C%20BKWS%20~%20EXA_M:1_GB_EN_Hangouts_Meet-KWID_43700052494145989-kwd-293231125089-userloc_9045340&utm_term=KW_google%20hangouts%20meet-g&ds_rl=1259922&gclid=CjwKCAjwkPX0BRBKEiwA7THxiEOLJ-sDw_IrCNH8S7pnuw9drqNbWVd9fAe2Dmxxd2fDmaev5QqXSRoC2yUQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds); [Zoom;](https://zoom.us/) [MS Teams](https://products.office.com/en-US/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software) and [GoToWebinar](https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-gb/webinar/lp/easy-webinars?cid=g2w_emea_ggs_cpc_brand_gotowebinar_e&gclid=CPHW-8jS8egCFY2BhQodfFQBNw).

Be prepared for technology not working. Does your broadband have sufficient bandwidth and where you sit has good enough Wi-Fi strength? If you lose connection have a [What’s App Team group](https://www.whatsapp.com/) set up so you can still communicate and at least let your team know what is happening.

Some of this technology might be new to your employer and colleagues. If you are already familiar with it perhaps you could support them with using it?

**3. Agreeing Clear Expectations**

Remote working can be a significant change to those used to working in the workplace, with easy face-to-face access to their team. It is important to build a new type of trusted working relationship and to avoid misunderstandings it could be useful to agree:

* When you are available to work and when you will be working
* How you will stay in touch and who will organise this
* When work will be set and reviewed
* How your performance will be measured and managed
* Where your work will be stored and who has access to it
* When you will be taking breaks and how you will communicate this with others. Maybe you could enter your working hours in your signature; add an ‘out of office’ message on your email; enter your working hours on a shared team calendar.
* Who you should contact if you have any problems or circumstances have changed

**4. Getting Motivated and Being Productive**

Life has many demands and things you want to do and achieve. Doing a good job and carving out a successful career is one of those. To stay productive at work you need balance with your work and home life. These 3 steps can help you stay on track:

**a) Strategize** - What do you want to achieve and why? What is the driver or motivation behind this? Set a goal and make a plan listing your objectives, then break in down into a list of manageable tasks.

**b) Focus** - Quantify how long each task takes and book it into your schedule. To prioritise, we must work on the tasks that have the nearest deadline and are deemed to have the highest importance. To establish what is your highest importance activity in the workplace consider:

* What are your own responsibilities and duties?
* What are your contributions to team duties?
* What is the impact of the work?
* Who requested the work to be undertaken? How important are they to the business and your career e.g. senior position; new customer; loyal customer.
* When was it requested?
* Who is the work being produced for?
* Who is leading on the work?
* Who do you need to collaborate with and what is their availability?
* How long does the work take to complete?
* How can the work be undertaken? Do you know how to undertake the work or does it require additional learning? Have you got access to the right information and systems?

Most people create a long ‘To Do List’, but once you have decided your priorities you can create a ‘Must Do Today List’. If you receive a lot of new emails that distract you from your list, perhaps you could consider checking your emails twice a day to see if you need to re-prioritise your day. Try and keep the structure of your day simple.

**c) Commit**- Have you completed everything on the ‘Must Do Today List’? If not, reflect upon why this hasn’t worked? Is your strategy still correct? Did you prioritise correctly? Did you allocate enough time to each task you booked in? Perhaps you are procrastinating and working on the easy hits rather that the priorities? If so maybe you should ‘[eat the frog’](https://doist.com/blog/eat-the-frog-todoist/) or deal with the most challenging task of your day first?

Maybe you need to work on a new daily routine? Did you feel ready for a day of work by waking up on time, getting washed and dressed; exercised; had breakfast and ticked off one or more home-life priorities before you start work? Creating a new morning routine can be your ‘fake commute’.

Do you need to build in energisers during the day? A quick stretch, breath of fresh air and a healthy snack can help you press the reset button.

A good way to stay motivated is to also spend a moment at the end of the day to look at everything you have achieved that day and see how completing some urgent tasks have helped you get that one step closer to achieving your goals.

Working from home is not all about challenge. Reflect upon the positives it brings, for example, you have a flexible job; you can make a cooked lunch; and being more sustainable by avoiding the daily commute. Appreciating the good things in life will help you feel more motivated.

University of Exeter student and vlogger [Ruby Granger has some great top tips on being productive](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0-trTFGfR4) especially managing work and study commitments.

**5. Communication Adjustments**

Developing and maintaining good working relationships with your manager and colleagues requires a change in communication when working remotely. As mentioned above being accountable about when you are working is important.

Being mindful that your colleagues will have competing demands on their time when working at home, so check when they are available to communicate; it’s good to respect the boundaries people set.

People may be under pressure, so helping others, including by being kind and generous with your words will be appreciated. Perhaps you could instigate a virtual ‘water cooler’ chat to connect with colleagues in a non-work way.

**6. Virtual Meetings**

* Get ready in advance with your technology and agenda items.
* Consider colleagues in other time zones when you set meetings.
* Remember to switch on your camera; blur your background (or choose a suitable location) and consider your non-verbal communication. You will also need to think about how you are dressed and whether it is appropriate for this meeting.
* Invite others in to give their thoughts and ideas. Be specific and ask people by name, otherwise everyone could start talking at once.
* Speak slowly and clearly and pause before responding to others as sometimes there is a time lapse between transmissions.
* Perhaps appoint a meeting facilitator to monitor chat comments during the meeting?
* Avoid distractions like checking email or having side conversations with people in the group.
* It is useful for your records to keep a summary of key points and actions after a virtual individual or team meetings.

**7. Regular Breaks**

For your health and wellbeing it is important to take regular breaks; this includes physically moving and taking a break from looking at your screen. Stepping away from your desk at lunchtime will help you feel re-energised for the afternoon ahead. You could even set up reminders to take a break, such as using Alexa Flash Meeting.

**8. Personal Support**

Social isolating or distancing can have an impact on our mental health. For information on self-care and other treatments for mental health issues please see: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>.

Do you think your employer could support you through this time? There may be HR policies and services available to you through your company. If not, would you feel able to discuss how your employer could support you? Ask to schedule a convenient and confidential 1:1 meeting with your line manager to discuss.

As an intern [Jo McCreedie](mailto:j.mccreedie@exeter.ac.uk) from the Internships Team could offer initial support. For more specialist support you may be eligible to access the university’s [Student Wellbeing services](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/wellbeing/) or the [University’s Staff Wellbeing services](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/).

**9. Flexible Working**

If you wish to change your normal working hours you will need to get permission from your line manager to work ‘flexible working hours’. They may not want you to work late every night and not be available for a client meeting early the next day as you have worked your hours! The key is to come to an agreement, for example if you have parenting responsibilities and temporarily need to look after your children during the day, could you negotiate with your employer to work every evening?

It is good to be flexible, but remember you are usually contracted to work a set number of hours and unless you have agreed paid overtime, you will need to keep a note of an extra hours you are accruing and share that with your manager, to agree when you can take these hours off work as ‘flexi’.

**10.** **When to Stop Working**

Where there aren’t the normal prompts to remind us it is the end of the day, sometimes people will let the working day drift on. Don’t forget the importance of work-life balance to remain a happy, motivated and productive intern!