

The STEM Advantage: Career Planning and Internship Strategies for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Postgraduate Students

THE STEM ADVANTAGE: CAREER PLANNING AND INTERNSHIP STRATEGIES FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

BEN ARCHER







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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

At James Cook University we acknowledge with respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples, educators and innovators of this country. We acknowledge that Country was never ceded, and value the accumulation of knowledge and traditions that reflect the wisdom of ancestral lines going back some 60,000 years, and recognise the significance of this in the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of Country. As a University, we will continue to learn ways to care for and be responsible for Country, and we will collectively seek to build a future that is based on truth-telling, mutual understanding, hope, empowerment, and self-determination.



Kassandra Savage (JCU Alumni), 'Coming Together and Respecting Difference', acrylic on canvas, 2014, 90cm x 90cm. © Kassandra Savage, reproduced with permission of the artist

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book serves as your practical guide to navigating workplace experiences during your internship and early career. Written specifically for students transitioning from university studies into professional practice, it provides evidence-based strategies and actionable frameworks to help you develop essential workplace capabilities.

The content draws from extensive research into intern experiences and organisational psychology, combined with real-world examples that illustrate how to apply theoretical concepts in practice. Each chapter builds your professional knowledge systematically, moving from foundational skills like resume development through to advanced capabilities like managing artificial intelligence tools in the workplace.

Throughout the book, you'll find activities designed to help you reflect on your experiences and develop practical approaches to common workplace challenges. These activities encourage you to think critically about your professional development while building tangible skills you can apply immediately in your internship.

The book maintains a strong focus on supporting linguistically diverse students entering Australian workplaces. You'll find clear explanations of workplace communication norms, cultural expectations, and professional practices that might differ from your previous experiences.

While aimed primarily at students undertaking workplace learning experiences as part of their degree requirements, this book also serves as a valuable resource for anyone beginning their professional journey in Australian workplaces. The frameworks and strategies provided will help you build positive workplace relationships, navigate organisational cultures, and develop the professional capabilities needed for career success.

Each chapter includes specific learning objectives, practical activities, and key takeaways that reinforce important concepts. The book's structure allows you to either work through it sequentially or focus on particular topics relevant to your current workplace challenges. Remember to engage actively with the reflection activities and practical exercises. Your professional development benefits most when you apply these concepts thoughtfully to your own experiences.

AI was used in the development of this book. I have taken a 'centaur' approach (see Chapter 6), and engaged with Claude.ai to break any writer's blocks and then rewritten the text in my own words.

Ben Archer

INTRODUCTION

Transitioning from university studies into professional practice represents one of the most significant shifts in your career journey. While your academic studies have equipped you with essential technical knowledge, succeeding in the workplace requires developing a broader set of professional capabilities. I've designed this book to serve as your guide through this crucial transition, helping you navigate workplace relationships, understand organisational cultures, and build the professional skills needed for career success.

Your internship experience offers a unique opportunity to develop these workplace capabilities in a supported environment. Rather than expecting you to figure everything out through trial and error, I have given some evidence-based frameworks and practical strategies you can apply immediately in your professional role. The content draws from extensive research into successful internship experiences, incorporating insights from career development, organisational psychology, professional communication studies, and workplace learning theory.

Throughout this book, you'll find practical activities designed to help you reflect on your experiences and develop tangible workplace skills. These activities encourage you to think critically about your professional development while building capabilities you can demonstrate to future employers. Each chapter includes specific learning objectives that clearly outline what you'll learn, followed by detailed explanations, real-world examples, and opportunities to practice these skills.

I've written this book with particular attention to supporting students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds entering Australian workplaces. You'll find clear explanations of workplace communication norms, cultural expectations, and professional practices that might differ from your previous experiences. Regular reflection points help you connect concepts to your own cultural background and professional aspirations.

The book's structure follows the typical internship journey, beginning with securing your placement and moving through to successfully transitioning into your early career. Early chapters focus on foundational skills like developing your resume and preparing for interviews. Middle chapters address key workplace capabilities such as building professional relationships, managing artificial intelligence tools, and developing emotional intelligence. Later chapters help you document your achievements and plan your next career steps.

While I designed this book primarily for students undertaking formal workplace learning experiences, it serves as a valuable resource for anyone beginning their professional journey in Australian workplaces. Whether you're starting an internship, entering graduate employment, or transitioning between careers, the frameworks and strategies provided here will help you develop the professional capabilities needed for workplace success.

I encourage you to engage actively with the reflection activities and practical exercises throughout this book. Your professional development benefits most when you thoughtfully apply these concepts to your own experiences. Remember that building professional capabilities takes time and practice, use this book as an ongoing reference as you navigate your internship and early career journey.

I have drawn inspiration from the experiences of hundreds of students I've supported through their internships over the past fifteen years. The stories you'll find in these pages come from real situations that students have encountered during their placements, though I've changed names, settings, and specific details, these experiences range from triumphs to challenges, from moments of insight to difficult lessons learned. Through these stories, you'll see how other students have navigated similar situations to those you might face during your own internship journey.

As you read the stories and examples, you might recognise situations similar to your own experiences. Each story has been carefully chosen to illustrate important principles of professional development and workplace success. The students whose experiences inspired these stories faced many of the same challenges you might encounter, from navigating cultural differences to building professional relationships to managing difficult workplace situations. Their journeys, though anonymised, offer valuable insights into how to approach your own professional development.

Welcome to this important step in your professional development. Let's begin building the capabilities that will support your career success.

1. GETTING THE INTERNSHIP

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- develop a comprehensive professional portfolio, including your resume, LinkedIn profile, and introduction email that aligns with your career goals and aspirations
- create and execute a strategic plan for securing your internship, incorporating effective job search techniques and professional networking strategies.

Imagine this Scenario

You sit down at your desk, open your laptop, and type "internships near me" into Google. The search returns thousands of results. Your heart races a little faster. Where do you even begin? The internship unit seemed like such a good idea when you enrolled, but now the reality of finding a placement is setting in.

You start methodically, creating a spreadsheet of potential companies. But after an hour of searching, you've only found three that seem promising. Anxiety creeps in. What if you can't find anything? What if no one responds?

The methodical approach quickly unravels. You begin opening tab after tab of company websites, firing off emails to anyone with a listed contact address. Marketing firms, design studios, advertising agencies, at this point, you're casting the widest net possible. Your emails become increasingly desperate, less tailored to each company.

Then you remember someone mentioning ChatGPT. Just to save time, you think, you ask it to draft a template email. You quickly modify it slightly and send it to thirty different companies in rapid succession.

It's only when you're reviewing your sent folder that your stomach drops. There it is, in the last line of every single email: "Feel free to use this template to inquire about internship opportunities at other companies." Your face burns hot with embarrassment as you realise you've just revealed to every potential employer that you're sending out mass-produced, Algenerated emails. You slump in your chair, wondering how you're going to fix this mess.

Does this sound familiar? Or perhaps you're worried about ending up in a similar situation? Don't worry, we've got you covered. In this chapter, we'll show you how to approach your internship search strategically and professionally, helping you avoid the common pitfalls that many students



From the Beginning...

Your resume serves as the cornerstone of your internship search and future career journey. Whether it's called a curriculum vitae (CV), profile, or resume, this document is your primary professional marketing tool. Throughout this book, we'll refer to it as a resume for consistency.

Think of your resume as a living document that grows and evolves alongside your professional development. As you gain new experiences, develop new skills, and achieve new accomplishments, your resume should reflect these changes. It's not something you create once and file away, it's a dynamic record of your professional journey.

When employers receive your application, your resume is typically the first document they review, even before reading your cover letter. This makes it your crucial first impression and your opportunity to showcase your potential value to the organisation. A well-crafted resume can open doors to interviews and opportunities, while a poorly constructed one might close them before you've had a chance to demonstrate your capabilities.

A strong resume combines several key elements: clear structure, relevant content, professional

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presentation, and evidence of your achievements. Each component, from your educational background to your work experience, from your technical skills to your extracurricular activities, plays a vital role in painting a comprehensive picture of your professional potential. When these elements work together effectively, your resume becomes a powerful tool for opening doors to professional opportunities.



Breaking Down Misconceptions

When creating your resume, you'll likely encounter various "rules" that may limit your ability to showcase your potential effectively. Let's examine some common misconceptions about resumes.



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https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=305#h5p-22

Rather than focusing on rigid rules, your energy is better spent on developing the key elements that make a resume truly effective. What matters most is creating a clear structure, including relevant content, maintaining a professional presentation, and providing evidence of your achievements. These components, from showcasing your educational journey to highlighting your work experiences, from demonstrating your technical capabilities to featuring your extracurricular involvement, work together to present a comprehensive picture of your professional potential. When thoughtfully crafted, these elements combine to create a powerful tool that opens doors to professional opportunities.

What Makes an Effective Resume?

The JCU Careers and Employability team offers sample graduate resumes for different study areas. These examples help students and recent graduates create strong job applications. By looking at the sample

resumes for Engineering, Environmental Science, Information Technology, Marine Science and Science, we can see what makes a resume effective.

All examples use clear, simple formatting that works well with employer application systems. They avoid complex tables, fancy fonts or graphics that might cause problems. Each resume starts with professional contact details: name, city/state location, professional email and LinkedIn profile.

Education appears near the start of each resume, which works well for recent graduates. Each one shows academic achievements clearly, including course projects and strong results. When a student has a high GPA (above 6.0 out of 7.0), they include this information. Putting education early helps show core qualifications straight away.

All samples present practical experience well, whether from work placements, internships or part-time work. They use strong action words and clear examples rather than vague descriptions. The examples also show how to present useful skills from casual jobs, like showing how your customer service work built communication skills.

Professional development and technical skills sections match each field of study. The IT resume focuses on technical skills, while Environmental and Marine Science resumes highlight fieldwork and research abilities. All include relevant training and professional memberships.

The resumes also include community work and volunteering that relates to their career goals. This shows initiative beyond university requirements. Lastly, all resumes end with professional references from academics and industry contacts, rather than personal references.

Getting Feedback on Your Resume

It is always beneficial to have someone else review your resume before submitting it to potential employers. A fresh set of eyes can catch errors you may have missed and provide valuable suggestions for improvement. Making an appointment with a Career Development Professional is highly recommended, as they can offer expert guidance tailored to your field and career goals. Most universities, including JCU, have dedicated careers services where you can connect with qualified professionals who understand both academic and industry requirements.



While there is no substitute for personalised feedback from a trained professional, JCU students also have access to ResumeAI through the Big Interview platform. This AI-powered tool can provide quick, actionable feedback on your resume's content, format, and overall presentation. ResumeAI analyses your resume against industry standards and offers specific suggestions for enhancement. Though it should not replace consultation with a Career Development Professional, it serves as a useful preliminary review tool that you can access at any time during your resume development process.

Activity 1.1: Creating a Resume

JCU provides editable resume templates that you can access through the JCU Careers page. These templates offer different layouts while ensuring you include all essential information. You can download the template that best suits your needs and follow these steps to complete it:

- Download your preferred template from the JCU Careers Page.
- Open the template in Microsoft Word.



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https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=305#h5p-20

Take it a step further

While these templates provide a solid foundation for your resume, getting professional feedback can make a significant difference in your job search success. Here's how you can take your resume to the next level:



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https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=305#h5p-21



Career Development Professionals work with resumes every day and understand what employers are looking for. Their expertise can help you present your experiences and skills in the most compelling way possible.

The Interview

Interview preparation is essential for making a strong impression on potential employers. Taking time to research, practice, and prepare helps build your confidence and demonstrates professionalism to interviewers. Before any interview, thoroughly research the organisation, understand the role requirements, and practice your responses to common questions.

Interviews can feel like daunting experiences, with anxiety often building in the days leading up to them. Your heart might race, your palms might sweat, and you might worry about forgetting everything you wanted to say. These feelings are entirely normal, even the most seasoned professionals experience interview nerves. However, it's worth remembering that an interview is fundamentally a professional conversation, an opportunity to meet someone who could become an important mentor or connection in your career journey. Rather than viewing your interviewer as an adversary, consider them a potential ally in your professional development. They're not there to catch you out but to discover if there's a mutual fit between you and their organisation. With thorough preparation, including researching the company, practising your responses, and planning thoughtful questions, you can transform nervous energy into genuine enthusiasm. This preparation helps shift your mindset from seeing the interview as an interrogation to viewing it as your first professional conversation with someone who could become a valuable part of your career network.

Useful Resource: The Big Interview



JCU provides all students with free access to Big Interview, an online platform designed to help you master interview techniques and build confidence. This comprehensive resource offers virtual mock interviews across 20+ industries, thousands of practice questions with expert tips, and the ability to record and share your responses for feedback. You can access Big Interview using your JCU email address to begin strengthening your interview skills today.

When asked to "Tell us about yourself", consider this your opportunity to create a compelling narrative that leads to your interest in this internship. Start by explaining what attracted you to this specific role and company, then connect this to your current career aspirations. From there, work backwards to discuss how your degree, major, and relevant coursework have prepared you for this opportunity. Include examples from your part-time work, volunteering, or university projects that demonstrate relevant skills and experiences. This approach helps the interviewer immediately understand your motivation and see the logical progression of your journey towards their organisation.

Interviewers asking, "Why do you want to intern here?" are looking for evidence that you've done your homework and have a genuine interest in their organisation. Before your interview, thoroughly research the company's website, social media presence, and recent news. Make specific notes about projects, initiatives, or achievements that genuinely excite you. Pay particular attention to the company's stated values and culture. How do these align with your own principles? Reference their industry reputation and market position, showing you understand their standing in the sector. Then, connect these observations directly to your studies and career aspirations. For example, if the company emphasises innovation and you're studying engineering, discuss how their cutting-edge projects would help you apply your theoretical knowledge in real-world situations. This comprehensive approach demonstrates both your research effort and your ability to see yourself contributing to their organisation.



When discussing what you want to learn during the internship, present a balanced view of both professional growth and organisational contribution. Express your enthusiasm for experiencing teamwork in a professional Australian workplace setting. This is particularly valuable as it differs significantly from university group work. Emphasise your desire to gain industry-specific knowledge while contributing meaningfully to team projects and organisational goals. Share your interest in developing essential workplace capabilities such as professional communication, project management, and cross-functional collaboration. Importantly, highlight how this internship would provide you with relevant experience in an Australian business context, helping you understand workplace culture and professional expectations. Show genuine excitement about the opportunity to both learn from experienced professionals and contribute fresh perspectives to their teams. This demonstrates that you see the internship as a two-way relationship where both you and the organisation can benefit from the experience.

When discussing technical skills, maintain honest transparency while showcasing your experience through specific examples. Rather than simply listing software packages you've used, share brief stories about how you've applied these tools in real situations. For instance, instead of just mentioning Excel proficiency, describe how you used it to analyse data for a university project, creating pivot tables to identify key trends. When discussing design software, reference specific assignments where you've applied these skills to solve problems. Remember to describe your experience level accurately while highlighting your continuing efforts to develop your technical capabilities.

If the interviewer asks about software packages you haven't used, don't let this shake your confidence. Instead, emphasise your adaptability and enthusiasm for learning new technologies. You might say,

While I haven't used that specific software, I've demonstrated my ability to quickly master new tools throughout my studies. For example, I learned AutoCAD in just two weeks to complete a major project. I'm confident I can apply this same dedicated learning approach to any new systems I need to use in this role.

Effective preparation extends beyond practising your responses: it includes preparing thoughtful questions that help you evaluate if this organisation aligns with your career goals. Remember, an interview is a twoway conversation; while the company assesses your fit, you should also determine if the workplace culture and opportunities match your aspirations. Prepare questions that demonstrate your genuine interest while gathering valuable insights. Consider questions such as:

- What makes this a great place to work?
- How do you support professional development in this organisation?
- How would my supervisor describe their management style?
- What makes someone successful in this role?

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Beyond these questions, thoroughly research the organisation's website and recent news, review the internship description multiple times, and plan appropriate professional attire. Arrange to arrive early and bring spare copies of your resume and a notepad for notes.

Your internship search is a significant step in your professional journey. By taking a strategic approach to developing your resume, seeking feedback from Career Development Professionals, and preparing thoroughly for interviews, you position yourself for success. Remember that both your resume and interview preparation are ongoing processes and they require regular updates and refinement as you gain new experiences and skills. The resources available through JCU, including resume templates, Career Development Professionals, and the Big Interview platform, are valuable tools to support your professional development journey.

Most importantly, approach your internship search with authenticity and professionalism. While it might feel daunting at first, remember that employers are looking for enthusiastic learners who can contribute fresh perspectives to their organisations. By presenting yourself professionally through a well-crafted resume and demonstrating genuine interest and preparation during interviews, you create meaningful opportunities for your future career development. The skills you develop during this process, from crafting compelling professional documents to engaging in professional conversations, will serve you well throughout your career.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how to craft a professional resume that highlights your strengths and accomplishments using clear structure, relevant content, and evidence of achievements
- ways to break free from common resume myths and focus on creating an effective, authentic presentation of your professional journey
- the importance of seeking feedback from Career Development Professionals and utilising tools like ResumeAl to enhance your resume
- strategies for preparing for interviews, including researching organisations, practising responses to common questions, and developing thoughtful questions to ask
- methods for managing interview anxiety by reframing interviews as professional conversations and opportunities for connection
- the value of being honest about your technical capabilities while emphasising your ability to learn and adapt
- the importance of viewing internships as two-way relationships where both you and the

organisation can benefit from the experience.

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2. STARTING THE INTERNSHIP

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- adapt to different internship environments and expectations across various STEM settings
- navigate workplace relationships and responsibilities to create a positive internship experience
- apply workplace health and safety principles to ensure a secure and enriching internship environment.

Imagine this Scenario

Your alarm blares at 06:00. You've barely slept, anxious about your first day at the environmental engineering firm where you'll complete your internship. After a quick shower, you put on the professional outfit you carefully selected last night. Everything feels stiff and formal compared to your usual university attire.

Standing in front of the mirror, you triple-check your appearance while mechanically brushing your teeth. Your stomach churns too much for breakfast, but you force down some toast, remembering all those times your mother insisted it was the most important meal of the day.

Google Maps suggests your journey should take 45 minutes. You decide to catch the 07:30 bus, giving yourself plenty of time to arrive before your 09:00 start. But as you step outside, you realise you forgot to account for the morning rain. The bus is running late.

Finally arriving at what you think is the correct building, you check your phone: 08:45. Plenty of time, you assure yourself. The lobby directory lists dozens of research centres and departments,

but you can't find the one you're looking for. You try calling your supervisor's number, but it goes straight to voicemail. Your hands begin to shake as you watch the minutes tick by.

At 09:15, your phone rings. It's the internship coordinator from the university. Your supervisor contacted them, wondering if you're okay. You were supposed to meet them in the Science Building, not the Engineering Building where you're currently standing. You have 5 minutes to get to the correct location, or they'll need to cancel your internship.



As you sprint across the campus, your professional shoes pinching with every step, you can't help but wonder: Could this chaos have been avoided? What if you had done a practice run to the office earlier in the week? What if you had asked for more specific directions about where to meet? What if you had arrived even earlier to account for potential confusion?

Your heart races as you realise that thorough preparation might have prevented this stressful situation entirely.

What Is Expected of You

Preparation is essential for making a strong first impression and starting your internship smoothly. The story above demonstrates how easily things can go wrong without proper planning. Here's how to ensure your first day, and every day after, runs smoothly.

Making Initial Contact

Before your first day, speak directly with your supervisor over the phone to confirm the details of your arrival. Important questions to ask include:

- the exact building and room/office location
- the best entrance to use

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- where to park (if driving) or which campus entrance is closest
- what time they expect you
- whether you need to bring any specific documents or equipment.

Always follow up this conversation with a brief email to confirm the details. This gives both you and your supervisor a written record to refer to.

Remember our opening story? If they had made this initial contact, they would have known exactly which building to go to and wouldn't have spent precious time searching the wrong location. A simple phone call and follow-up email could have prevented their stressful sprint across campus.



Planning Your Journey

Transport planning is crucial for professional punctuality. Here are some key strategies:

- use at least two different transport apps to cross-check your travel time
- for public transport, check both the transport company's official app and an alternative like Google Maps
- allow extra time for unexpected delays, especially during peak hours or wet weather
- consider doing a practice run a few days before, at the same time you'll be travelling for your internship.

This careful planning is particularly important in major cities like Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, where transport disruptions are common. A single broken-down train can cause ripple effects across the entire network, while a minor traffic accident can turn a 30-minute drive into a 90-minute ordeal. Even seemingly small events like sports matches or concerts can significantly impact your journey time. Building in this

buffer time might mean arriving a bit early occasionally, but it's far better than being late and appearing unprofessional.

Remember to check for planned disruptions too. Major cities often schedule infrastructure maintenance that can affect both public transport and road networks. Transport authorities usually announce these changes in advance through their apps and websites, so checking these the night before your internship can help you plan alternative routes if needed.



Timing Your Arrival

Professional workplaces have different expectations than university classes. Aim to arrive:

- 5-10 minutes before your agreed start time
- not too early (more than 15 minutes) unless specifically arranged
- never late, this creates a poor first impression and can impact the whole team's schedule.

Unlike university, where you can quietly slip into the back of a lecture theatre, your supervisor and colleagues may have scheduled their day around your arrival. They might have planned team meetings, site visits, or training sessions that require your presence at specific times. Arriving too early can be just as disruptive as being late. Your supervisor might be in another meeting or preparing for your arrival, and having you wait in their office or workspace for an extended period could be uncomfortable for everyone.

The ideal 5-10 minute window allows you to:

- find your way to the correct location
- take a moment to compose yourself
- use the bathroom if needed
- review any materials you've brought
- appear eager but not overly anxious.

If you do find yourself running late due to circumstances beyond your control, contact your supervisor as

soon as possible. A brief message explaining the situation and your estimated arrival time shows respect for their time and demonstrates professional communication skills.

Understanding Expectations and Building Proactive Career Behaviours

Your internship provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate your professional capabilities and learn from experienced practitioners. Research shows that successful internships are characterised by two-way dialogue between interns and supervisors, not just one-way instruction (Okolie et al., 2023). This collaborative approach is especially prevalent in Australian workplaces.

From your first day, take the initiative to understand what is required of you and actively engage in proactive career behaviours. Crockett and Preston (2004) emphasise that workplace participation and engagement lead to better professional outcomes, particularly when employees demonstrate initiative in their career development. Australian workplaces generally foster an egalitarian culture, where open communication across all organisational levels is encouraged and valued. This means that thoughtful questions and requests for clarification, even from senior staff members, are usually welcome. Ask for clarification when tasks aren't clear. Don't hesitate to:

- ask for clarification when tasks aren't clear
- seek confirmation that you're on the right track
- request feedback on your work
- double-check deadlines and deliverables.

While hierarchies exist in Australian workplaces, the culture tends to be less formal than in many other countries. Quality supervisor support during work placements is essential for enhancing students' career interests and actions (Okolie et al., 2023). You might notice that managers and senior staff are often addressed by their first names, and most encourage direct communication. This approachable atmosphere means you shouldn't feel intimidated about:

- asking questions during team meetings
- seeking guidance from your supervisor
- requesting help when you need it
- · sharing your ideas or concerns.

Remember

Your supervisor would rather answer questions early in a project than discover misunderstandings later. While it might feel uncomfortable at first, especially if you're from a culture with more formal workplace hierarchies, asking thoughtful questions demonstrates your engagement and desire to get things right. In fact, many Australian supervisors view the ability to ask appropriate questions as a sign of professional maturity and good judgment.

Case Study: A Matter of Professional Integrity

Marina Taylor was completing her environmental science placement as part of her Master's degree with a regional council in the Northern Territory. Her role involved reviewing environmental impact assessments for coastal developments, working under the supervision of Dr Alan Chen and Environmental Director Sarah Thompson.

During her analysis of flora data for a significant beachfront development, Marina noticed an unusual entry. The report identified a specimen as Quercus suber (Cork Oak), a Mediterranean species she was familiar with from her home country. Having grown up in Greece and completed her undergraduate degree there before moving to Australia for her Master's studies, she knew this species could not possibly survive in the Northern Australian tropical climate.

Intrigued by this discrepancy, Marina conducted a site visit. Upon inspection, she discovered that the tree in question was not a Cork Oak at all but rather appeared to be a protected native species. If her identification was correct, this would have significant implications as the development would either need to be cancelled or undergo substantial modifications costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. It would also reveal a significant oversight in her supervisor's original assessment.

Marina now faced a complex professional dilemma. Should she report her findings, and let her supervisor know, or assume that her supervisor is correct and allow for a protected tree to be cut down?

Activity 2.1: Difficult Conversations at Work

Applying the research from Okolie et al. (2023) about work placement supervisor support, discuss how this situation challenges the typical supervisor-intern relationship. What factors should Marina consider when deciding how to proceed?

Marina has discovered a significant error that could have major environmental and financial implications. Drawing on your understanding of professional integrity and workplace communication in Australian contexts:

- What are the potential consequences of each course of action available to Marina?
- How might different approaches to raising this issue affect her professional relationships?
- What documentation or evidence should she gather before proceeding?

Consider the power dynamics at play in this situation. How might Marina's status as an international student and intern influence:

- Her approach to addressing this issue?
- How might her concerns be received?
- The level of confidence she needs to demonstrate when presenting her findings?
- What additional steps might she need to take to ensure her concerns are taken seriously?

Role-play activity:

Working in pairs, enact a professional conversation between Marina and Dr Chen about her findings.

One person will play Marina, who needs to:

- present her concerns clearly and professionally
- demonstrate respect for her supervisor's position while standing firm on her findings
- navigate potential defensive responses.

The other person will play Dr Chen, who might:

- feel threatened by the discovery of this error
- be concerned about their professional reputation
- need to balance multiple stakeholder interests.

Taking Ownership of Your Experience

Professional workplaces expect interns to take responsibility for their learning and contribution to the organisation. This means being proactive about your development and honest in your communication. Here's how to demonstrate professional ownership:

Speaking Up When Things Aren't Right

Workplace safety and ethical conduct depend on everyone's willingness to raise concerns. This includes:

- identifying potential safety hazards in your work area
- reporting procedures that seem incorrect or inefficient
- discussing workload issues before they become overwhelming
- raising concerns about inappropriate workplace behaviour
- alerting your supervisor to potential errors in calculations or data.



Research highlights why speaking up is particularly important for interns and junior employees, even though it may feel challenging. Oakman et al. (2024) identify that while many workers recognise common workplace issues like stress, fatigue, and inadequate training, they often hesitate to report them. This reluctance stems from several factors, as outlined in the table below adapted from Clarkson et al. (2018).

Reasons why Junior Employees do not Report Workplace Issues



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However, failing to report issues can perpetuate workplace hazards and contribute to poor organisational outcomes. Clarkson et al. (2018) found that when young workers don't raise concerns:

- problems often go unaddressed until they become more serious
- other workers may face similar risks without warning
- important opportunities for workplace improvement are missed
- organisational learning is limited
- worker wellbeing and job satisfaction decrease.

In Australian workplaces, speaking up about problems is viewed as responsible behaviour, not complaining. Top organisations actively encourage employees at all levels to raise concerns because:

- fresh perspectives from new employees often help identify issues that long-term staff may have overlooked or accepted as "normal"
- early reporting of potential issues is more cost-effective and safer than dealing with problems after they cause harm
- building a speak-up culture improves overall workplace safety outcomes and employee wellbeing
- organisations with strong reporting cultures tend to have better safety performance and lower incident rates.

When raising concerns:

- document specific examples of the issue you've observed
- frame your concern in terms of workplace safety and efficiency rather than complaints
- propose potential solutions when possible
- use established reporting channels (e.g., supervisors, Health and Safety Representatives, workplace safety systems)
- remember that you have a right and responsibility to raise legitimate concerns. For more information, view the Protections at work fact sheet by the Fair Work Commission.

If you feel uncomfortable raising an issue directly:

- consult with your workplace Health and Safety Representative (HSR)
- discuss with your supervisor or another trusted senior colleague
- seek advice from the placements team at your university
- consider using anonymous reporting systems if available.



Your contribution to workplace safety matters. Research shows that organisations benefit from having multiple perspectives on safety issues, especially from those new to the workplace who may notice things that others have grown accustomed to.

Asking Questions When Uncertain

Uncertainty is natural in any new role. Professional conduct means seeking clarification rather than making assumptions. Consider these approaches:



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https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=306#h5p-25

Frame your questions to show you've thought about the problem and are seeking guidance to perform better. Research by Oakman et al. (2024) shows that young workers who actively seek clarification are more likely to understand and implement safety procedures correctly. When asking questions:

- demonstrate preparation
- review available materials first
- note specific points that need clarification
- show what you already understand before asking about what you don't
- reference relevant procedures or past examples.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=306#h5p-23

Time Your Questions Appropriately

- ask during designated check-in times when possible
- for urgent matters, preface with "I have a time-sensitive question about..."
- consider whether the question needs immediate attention or can wait for a scheduled meeting
- be mindful of your supervisor's other commitments.

Follow Up Effectively

- take notes during the discussion
- summarise key points back to confirm understanding
- document the guidance for future reference
- share any relevant learnings with team members facing similar challenges.

Build Professional Confidence

Clarkson et al. (2018) reported that 61% of young workers lack confidence in raising workplace issues. Combat this by:

- starting with questions about processes and procedures
- building up to more complex inquiries as your understanding grows
- using each interaction as an opportunity to demonstrate your professional development
- showing how you've applied previous guidance to new situations.



Questions that demonstrate thoughtful engagement with your work help build your professional reputation. Supervisors generally prefer answering clear, well-formed questions early in a project rather than having to address problems that arise from misunderstandings later.

Managing Mistakes Professionally

Everyone makes mistakes, even experienced professionals. What matters is how you handle them:

acknowledge the mistake promptly

take responsibility without making excuses.

Present the situation to your supervisor clearly:

- what happened
- any immediate consequences
- steps you've already taken to address it.

Ask for guidance on:

- how to fix the current situation
- how to prevent similar mistakes
- what you should learn from this experience.

Research suggests that proactively disclosing your mistakes, rather than waiting for others to discover them, leads to better outcomes and builds trust. This approach, known as "stealing thunder," involves taking the initiative to admit errors before someone else points them out (Guchait et al., 2023). When owning up to a mistake, it's important to accept full responsibility rather than trying to blame others or make excuses. The key is to acknowledge the error promptly, demonstrate genuine accountability, and focus on solutions or lessons learned rather than dwelling on justifications. Mura et. al. (2013) show that this upfront, honest approach helps maintain credibility and professional relationships, as it demonstrates integrity and a commitment to improvement. While sharing mistakes can feel uncomfortable, doing so in a transparent and accountable way strengthens trust and can lead to better workplace outcomes than if the mistake had been concealed or revealed by someone else.

For example, instead of saying, "The spreadsheet got messed up," try this approach, "I noticed I made an error in the calculations on yesterday's spreadsheet. I've identified where the mistake occurred and would like your guidance on the best way to correct it."

Building Professional Resilience

Taking ownership also means:

- accepting constructive feedback professionally
- · learning from challenges and setbacks
- adapting your approach based on experience
- supporting team members when they need help
- contributing to a positive workplace culture.

Your internship is a learning experience. Taking ownership doesn't mean you need to be perfect, it means approaching your role with professionalism, honesty, and a willingness to learn and improve. Making mistakes is an inevitable part of professional growth and development. What matters most is how you handle those mistakes and what you learn from them. By demonstrating accountability and a genuine desire to improve, you show maturity and build trust with your colleagues. This approach not only helps you grow professionally but also contributes to creating an environment where others feel safe to acknowledge their own mistakes and seek support when needed. Strong professionals aren't those who never make mistakes, they're the ones who handle them with integrity and use them as opportunities for growth.

Managing Personal Issues

During your internship, you may encounter situations where personal matters impact your work. Many people hesitate to discuss personal issues in professional settings, often due to concerns about career implications or being perceived as less committed (van den Akker et al., 2017; Eldine, 2016; Lauzun et al., 2010). These concerns are natural and understandable. Van den Akker et. al. (2017) found that employees across all levels worry about maintaining professional boundaries while managing personal challenges.

However, it's important to understand that Australian workplaces typically foster a more supportive environment than many other countries. The egalitarian culture common in Australian organisations encourages open communication between supervisors and employees. This means that while maintaining professional boundaries is important, there's generally greater acceptance of work-life balance needs and more established support systems for managing personal challenges. This supportive workplace culture can lead to better outcomes for both employees and organisations.

What makes your situation unique is that as an intern, you have access to additional layers of support that regular employees don't have. Beyond your workplace supervisor, you can reach out to your university internship coordinator, academic supervisors, and university support services. This network exists specifically to help you navigate challenges during your internship experience and can provide guidance on how to handle personal issues professionally.



When personal matters do arise, the most effective approach is to communicate early and clearly with your supervisor about any support you might need. Research indicates that supervisors are better able to provide accommodation when they understand the situation and can plan accordingly (Okolie et al., 2023). Keep your communication professional and focused on how you plan to maintain your work responsibilities while managing personal challenges. This approach can lead to better outcomes than either avoiding disclosure entirely or sharing too much personal information.

Remember that seeking support when needed is not a sign of weakness but a demonstration of professional maturity. Your internship is a learning experience, and part of that learning involves developing the skills to balance professional responsibilities with personal needs. Australian workplace laws and cultural norms support this balance, and your university's support services are there to help you navigate this aspect of professional life.

As your internship progresses, you'll develop your own understanding of appropriate boundaries and communication strategies. The key is to remember that while personal issues can feel overwhelming, you have multiple support channels available to help you manage these challenges professionally. This support network, combined with Australia's generally supportive workplace culture, provides you with resources that many regular employees don't have access to.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how to prepare effectively for your first day through proper planning, initial contact with supervisors, and journey preparation
- strategies for managing arrival times and professional punctuality in Australian workplace contexts

- the importance of taking initiative and engaging in proactive career behaviours within the Australian workplace culture
- methods for building professional resilience and managing mistakes with integrity and accountability
- ways to effectively raise workplace concerns and ask questions in professional settings
- techniques for maintaining appropriate professional boundaries while managing personal challenges
- the value of utilising multiple support channels, including workplace supervisors and university resources
- how to navigate workplace hierarchies and communication norms in Australian professional settings
- the critical role of speaking up about safety and ethical concerns in the workplace environment
- methods for adapting to Australia's workplace culture while maintaining professional relationships and integrity.

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3. WORKPLACE RIGHTS ON INTERNSHIP

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- take proactive steps when your internship role lacks meaningful work or development opportunities
- recognise and respond appropriately to workplace safety concerns, including physical hazards and psychosocial risks
- access appropriate interventions and support services when experiencing difficulties during your placement.

Imagine this Scenario

Ben slumps at his desk, staring at the mountainous pile of papers waiting to be photocopied. Five thousand pages need to be collated into staff handbooks, and he's only managed three hundred so far. The photocopier hums monotonously as he feeds in page after page, his spirits sinking with each mechanical whir.

This isn't what he imagined when he secured an internship with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. His morning routine has become predictable: arrive at 8:30, collect lunch orders from thirty staff members, spend two hours at the photocopier, then escort visitors from reception to the boardroom. Between these tasks, he reorganises the departmental library and filing system, work that feels far removed from international relations and diplomacy.

One particularly challenging afternoon, while alphabetising folders in the invoice filing system, Ben considers emailing his university coordinator. Surely this isn't what an internship is supposed to be? He's spending more time with the photocopier than with any mentor. His hands are paper-cut and ink-stained rather than shaking those of diplomats.

But Ben's father had always told him that every job, no matter how mundane, deserved his best effort. So despite his frustration, Ben approaches each task with diligence. He develops an efficient system for collecting lunch orders. He creates a colour-coding method for the filing system that makes document retrieval significantly faster. His reorganisation of the library introduces a logical cataloguing system that staff members begin to praise.

Then one morning, everything changes. The office is buzzing with energy: José Ramos-Horta, the President of Timor-Leste, is visiting. Ben's supervisor, impressed by his reliable handling of everyday tasks, assigns him to the motorcade team. Suddenly, Ben finds himself travelling alongside a world leader, listening to diplomatic discussions he's only read about in textbooks.

This opportunity opens doors. His proven reliability leads to more significant responsibilities. When Prime Minister Kevin Rudd visits the department, Ben's organisational skills earn him a place in the preparation team. During the visit, he has the chance to meet the Prime Minister himself, a moment that would have seemed impossible during those long hours at the photocopier.

The turning point comes when Ben's supervisor, having witnessed his dedication to even the smallest tasks, asks him to draft a ministerial brief on education aid in Vietnam. Ben applies the same meticulous attention to detail that he used in reorganising the library. His research is thorough, his analysis careful, and his recommendations well-reasoned. The brief is so wellreceived that it influences a change in government policy.

Looking back, Ben realises that those seemingly mundane tasks taught him crucial lessons about workplace dynamics, attention to detail, and professional persistence. His efficient handling of basic responsibilities demonstrated his reliability and work ethic are qualities that proved more valuable than any initial prestigious assignment could have been.

The photocopier, lunch orders, and filing systems had tested his character, showing his supervisors that he could be trusted with gradually increasing responsibility. Each task, no matter how small, had been an audition for bigger opportunities. His willingness to give his best effort to every assignment, regardless of its perceived importance, had opened doors he never expected to walk through.

Ben's experience demonstrates a fundamental truth about internships: they're as much about proving your professional character as they are about gaining specific skills. Whether you're reorganising a filing system or drafting policy documents, your approach to the work speaks volumes about your potential. Sometimes, the path to diplomatic circles and policy influence starts at the photocopier. It's not about where you begin, but how you handle each step of the journey.

Expectations vs Reality

During your internship, you may find yourself scrolling through social media, seeing posts from friends about their incredible placement experiences, presenting to executives, travelling internationally, or working on groundbreaking projects. These glimpses into others' experiences can trigger feelings of disappointment or inadequacy about your own internship. It's important to remember that social media often shows only the highlights, not the day-to-day reality that likely includes many routine tasks like your own. Everyone's professional journey unfolds differently, and comparing your beginning to someone else's middle chapter rarely leads to productive insights.

The reality of many internships might differ significantly from your initial expectations. Perhaps you envisioned yourself immersed in high-level strategic discussions or working directly on major projects, but instead find yourself handling administrative tasks or basic operational duties. This disconnect between expectation and reality can be disheartening and might even make you question whether you've made the right choice. However, these feelings are a normal part of the professional learning experience, shared by many interns across different industries and organisations.

The key to a successful internship lies not in the initial tasks you're given, but in how you approach them and what you learn from each experience. Every assignment, no matter how mundane it might seem, offers opportunities to demonstrate your work ethic, attention to detail, and ability to handle responsibility professionally. These qualities, more than any specific technical skills, often determine which interns receive increasingly challenging and rewarding opportunities. By maintaining a positive attitude and approaching each task with dedication, you create possibilities for growth that might not be immediately apparent. Remember, today's photocopying duty might be tomorrow's chance to prove you're ready for bigger challenges. Opportunities often emerge in unexpected ways from seemingly routine situations.

When embarking on your internship, you should reasonably expect your supervisor and organisation to make genuine efforts to integrate you into the core functions of their business. This integration means providing opportunities to observe, learn about, and participate in the fundamental activities that define the organisation's purpose and success. For instance, if you're interning at an engineering firm, you should have opportunities to engage with engineering projects, even if in a limited capacity. Similarly, a marketing intern should be exposed to marketing strategy and campaign development, rather than being confined to entirely unrelated tasks.

However, it's important to understand when apparent misalignment between your duties and your field of study warrants contacting your internship coordinator. Consider the case of Sarah, a journalism student who secured an internship at a major newspaper. Despite her aspirations to develop her reporting skills, she found herself processing invoices in the accounts department. While basic administrative tasks can be part of any role, Sarah's situation raised concerns because she had no exposure to the newsroom, editorial meetings, or any aspect of journalism. This complete disconnection from the core function of

journalism represented a clear case where intervention from an internship coordinator was appropriate. The placement wasn't providing the intended professional development opportunities in her field of study.



This example helps illustrate the difference between routine tasks that are part of professional life and situations that require intervention. If you're spending the majority of your time on duties entirely unrelated to your field of study, with no clear path to more relevant experiences, it's appropriate to seek guidance from your internship coordinator. Your coordinator can help assess the situation objectively and, if necessary, work with your workplace supervisor to ensure your internship aligns more closely with your learning objectives. Remember, the goal isn't to avoid all administrative tasks, but rather to ensure you have meaningful opportunities to learn about and contribute to your chosen field while developing professional capabilities that will serve you in your future career.

Unwanted Interactions

Your internship should be a positive learning experience where you feel safe and respected. JCU takes your wellbeing seriously and has established clear agreements with host organisations to protect you from psychosocial hazards, that is, behaviours from others that could make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable in your workplace.

Understanding Psychosocial Safety

Your psychological and emotional wellbeing at work deserves serious attention and protection. Research indicates that workplace sexual harassment remains a persistent occupational health concern, with substantial evidence linking it to serious outcomes including long-term sickness absence, depression, and other mental health impacts. While many workplace interactions are professional, studies show that

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inappropriate behaviours occur with concerning frequency, particularly affecting women, young workers, and those in precarious work arrangements.

The tripartite model (Madsen & Nielsen, 2023) helps us understand three distinct but related types of inappropriate workplace behaviours:

- Gender harassment: Actions that convey insulting, hostile or degrading attitudes about someone's gender, even without explicit sexual content.
- 2. Unwanted sexual attention: Unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances that are offensive and unreciprocated.
- 3. Sexual coercion: Situations where work-related benefits are made contingent on sexual cooperation.

If you encounter any of these behaviours, it's important to understand that:

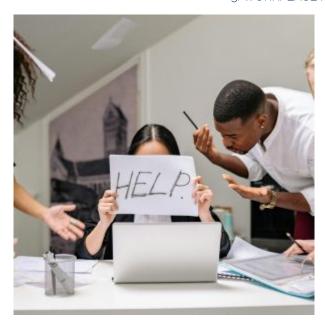
- this is not your fault
- you have clear legal rights protecting you from such conduct
- your workplace and university have a duty of care to ensure your psychological safety
- there are multiple channels of support available to help you.

Your university's placements team is trained to handle these situations with confidentiality and professionalism. They can help you understand your options and access appropriate support services.



🦞 Remember

Speaking up about inappropriate behaviour helps maintain professional standards and ensures internships remain valuable learning experiences for all students.



If you experience any of these behaviours during your internship, it's crucial to act promptly:

- document the incident(s), including dates, times, and specific details
- contact your university's placements team immediately to discuss your concerns
- remember that reporting these issues is not only your right but helps protect future students.

You can contact the placements team confidentially to discuss any concerns, no matter how minor they might seem. It's better to raise concerns early rather than wait for situations to escalate.

Your placements team is trained to handle these sensitive situations professionally and can:

- listen to your concerns without judgment
- help you understand your options
- work with the host organisation to address the situation
- arrange alternative placement options if necessary
- connect you with additional support services if needed.



Your safety and wellbeing are the top priority. Speaking up about inappropriate behaviour helps maintain professional standards and ensures internships remain valuable learning experiences for all students.

Activity 3.1: An Uncomfortable Situation

Simone has just completed her first week as an intern in a chemical engineering laboratory. The work itself has been exciting, she's already helped calibrate sophisticated testing equipment and participated in team discussions about upcoming research projects. However, a pattern of interactions with Brendon, the grants manager she met during orientation, has begun to make her uncomfortable.

Throughout the week, Brendon has been finding reasons to visit her workstation, often with questions that seem to extend beyond professional interest. He asks about her weekend plans, comments on her clothing choices, and frequently mentions how "refreshing" it is to have "young energy" in the lab. When she focuses on her work rather than engaging in conversation, he tends to linger, sometimes pulling up a chair to "chat about the industry."

On Friday afternoon, while she's carefully documenting her calibration results, Brendon approaches her workstation again. He mentions that the team usually goes for Friday drinks and asks if she'd like to join. This is the first Simone has heard about any after-work gathering, and she notices none of her immediate laboratory colleagues are around to confirm this tradition. She feels uncertain but doesn't want to seem unfriendly during her first week, so she asks where everyone is meeting. Brendon gives her the name of a nearby bar, mentioning that it's a quiet place where they can "get to know each other better."

When Simone arrives at the bar later that evening, she finds only Brendon there. He explains that "everyone else cancelled" or "left early," though she hadn't seen any group emails or chat messages about the gathering. Brendon has already ordered her a wine, saying he "remembered she mentioned liking it", although Simone doesn't recall having this conversation.

Applying the tripartite model of workplace harassment:

- identify examples of gender harassment in the scenario
- analyse how unwanted sexual attention manifests in the situation
- discuss whether any elements could potentially develop into sexual coercion
- examine how these different forms of harassment might interact and escalate.

Drawing on research about power dynamics in workplace harassment:

- How do organisational hierarchies affect this situation?
- What role does Simone's status as a new intern play?
- How might the informal nature of after-work gatherings complicate professional boundaries?

• What organisational factors might enable or discourage such behaviours?

Consider the preventive recommendations from current research:

- What workplace policies could help prevent such situations?
- How might clearer organisational communication channels help?
- What role should supervisors and HR play?
- What training might help both interns and managers understand appropriate boundaries?

Role-play exercise: Professional response strategies

Working in pairs, practice how Simone could respond to each type of harassment:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=307#h5p-26



Remember

The research shows that harassment often escalates gradually, making early recognition and response crucial. These skills are essential not only for your internship but throughout your professional career.

Harassment and Bullying

Research shows that workplace bullying and racial harassment remain significant challenges in Australian workplaces, with certain groups being particularly vulnerable. According to comprehensive studies by Attell et al. (2017) and McCord et al. (2018), racial minorities experience substantially more race-based mistreatment than their colleagues, with the impact being even more pronounced when traditional workplace support systems fail to provide adequate protection. While coworker support can help buffer against some negative effects of workplace bullying, this protective factor often proves less effective for racial minorities and women, highlighting the need for more robust institutional safeguards and support mechanisms.

It is essential to understand that workplace bullying and racial harassment can take many forms, from overt discrimination to more subtle microaggressions that may be difficult to identify or address. The research indicates that while overall instances of workplace mistreatment have generally decreased over time, certain types of targeted behaviour have actually increased in frequency. For those entering the Australian workplace for the first time, it is crucial to know that all workers have legal protections against bullying and racial harassment under the Fair Work Act 2009 and various anti-discrimination laws. These laws require employers to provide a safe working environment free from harassment and discrimination, and there are clear procedures for reporting and addressing such behaviour when it occurs.



If you experience bullying during your internship, remember that your university's placement team and academic supervisors are there to support you. Unlike regular employees who might only have workplace channels available, you have additional layers of support through your educational institution. Speaking with your placement coordinator or academic supervisor is important for several reasons. First, they can help you assess whether what you're experiencing constitutes bullying and advise you on appropriate steps to take. Second, they can act as intermediaries with the workplace if needed, using their professional relationships and experience to help resolve the situation. Third, they can help ensure that any workplace issues don't unfairly impact your academic progress or professional development. Most importantly, they can help protect your wellbeing while ensuring you still meet your learning objectives, whether that means working with the placement site to resolve issues, arranging additional support, or, in serious cases, finding an alternative placement. Remember to document specific instances of concerning behaviour and maintain communication with your university contacts throughout the process.

Activity 3.2: Understanding and Navigating Workplace Rights

This research activity helps you understand the legal frameworks and support systems that protect workers in Australian workplaces. By working in pairs, you'll develop a comprehensive

understanding of both general workplace protections and specific protections against discrimination.

Instructions for pair work

Partner A: General workplace protections

Your focus is on understanding the broad protections available to all workers in Australia. Research these key areas:

Fair Work Act 2009:

- What are the National Employment Standards?
- What defines workplace bullying under Australian law?
- What minimum entitlements do all workers have?
- What special protections exist for interns and students on placement?

Work Health and Safety:

- What are an employer's responsibilities for workplace safety?
- What are your rights if you feel unsafe at work?
- How do you report safety concerns?
- What protections exist for workers who report safety issues?

Partner B: Anti-discrimination protections

Your focus is on understanding specific protections against discrimination and harassment. Research these key areas:

Anti-discrimination legislation:

- What behaviours are classified as discrimination?
- What constitutes racial harassment?
- How does Australian law define workplace harassment?
- What special considerations exist for international workers?

Industry-specific protections

- What additional protections exist in your field?
- What professional codes of conduct apply?
- How do professional associations support their members?
- What industry-specific reporting mechanisms exist?

The following resources may be useful for your research:

Essential websites:

• Fair Work Commission:

- focus on the "Common Issues in the Workplace" section
- read through the "A manager behaves in a way that discriminates" and "A person is bullying another" sections.
- Australian Human Rights Commission:
 - Review the "Education" and "Employer" resources
 - Read the "Good Practice, Good Business" factsheets

Your university's policies:

- Access your university's placement handbook.
- Review student placement agreements.
- Locate contact information for placement coordinators.

Professional association website:

- Find your industry's peak body.
- Review member protection policies.
- Identify support services available.

Use this template to collaborate using your results:

Protection Type	Protection Details
Legal Framework	
Relevant legislation	
Key protections	
Worker rights	
Employer obligations	
Reporting Mechanisms	
First point of contact	
Escalation pathway	
Required documentation	
Timeline requirements	
Support Services	
University contacts	
External agencies	
Professional associations	

Tips for effective research

- Save direct quotes from official sources. These may be useful later.
- Note specific section numbers of relevant legislation.
- Download or bookmark key resources for future reference.
- Create a contact list of support services.

Quality check

Before moving to Activity 3.3, ensure you can answer these questions:

- What constitutes a protected action under the Fair Work Act?
- How does Australian law define workplace harassment?
- What are the first three steps in reporting workplace concerns?
- Who are your key support contacts at university and in the workplace?

Cultural consideration note

Remember that Australian workplace culture and legal protections may differ significantly from those in your home country. If you're unsure about cultural interpretations, note your questions to discuss with your partner or tutor.

Activity 3.3: Creating Safer Workplace Scenarios

When facing workplace challenges, it's valuable to understand how different responses might lead to different outcomes. This activity helps you explore various workplace situations and develop appropriate response strategies.

Understanding Scenario Development

Think of scenario development like creating a "Choose Your Own Adventure" story, where each choice leads to different consequences. Your scenarios should reflect realistic situations that international students might encounter in Australian workplaces, while incorporating the legal frameworks and support systems you researched in Activity 3.2.

Each scenario you create should include:

- an initial situation that could be interpreted in multiple ways
- cultural elements that might influence how different people view the situation

- at least three possible response options
- realistic outcomes for each response
- references to specific workplace rights and protections.

Example Scenario Structure

Let's examine how to build an effective scenario:

Initial Situation:

During a team meeting, your colleague consistently interrupts you and rephrases your technical suggestions in simpler terms, despite your expertise in the area. You notice this doesn't happen when other team members speak.

Context to Consider:

- power dynamics in the workplace
- cultural differences in communication styles
- professional hierarchy in Australian workplaces
- impact on your work performance and wellbeing.

Response Options:

- **Direct Approach:** schedule a private conversation with your colleague.
- **Seek Support:** discuss the situation with your supervisor.
- Document and Escalate: begin documenting instances and consult your university placement coordinator.

For each response, you'll need to consider:

- immediate consequences
- long-term implications
- impact on workplace relationships
- alignment with Australian workplace culture
- professional development opportunities
- protection of your rights and wellbeing.

Your Task

Working with your partner:

- Create three different workplace scenarios that draw from your research in Part A.
- For each scenario, develop three distinct response options.
- Map out likely outcomes for each response.
- Identify relevant workplace rights and support services for each situation.
- Consider cultural factors that might influence how different people interpret the

situation.

Think about scenarios involving:

- communication challenges
- professional boundaries
- work expectations
- team dynamics
- cultural misunderstandings
- professional development opportunities.

Physical Safety on Placement

Your physical safety at work is protected by Australian law. Both your host organisation and university have legal obligations to ensure you have a safe working environment. Understanding these protections helps you stay safe and know what to do if safety concerns arise.

Understanding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Your host organisation must provide appropriate PPE when your work involves potential physical risks. PPE might include:

- safety glasses or goggles for laboratory work
- steel-capped boots for construction or industrial sites
- high-visibility clothing for outdoor work
- hard hats in areas with overhead hazards
- protective gloves for handling chemicals or materials
- face masks for dusty environments or when working with particles.



Even if you see others not wearing the required PPE, you must always follow safety protocols. Your placement supervisor should demonstrate how to properly use and maintain any required safety equipment.

Emergency Procedures and Orientation

During your first days, your host organisation should provide a safety orientation covering:

- emergency exit locations and evacuation routes
- assembly points for emergency situations
- location of fire extinguishers and first aid kits
- emergency contact numbers and procedures
- names and locations of first aid officers
- specific hazards in your work area
- reporting procedures for safety concerns.

If you haven't received this information, politely request it from your supervisor. Understanding emergency procedures before you need them is crucial for workplace safety.

Workplace Hazards and Risk Management

Your work area should be maintained to minimise physical risks. This includes:

- clear walkways free of trip hazards
- properly maintained equipment
- adequate lighting and ventilation
- ergonomic workstation setup
- clean and organised workspaces
- proper storage of dangerous materials.

If you notice potential hazards, report them to your supervisor immediately. This isn't complaining; it's contributing to workplace safety.

Injury Reporting: Why Every Incident Matters

Even minor injuries must be reported to both your host organisation and the university placement team. This requirement exists for several important reasons:

- your protection
- ensures you receive appropriate medical attention if needed
- creates a record if complications develop later
- protects your rights if you need time off to recover
- prevention of future incidents

- helps identify workplace hazards
- allows organisations to improve safety measures
- protects other students and workers
- legal and insurance requirements
- maintains compliance with safety regulations
- ensures proper insurance coverage
- protects both you and the organisations involved.

For example, a seemingly minor sprained ankle might:

- develop into a more serious condition
- indicate a workplace hazard that needs addressing
- affect your ability to complete placement requirements.

If you experience any injury during your placement, follow these steps:

- immediate response
- seek first aid if needed
- inform your workplace supervisor
- remove yourself from any dangerous situation
- documentation
- record the incident details while fresh in your memory
- note the time, location, and circumstances
- list any witnesses present
- formal Reporting
- complete your host organisation's incident report form
- contact your university placement team (within 24 hours)
- keep copies of all documentation.

Premember

Reporting injuries isn't just about following rules, it's about maintaining your wellbeing and helping create safer workplaces for everyone. Your university's placement team is there to support you through this process while ensuring your placement requirements are appropriately managed.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how to evaluate the alignment between internship duties and educational objectives, including recognising when tasks provide valuable professional development versus when they indicate a need for intervention
- the importance of documenting and reporting workplace safety concerns through appropriate channels, whether they involve physical hazards or psychological risks
- methods for recognising and responding to different forms of workplace harassment, including gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion
- strategies for accessing and utilising multiple support channels when facing workplace challenges, including university placement coordinators, workplace supervisors, and external support services
- the legal frameworks and protections available to interns in Australian workplaces, including rights under the Fair Work Act and anti-discrimination legislation
- proper protocols for using and maintaining Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in various workplace settings, along with the importance of following safety procedures even when others might not
- the critical importance of reporting workplace incidents and injuries, no matter how
 minor they might seem, to both protect individual wellbeing and contribute to broader
 workplace safety
- ways to navigate and understand cultural differences in Australian workplace settings while maintaining professional boundaries and protecting personal wellbeing
- the value of maintaining detailed documentation of workplace experiences, particularly when dealing with concerning behaviours or safety issues
- techniques for distinguishing between routine professional challenges and situations that require external intervention or support.

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4. SETTING GOALS AND MAKING PLANS

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- design a structured learning plan that aligns your professional development goals with workplace opportunities
- collaborate effectively with supervisors to create achievable learning objectives and success metrics
- develop strategies to track and demonstrate your growth across both technical and interpersonal competencies.

Imagine this Scenario

You sit in the sleek office, your recently pressed interview outfit still crisp despite the humid Brisbane morning. The interview has been going well. You've confidently discussed your technical skills, your understanding of the company's mission, and your eagerness to contribute to their upcoming projects. Then comes the question that makes your heart sink, "Tell us about the most important things you learned during your internship at Greentech Solutions." Your mind goes completely blank. Despite spending twelve weeks there just a few months ago, you can't articulate a single meaningful learning experience. You find yourself stumbling through a vague answer about "gaining industry experience" and "developing professional skills," knowing you sound disappointingly generic.



As you leave the interview, your polished shoes clicking against the marble lobby floor, the reality hits you hard. If only you had documented your learning experiences throughout your internship, you could have shared specific examples of challenges you overcame, skills you developed, and professional growth you achieved. Instead of impressing the interview panel with concrete examples of your capabilities, you left them with empty phrases that could have come from any graduate. The experience serves as a stark reminder that tracking your professional development isn't just about ticking boxes on a form, it's about building a narrative of your growth that you can draw upon throughout your career. A thoughtfully developed learning plan would have provided structure to your internship experience, helping you identify and document significant moments of learning and growth. More importantly, it would have given you a rich source of specific examples to draw upon in professional situations like job interviews, where the ability to articulate your development can make the difference between success and disappointment.

Why have a Learning Plan?

The journey from classroom to workplace brings exciting opportunities for professional growth, but maximising these opportunities requires careful planning. A learning plan serves as your roadmap for professional development, helping you navigate the transition from academic learning to workplace application. While university courses provide you with theoretical knowledge and foundational skills, a well-crafted learning plan helps you identify specific ways to apply and expand these capabilities in a professional context.

Think of your learning plan as a GPS for your professional development journey. Just as a GPS helps you navigate from your current location to your desired destination, a learning plan helps you move from your current skill level toward your professional goals. Just like a GPS that recalculates when you

encounter unexpected routes, your learning plan should be flexible enough to adapt to new opportunities and challenges that arise during your placement.

Creating an effective learning plan involves more than simply listing what you hope to achieve. It requires careful consideration of your current capabilities, thoughtful goal-setting, and strategic planning for how you'll demonstrate your progress. Most importantly, it involves collaboration with your workplace supervisor to ensure your goals align with available opportunities and organisational needs.

Developing Your Learning Plan

The first step in creating an effective learning plan is establishing a reliable system for documenting your professional journey. Whether your university provides a formal template or not, maintaining detailed records of your internship experience is invaluable for your professional development. Think of this documentation as creating a professional memory bank that you can draw upon throughout your career.

If you haven't been provided with a specific template, a dedicated notebook or digital document can serve as an excellent foundation for your learning plan. This doesn't need to be elaborate; even a simple notebook can become a powerful tool when used consistently.

My personal favourite approach is the bullet journal method, which uses simple symbols and short phrases to track tasks, events, and notes in a flexible, easy-to-maintain format. For example, you might use a dot (•) for tasks, a circle (o) for events, and a dash (-) for notes. This approach helps you quickly capture important information without getting bogged down in long-form writing, while still maintaining a clear, organised record of your experience.

For a how-to guide on setting up a bullet journal, please watch the video below [20:17]:



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Consider setting aside the first few pages for basic but essential information about your placement: the organisation's name and primary business focus, your supervisor's name and contact details, your start date, and your working hours. While these details might seem obvious at the start of your internship, having them readily available can prove surprisingly useful, particularly when updating your resume or preparing for job interviews months later.

Your documentation system should also include space for ongoing notes about your role and responsibilities. As you begin your placement, write down your initial tasks and projects, even if they seem straightforward. Many interns are surprised by how quickly their responsibilities evolve, and having

a record of where you started provides a valuable reference point for tracking your professional growth. Remember to note down any specific systems, software, or equipment you're using. These details will be particularly relevant when describing your technical skills to future employers.

Make it a habit to update your documentation regularly. Set aside a few minutes at the end of each week to record significant experiences, challenges you've encountered, and solutions you've developed. This practice not only helps you track your progress but also develops your professional reflection skills. Consider creating separate sections in your notebook for different aspects of your experience: technical skills, workplace relationships, challenges overcome, and key achievements. This organisation makes it easier to locate specific examples when you need them, whether for assessment purposes, professional development discussions, or future job applications.

Activity 4.1: Setting Up Your Professional Documentation

This activity helps you create a structured record of your placement details and initial responsibilities. Having this information readily available will help you track your professional journey and provide valuable reference points for future career opportunities.

Instructions:

Find a notebook or create a digital document that will serve as your professional journal. If using a notebook, dedicate the first few pages to this foundation information. Set aside 30 minutes to thoroughly document the following details:



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Keep this information up to date throughout your placement. If your responsibilities change or you begin using new systems, add these details to your documentation. This living record will become an invaluable resource for developing your learning objectives and tracking your professional growth.

Planning for Technical Skill Development

Technical skills form a crucial component of professional competence, but research shows their development requires structured approaches that go beyond simple workplace exposure. Chivers (2007) examined postgraduate students' technical skill development. His research discovered that technical competency development occurs most effectively when integrated with higher-order thinking capabilities, particularly meta-competencies such as critical thinking and problem-solving.

Chivers' (2007) research can be used to create a framework for planning technical skill development. This approach emphasises that learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment must work together in a coordinated way. When applied to technical skill development, this means carefully reflecting on learning experiences so each element reinforces and builds upon the others.

For example, if your goal is to develop advanced data analysis capabilities, simply attending training sessions isn't enough. The constructive alignment approach suggests you need clearly defined learning outcomes (what specific analytical skills you need to master), aligned learning activities (practical exercises with real data), and appropriate assessment methods (demonstrating your analytical capabilities in workplace projects).



When students commence their internship, people tend to focus heavily on knowledge acquisition and basic cognitive competencies. However, Chivers' (2007) findings show that true professional growth occurs when technical skills are developed alongside meta-competencies. This suggests that effective technical skill development should include opportunities to:

- apply technical knowledge to complex, real-world problems
- exercise professional judgment about when and how to use technical skills
- critically evaluate the results of technical work

• communicate technical information effectively to different audiences.

Chivers' (2007) findings also reveal that while students may initially concentrate on mastering basic technical procedures, their development of higher-order capabilities becomes increasingly important as they progress. This suggests that technical skill development plans should evolve over time, gradually incorporating more complex decision-making and professional judgment alongside technical mastery.

When measuring progress in technical skill development, the constructive alignment framework suggests using assessment methods that authentically reflect workplace requirements. This might include successfully completing workplace projects, teaching others new technical skills, or contributing to technical documentation: activities that demonstrate not just technical knowledge but the ability to apply it effectively in professional contexts.

This integrated approach aligns with Chivers' findings about how professionals develop advanced competencies. His research shows that the most effective professional development occurs when technical skills are learned as part of a broader development of professional capability, rather than in isolation.

Activity 4.2: Building Your Technical Skills Development Plan

Like the health and safety professionals in Chivers' (2007) research, you'll create a structured plan that aligns your technical skill development with broader professional capabilities. Using the constructive alignment principles, you'll map out how to develop both technical competence and meta-competencies.



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Share your completed plan with your supervisor or a trusted colleague. Just as the research shows the importance of workplace connection, getting feedback on your plan can help ensure it aligns with both your professional development needs and organisational opportunities.

Remember

The evidence shows that technical skill development is most effective when integrated with broader professional growth. Your plan should reflect this holistic approach to building professional competence.

A Note for JCU Students: Preparing your Learning Plan Assessment

The activity above directly supports your first assessment task in this subject. Creating a learning plan that will guide your internship experience. Let's explore how you can use this framework to develop a strong learning plan that meets the assessment requirements.

Your learning plan template asks you to consider specific competency areas: technical skills, self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy & social skills, and communication. The structured approach we've just worked through is particularly valuable for the technical skills section, but the principles of constructive alignment and integrated development can strengthen your entire learning plan.

When completing your learning plan assessment, consider how your technical skill development connects with other competency areas. For instance, if you're developing advanced data analysis capabilities, think about how this might also involve self-awareness (understanding your current skill level), self-regulation (managing frustration when learning new techniques), and communication (explaining complex findings to different audiences).

Remember that your learning plan needs to be discussed with your placement supervisor within your first two weeks. The detailed thinking you do through this activity will help you have a more productive conversation with your supervisor. You'll be able to clearly articulate not just what technical skills you want to develop, but how you plan to develop them and how you'll demonstrate your growth.

The evidence of achievement section in this activity directly relates to the "Planned Evidence of Achievement/s (i.e. deliverables)" column in your learning plan template. The critical thinking you've done about how to demonstrate your developing capabilities will help you identify specific, measurable deliverables that satisfy the assessment requirements.

By taking this evidence-based, structured approach to your learning plan, you're setting

yourself up for success not just in this assessment task, but throughout your placement experience. Your learning plan becomes more than just an academic exercise; it becomes a practical tool for guiding your professional development, just as the research shows it should be.

Building Your Self-Regulation on Internship

Self-awareness serves as a cornerstone for professional growth during internships, with research consistently demonstrating its vital role in workplace success. Studies by both Sutton et al. (2015) and Wonda (2024) show that self-aware interns are better equipped to navigate workplace relationships, understand diverse perspectives, and contribute effectively to their organisations. This heightened self-awareness enables you to process feedback constructively, recognise strengths and areas for development, and make thoughtful decisions about your own professional trajectory. By developing a clearer understanding of your own emotions, reactions, and impact on others, you can build stronger professional relationships and adapt more effectively to workplace challenges.

Moreover, self-awareness is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be actively developed throughout the internship experience. A systematic review undertaken by Carden et. al. (2022) demonstrates that people can cultivate this crucial capability through targeted training. Enhanced self-awareness correlates directly with improved job performance, increased confidence, and more effective workplace communication (Carden et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2015; Wonda, 2024). When you invest in developing their self-awareness, you're better positioned to make meaningful contributions to their teams, navigate professional challenges with resilience, and identify opportunities for career growth. The evidence suggests that self-aware interns are more likely to transform their internship experiences into valuable stepping stones for long-term career success, as they can better align their strengths and interests with professional opportunities while maintaining productive relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

While it may be tempting to begin your internship by formally assessing your current level of selfawareness, research suggests that a more productive approach is to focus directly on identifying meaningful personal and professional goals. The key is understanding how your emotions and responses might influence your internship experience. Consider, for example, how you typically react when receiving constructive criticism. Do you feel defensive, or discouraged, or do you eagerly embrace the feedback as a growth opportunity? These emotional patterns will likely surface during your placement.

Scenario: A Cavalcade of Emotions

Davide sits at his desk, staring at his laptop screen where chapter 14 of *Tropical Marine Species:* A Comprehensive Guide (14th Edition) glows back at him. Three weeks ago, when he received the internship offer from Dr. João Oliveira, one of the world's leading marine biologists, Davide could hardly contain his excitement. This was the same Dr. Oliveira whose books had inspired Davide's passion for marine biology. He still remembers receiving the 10th edition for his thirteenth birthday and spending countless hours memorising every detail about coral reef ecosystems.

Reality, however, has fallen short of his expectations. Instead of diving in crystal-clear waters or assisting with groundbreaking research, Davide finds himself hunched over his computer, methodically reformatting citations and standardising image captions. The work feels mundane and repetitive, nothing like the dynamic research experience he had imagined. Each morning, he forces himself to open another chapter, trying to maintain enthusiasm for what feels like an endless task.



Today's email from Dr. Oliveira has sent Davide's anxiety spiralling. The message was brief but clear: upon returning from a three-week expedition to Mombasa Marine Park, exactly the kind of adventure Davide had hoped to experience, Dr. Oliveira expects both the book editing to be complete and Davide to be ready to begin processing approximately 5,000 new photographs. The magnitude of the task ahead feels overwhelming. Davide's fingers hover over the keyboard as he tries to calculate how many pages he needs to edit per day to meet this deadline, all while knowing another enormous task looms on the horizon. The excitement of working with his academic hero has transformed into a knot of stress in his stomach as he wonders how he will manage it all.

Using Self-Awareness to Get Through Challenging Situations

Being aware of and accepting our emotions is a crucial first step in managing challenging workplace situations. For Davide, it's important to understand that his feelings of disappointment, boredom, and now overwhelm are completely natural responses to his situation. Many interns experience similar emotions when their expectations don't align with reality, particularly when working with someone they deeply admire.

Let's examine why validating these emotions is important. When Davide acknowledges that it's normal to feel disappointed about not participating in field research, he can move from questioning himself ("Why am I not more grateful for this opportunity?") to understanding his reaction ("Of course I feel disappointed. This isn't what I expected"). This shift in perspective is powerful because it reduces the additional stress that comes from trying to suppress or deny his feelings.

Similarly, recognising that boredom with repetitive tasks is a common experience helps Davide understand that these feelings don't reflect poorly on his commitment to marine biology or his respect for Dr Oliveira's work. Many professionals, even those passionate about their field, sometimes find certain aspects of their work mundane. This understanding can help Davide separate his temporary feelings about specific tasks from his broader career aspirations.

The feeling of being overwhelmed by the upcoming deadlines is particularly important to acknowledge. When we try to ignore or push away feelings of stress, we often become more anxious and less capable of thinking clearly about solutions. By accepting that he feels overwhelmed, Davide can begin to look at his situation more objectively and start planning how to manage his workload effectively.

Remember, emotional awareness isn't about wallowing in negative feelings, it's about creating a foundation for constructive action. Through our involvement with interns who did not complete their placements, we discovered that most of them struggled with managing their emotional responses to workplace challenges. These students often found it difficult to identify and articulate their feelings, which led to increased stress and eventually contributed to their withdrawal or removal from their internships. By contrast, interns who regularly took time to reflect on and name their emotions were better equipped to address challenges constructively.



This reflection might involve asking yourself, "Am I feeling disappointed because my expectations weren't met? Anxious about the workload? Intimidated by working with someone I admire?" Understanding these distinct emotional responses helps create clarity and opens pathways for addressing each concern specifically. Once Davide can identify and accept how he feels, he can begin to use these emotions as valuable information about his situation and what he needs to do to address it.

Turning Self-Awareness into an Organisational Superpower

After acknowledging his feelings, Davide realises that taking control of his situation begins with getting organised. Rather than letting the mounting pressure paralyse him, he decides to transform his self-awareness into actionable steps. Opening his bullet journal, a tool he previously used mainly for tracking marine biology terminology, he begins to break down the editing task into manageable chunks.

First, Davide calculates the time available before Dr. Oliveira returns from Mombasa with the photographs. Three weeks translates to 21 days, but being realistic about his energy levels and the need for breaks, he decides to plan for 18 working days. He knows the remaining chapters total approximately 450 pages. A quick division shows him he needs to edit 25 pages per day to complete the book before the photographs arrive.

The number feels more manageable now that it's clearly defined. Drawing on his understanding of his work patterns, another aspect of self-awareness, Davide knows he focuses best in the morning. He also recognises that his enthusiasm for marine biology, while tested by the mundane nature of editing, remains a valuable asset. Each chapter, after all, contains fascinating information about species he hopes to one day study in person.

To support his planning, Davide invests in workflow management software. He chooses this tool deliberately, aware that his natural tendency to get overwhelmed by large projects means

he needs a system that can break tasks into smaller components and track his progress visually. The software allows him to set up daily editing targets and create a timeline for the upcoming photo processing task.

With a clear plan and daily targets in place, Davide finds that his initial feeling of being overwhelmed has subsided significantly. Breaking down the large task into manageable pieces has given him a sense of control and direction. The simple act of knowing exactly what he needs to accomplish each day, 25 pages of editing, has transformed an intimidating project into a series of achievable goals.

However, as Davide settles into his new routine, he notices that his disappointment about the nature of the internship hasn't diminished. In fact, this feeling has grown stronger as he processes his emotions more clearly. Each time he edits a passage about field research or encounters a stunning photograph of marine life, he's reminded of the hands-on experience he had hoped to gain. This self-awareness helps him recognise that while he can manage the workload effectively, his deeper career aspirations still need to be addressed.

Rather than letting this disappointment fester, Davide decides to use it constructively. He plans to raise his concerns with Dr. Oliveira when he returns from Kenya, recognising that the natural opening of asking about the expedition provides an opportunity for a broader conversation. By waiting for this moment, Davide can approach the discussion from a position of demonstrated competence, having completed the editing task professionally despite his reservations. This strategy shows emotional intelligence. He understands that timing and context matter when raising concerns with a supervisor, especially one he deeply respects.

Davide realises that while self-awareness has helped him manage the immediate challenges of his workload, it's also guiding him toward addressing the larger question of his professional development. His ability to acknowledge both his practical achievements and his emotional needs demonstrates growing maturity in his approach to workplace challenges.

An Important Note About Workflow Software

While the author of this textbook uses Nirvana for workflow management, it's essential to find the tool that best matches your working style and needs. The internet abounds with advertisements for workflow management software, each claiming to be the ultimate solution for productivity. However, what works well for one person may not suit another.

Rather than immediately subscribing to the most advertised option, take time to research alternatives. A helpful starting point is AlternativeTo, a website that allows you to compare Remember that the most expensive or feature-rich option isn't necessarily the best choice for your needs. Many free or low-cost alternatives provide excellent functionality without overwhelming you with unnecessary features. The key is finding software that enhances rather than complicates your workflow.

Developing Self-Regulation on Internship

In Davide's case, we've seen how self-awareness, recognising his feelings of disappointment, boredom, and overwhelm, led naturally to self-regulation through practical action. By acknowledging his emotions and understanding their source, he could step back from feeling overwhelmed and develop concrete strategies to manage his work. This progression from awareness to regulation didn't make his disappointment disappear, but it did allow him to channel his emotions productively rather than letting them control his internship experience.

Your internship journey, while unique to you, will likely involve similar emotional challenges that require both awareness and regulation. Like Davide, you might find yourself facing unexpected situations or dealing with tasks that don't align with your initial expectations. The key is to recognise that these emotional responses are not only normal but can serve as valuable signals helping you understand and improve your professional experience.

Take a moment to envision yourself in various workplace scenarios. Perhaps you're asked to give an impromptu presentation to senior staff, or maybe you make a significant error on an important project. What emotions arise as you imagine these situations? Some common feelings that emerge for interns include impostor syndrome (feeling like you don't belong or aren't qualified), anxiety about meeting expectations, or frustration when tasks take longer than anticipated to master. By acknowledging these potential emotional responses in advance, you can develop strategies to manage them effectively.



For instance, if you know that you tend to become overwhelmed when juggling multiple deadlines, you might set a goal to develop better time management skills during your internship. Or if you recognise that you sometimes hesitate to ask questions for fear of appearing unknowledgeable, you could establish a goal to practice seeking clarification at least once during each team meeting. The key is to use your understanding of your emotional patterns to inform specific, actionable goals that will help you grow professionally.

Activity 4.4: Planning for Developing Self-Awareness on Internship

Part 1: Emotional mapping

Take a few quiet moments to imagine yourself in your upcoming internship. As you visualise the following scenarios, write down the emotions that surface for each:

- your supervisor asks you to present your work to the team
- a fellow intern points out an error in your work
- you're given a task but aren't sure how to begin. Your supervisor is away, and the workplace is very busy, and everyone seems too occupied to help
- you complete a project successfully.

Part 2: Pattern recognition

Review your emotional responses and answer these reflection questions:

- "When I look at my emotional responses across these scenarios, I notice..."
- "The situations that seem most challenging for me are..."
- "My typical response when feeling uncertain is..."
- "The type of support I find most helpful when stressed is..."

Part 3: Goal formation

Based on your reflections, complete these sentences:

- "During my internship, I want to become more aware of..."
- "I will know I'm making progress when..."
- "To develop my self-awareness in this area, I will..."
- "When I face challenges, I plan to..."



Remember

Your goal should focus on developing awareness and understanding rather than just changing behaviour. For example, instead of "I will never get nervous during presentations," a better goal might be "I want to better understand what triggers my presentation anxiety and develop strategies to work with these feelings."

Part 4: Evidence of achievement

Professional development research tells us that the best way to track progress in selfawareness is through specific, observable indicators (Hughes et al., 2019). Think about how you'll know you're making progress toward your self-awareness goal by considering evidence across three domains:



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For example, if your goal is to become more aware of how you respond to constructive feedback, your evidence might look like this:

Internal evidence: "I will notice myself pausing to reflect before responding to feedback rather than immediately feeling defensive."

External evidence: "My supervisor will observe that I ask clarifying questions about feedback instead of becoming quiet or argumentative."

Documentation evidence: "I will maintain a feedback log recording the feedback received, my initial emotional response, ow I chose to respond and what I learned from the interaction."



The best evidence is specific and measurable. Instead of "I will be more confident," try "I will document three instances per week where I contributed ideas in team meetings despite feeling uncertain."

Share your goal and evidence with a classmate and give each other feedback using these prompts:

- Is the goal focused on awareness rather than just behaviour change?
- Is it specific enough to track progress?
- Does it acknowledge both emotions and actions?
- Is the evidence tangible enough to verify?

Empathy and Social Skills: Essential Competencies for Professional Success

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, technical skills alone are not enough to build a successful career. The research consistently shows that empathy and social skills, often called social intelligence, are among the most critical competencies for professional development. Ramos-Monge et. al. (2023) undertook a study of university students entering the workforce. The findings demonstrated that interpersonal capabilities rank among the top skills that employers seek, yet they are often the lowest skill scored among students who commence in the workforce.

The type of skills employers look for include the ability to understand social situations effectively, communicate clearly and appropriately with others, empathise with colleagues' emotions and perspectives, and build and maintain positive professional relationships. Students who develop strong social intelligence skills during their education and early work experiences are better positioned to succeed in their careers.

Why do these skills matter so much? The modern workplace is increasingly collaborative and relationshipdriven. Whether you are working remotely or in person, your ability to understand others' perspectives, respond appropriately to social cues, and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics has a direct impact on your professional effectiveness. This is particularly true in the digital employment market, where virtual collaboration and cross-cultural communication are becoming the norm.



The good news is that these skills can be developed through conscious effort and practice. As you begin your internship, you have an ideal opportunity to strengthen your social intelligence capabilities in a professional setting. The key is to approach this development intentionally, just as you would approach building technical skills.

Consider these key findings from an entire university's graduating cohort in research undertaken by Rozell et. al. (2002):

- A combination of self-regulation and social skills are significant predictors of career success.
 According to the first study's findings, students who scored higher in these two areas demonstrated significantly better career choice behaviours compared to those with lower scores.
- Social skills and group collaboration abilities are key differentiators in professional settings. Students
 with high scores in social skills in collaborative settings and self-awareness showed significantly better
 performance in professional settings than those with lower scores.
- Longevity of employment correlated strongly with empathy and social skills capabilities. Students
 who scored highly on both empathy and social skills measures demonstrated better performance in
 helping their employer achieve their organisational goals and scored higher customer satisfaction
 scores.
- Communication and social adaptability are increasingly critical in digital workplaces. The research
 indicates that international students who developed stronger empathy and social skill capabilities
 showed improved performance in cross-cultural professional settings.

Through conscious development of these capabilities, you can enhance your professional effectiveness and create stronger working relationships. A structured learning plan that incorporates both technical and social skill development will provide a solid foundation for your career growth.

Most people tend to say that they have excellent empathy and social skills. But is this really the case? Try this activity out and put it to the test.

Self-reflection:

Think about your last team experience (work, university, or volunteer). Write brief notes about:

- one interaction where you built a strong professional connection
- one interaction where you wish you'd handled things differently
- What do these experiences tell you about your relationship-building strengths and areas for growth?

Interactive practice:

Find someone that you interact with, but don't know well. Your task is to learn three interesting things about their professional goals or experience. Practice active listening and asking followup questions. Take some time to reflect on that conversation:

- What techniques helped you build rapport quickly?
- How might these skills translate to your internship?
- What specific goals could you set for relationship building during your placement?

Goal Setting for Empathy and Social Skills

Consider how that brief conversation you just had revealed insights about relationship building. You likely found that asking thoughtful questions and showing genuine interest helped create a connection quickly. During your internship, this same principle applies, but you'll have more time to develop these relationships meaningfully.

When writing your learning plan goals, translate these conversation insights into specific professional actions. For example, if you found that asking about someone's professional journey helped build rapport, you might write: "Schedule three one-to-one conversations with team members in my first month, focusing on understanding their career paths and current roles." This goal is specific and measurable while building on the skills you just practised.

Similarly, if you discovered that following up on details someone shared helped deepen the connection, consider a goal like: "After each significant project collaboration, arrange a brief coffee chat to reflect on what we learned and discuss future opportunities to work together." This demonstrates both initiative and relationship-building awareness.

Remember that professional relationship building is an ongoing process. The brief conversation you just had was a starting point. Your internship goals should reflect a gradual deepening of professional connections over time. Consider how you might progress from initial introductions to meaningful professional relationships that could extend beyond your internship period.

When discussing these goals with your supervisor, explain how you plan to balance relationship building with your other responsibilities. This shows maturity in understanding that workplace connections should develop naturally alongside your primary duties, rather than detracting from them.

The Importance of Communication

Communication in professional settings forms the foundation of successful career development and learning plan implementation. Effective workplace communication involves both sharing your own thoughts and ideas clearly, as well as actively listening to and engaging with others. When discussing your learning plans and professional development goals with supervisors and mentors, it's crucial to articulate your aspirations clearly while remaining open to feedback and guidance.

In Australian workplaces, direct communication is generally preferred, though it should always remain respectful and professional. This means being clear about your learning objectives and development needs, while showing appreciation for the support and opportunities provided. For example, rather than saying "I might like to learn more about project management," you might say "I would value the opportunity to develop my project management skills through shadowing the team during the next project planning cycle."

Understanding and adapting to your organisation's communication channels is equally important. Whether your workplace prefers formal emails, scheduled meetings, or casual check-ins, aligning your communication style with these norms helps ensure your learning and development needs are heard and addressed effectively.

Navigating Australian English in the Workplace

Translation devices and software can serve as valuable tools during your academic journey and early career development. They offer helpful support when encountering unfamiliar terminology or complex concepts. However, it's essential to understand the distinction between using these tools as occasional aids versus relying on them for basic communication.

Consider this scenario: You're in a team meeting where colleagues are discussing an urgent safety issue. The conversation moves quickly, with multiple people contributing important information. In this situation, you need to understand and respond immediately. There isn't time to use translation software. Your ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English could be crucial for workplace safety and operational efficiency.

If you currently find yourself needing translation support for routine interactions, such as understanding lecture content, participating in tutorial discussions, or communicating with your lecturers, this signals a need to evaluate your readiness for Australian workplace integration. While academic environments often provide additional support and time for language processing, professional settings typically require more immediate and fluent communication.



Professional workplaces in Australia operate primarily in English, with expectations of:

- quick comprehension of verbal instructions and safety protocols
- active participation in team discussions and meetings
- clear communication with colleagues and stakeholders
- understanding of subtle language nuances that affect workplace relationships
- immediate response in emergency situations.

Rather than viewing this as a barrier, consider it an opportunity to strengthen your English language skills before entering the workforce. Many universities offer additional English language support services, conversation practice groups, and professional communication workshops. Engaging with these resources while still studying can help build the language confidence needed for successful workplace integration.

The goal isn't to eliminate translation tools from your professional toolkit entirely, but rather to develop sufficient English language proficiency so these tools serve as occasional references rather than essential communication aids. This approach helps ensure you can participate fully and safely in Australian workplace environments.

Written Communication

Many international students and professionals come from cultures where formal, hierarchical communication is deeply embedded in professional interactions. For example, in some Asian cultures, it's common to begin emails with elaborate honorifics and respectful phrases, particularly when writing to someone in a senior position.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=308#h5p-31

Here's what characterises effective email communication in Australian workplaces:

- **Beginning emails:** Use "Hi [first name]" for most professional communications. "Dear [first name]" is acceptable for more formal situations or initial contacts.
- **Getting to the point:** State your purpose in the first sentence or two. Australian professionals appreciate it when you communicate your main message early.
- Maintaining politeness: Use "please" and "thank you" appropriately, but avoid excessive formality or apologetic language. For example, instead of "I am terribly sorry to burden you with this request," simply write "Could you please..."
- Closing emails: Keep it simple with "Thanks" or "Kind regards" followed by your name. Elaborate sign-offs aren't necessary.
- **Length:** Keep emails concise. If your message requires more than a few paragraphs, consider requesting a meeting instead.

Remember that adapting to this communication style might feel uncomfortably informal at first if you're

from a more hierarchical culture. However, embracing this direct approach demonstrates your understanding of Australian workplace culture and your ability to communicate effectively within it. By the same token, when we're less confident in our English language skills, it's natural to try to communicate in the simplest, most straightforward way possible. However, this approach can sometimes come across as abrupt or demanding. Consider this example:



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https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=308#h5p-32

This version is still clear and direct, but includes several important elements that make it more appropriate for Australian workplace communication:

- a greeting that acknowledges the person
- the word "please" to make it a request rather than a demand
- context for why the report is needed
- a thank you to show appreciation
- a signature to close the message professionally.

Even when our vocabulary might be limited, we can use these simple structural elements to maintain professional relationships. Here's another example:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=308#h5p-33

This balanced approach becomes particularly important in workplace situations where we need ongoing cooperation and support from our colleagues. By taking the time to include these small courtesies, we build better working relationships while still getting our message across clearly.

Activity 4.6: Checking Written Communication

This activity helps you understand how cultural differences can affect written communication and how to adapt your writing style for Australian professional contexts.

Part 1: Email analysis



Read the above email carefully. First, let's identify elements that don't align with Australian professional communication norms:

- Consider the subject line: "Formal Request for Special Consideration"
 - How does this set the tone for the email?
 - Is this level of formality typical in Australian professional settings?
- Examine the greeting: "Dear esteemed Professor Benjamin"
 - What assumptions about hierarchy does this reveal?
 - How might this make the recipient feel in an Australian context?
- Look at the first paragraph:
 - What purpose does the praise of the professor's research serve?
 - Is this level of deference common in Australian academic settings?
- Analyse the request section:
 - How many words does it take to make the actual request?
 - What language choices make this section feel overly formal or apologetic?
- Consider the closing statements:
 - What message does "forever be in your debt" send?
 - How might this affect the professional relationship?

Part 2: Rewriting exercise

Now, let's rewrite this email following Australian professional communication principles. Your email should:

- be clear and direct while maintaining politeness
- respect the recipient's time
- present relevant information efficiently
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

Here's a structure to follow:

- brief, clear subject line
- professional but approachable greeting
- clear statement of purpose
- relevant supporting information
- · specific request
- professional close.

Part 3: Reflection questions

After rewriting the email, consider:

- How does your version differ in length from the original?
- What cultural assumptions did you need to adjust?
- How does your version maintain professionalism while reducing formality?
- How might these changes affect how the request is received?

Part 4: Another analysis



An unintentionally rude email requesting an extension

Let's examine the key elements of the above email that could be improved:

Subject line analysis:

- While "Extension" is direct, how could it be more informative?
- What context is missing that would help the recipient?

Greeting issues:

- Notice the inconsistent capitalisation in "Dear dr archer".
- How might this greeting affect the recipient's first impression?
- What does this tell us about attention to detail in professional communications?

Message structure:

- Observe how the email presents information in fragments rather than complete sentences.
- Notice the missing punctuation and inconsistent capitalisation.
- Consider how the final line reads as a demand rather than a request.

Tone and professionalism:

- Examine how "i want extension so tell me new date" might be received.
- Consider what information is missing that would help the recipient make a decision.
- Think about how this could affect the professional relationship.

Now, rewrite this email to achieve these goals:

- provide a clear, informative subject line
- use a proper professional greeting
- give complete context for the situation
- make a polite, specific request
- include all relevant details the recipient needs
- close professionally.

Part 5: Discussion questions

After rewriting both emails, consider:

- How would you feel receiving your versions versus the originals?
- What specific language choices make your versions more professional?
- How does providing context help the recipient assist you better?
- What cultural assumptions about workplace communication did you need to adjust?

Understanding Conversational Dynamics

Australian workplace conversations tend to be remarkably informal and direct, which can initially feel surprising if you're from a more formal culture. For example, during a team meeting, it's perfectly normal to hear colleagues speaking casually about project challenges or sharing ideas without elaborate introductions or formal language structures. This informality, however, doesn't indicate a lack of professionalism; rather, it reflects the egalitarian nature of Australian workplace culture.

Denniston's (2019) research reveals that formal language is generally reserved for specific contexts, such as delivering presentations or responding to them. In day-to-day interactions, whether you're chatting with colleagues in the break room or participating in team meetings, the communication style remains conversational and focused on the topic at hand.<

Giving and Receiving Feedback

The Australian approach to feedback has distinct characteristics worth understanding. When offering positive feedback, comments are typically directed personally and specifically. Instead of saying:

"The presentation was good," an Australian colleague might say:

"Jim, your analysis of the market trends was really insightful."

This direct, personal approach to positive feedback helps build stronger professional relationships.

Negative feedback, however, follows different rules. Australians generally avoid public criticism of individuals. If there's a need to address performance issues or concerns, these conversations happen privately, unless there's a specific meeting designated for group feedback. This approach helps maintain professional dignity and workplace harmony.

The Volume Factor

An interesting finding from Clark's (1997) research provides encouraging news for non-native English speakers: Australians show remarkable ability to understand non-fluent English, possibly due to their own frequent use of colloquialisms and slang. However, this comes with an important caveat: being audible is crucial. While it might feel more comfortable to speak quietly when you're uncertain about your English, this can create more communication barriers than occasional language mistakes.

Speaking with adequate volume shows confidence and engagement, even if your English isn't perfect. Australian colleagues are generally patient with language learners who speak up clearly but may find it frustrating when they have to constantly ask someone to repeat themselves because they're speaking too softly.

Building Confidence Through Practice

Research from both Denniston et. al. (2019) and Clark (1997) emphasises that practising conversational English during your university years significantly impacts your workplace communication abilities. This suggests that engaging actively in class discussions, group projects, and casual conversations with classmates provides valuable preparation for professional contexts. Each interaction helps build the confidence and skills needed for workplace communication.

Consider these practical strategies for developing your spoken communication skills:

- Participate actively in tutorial discussions, even if you're not completely confident about your English.
- Join university study groups or conversation clubs where you can practice informal English.
- Record yourself speaking to become aware of your volume level.
- Practice explaining complex ideas in simple terms, a skill valued in Australian workplaces.
- Pay attention to how Australian classmates and teachers phrase their ideas and feedback.

Remember

Perfection isn't the goal: effective communication is. Australian workplaces value clarity and engagement over grammatical perfection. By focusing on being clear and audible, while understanding the cultural norms around formal versus informal communication, you can develop the confidence needed for successful workplace interactions.

Activity 4.7: Professional Communication Development Plan

This activity helps you create a structured plan for improving your workplace communication skills. By identifying specific areas for growth and setting measurable goals, you'll develop a clearer path toward confident professional communication in Australian workplaces.

Part 1: Self-assessment

Begin by reflecting honestly on your current communication strengths and challenges. Rate your confidence level (1-5) in these areas:

Written communication:

- Think about your ability to:
 - write clear, professional emails
 - adapt your tone for different workplace situations
 - use appropriate greetings and closings
 - express requests politely but directly
 - respond to workplace messages promptly.

Spoken communication:

- Consider how comfortable you feel:
 - speaking up in group meetings
 - having casual conversations with colleagues
 - explaining technical concepts clearly
 - using an appropriate speaking volume
 - asking questions when you need clarification.

Part 2: Goal development

Now, let's create SMART goals for improving your communication skills. SMART goals are:

- **Specific:** clear and well-defined.
- Measurable: you can track your progress.
- Achievable: realistic within your current situation.
- **Relevant:** connected to your professional development.
- Time-bound: has a deadline or timeline.

Example:

Instead of writing:

"I want to speak better English," try:

"Over the next three months, I will participate in at least two class discussions each week, focusing on speaking at a volume where everyone in the room can hear me clearly."

Write three SMART goals:

- a goal for written communication
- a goal for spoken communication
- a goal for cultural understanding.

Part 3: Action planning

• What specific steps will you take to achieve this goal?

- What resources do you need?
- How will you measure progress?
- What potential obstacles might you face? (Consider your own confidence as an obstacle here as well.)
- How will you overcome these obstacles?
- Who can support you in achieving this goal?

Part 4: Progress tracking

Create a weekly check-in schedule to monitor your progress.

Week 1-4:

- What communication situations did you encounter?
- How did you handle them?
- · What worked well?
- What could you improve?
- What adjustments do you need to make to your goals?

Sample Progress Entry:

"This week I sent three professional emails to my tutors. I remembered to use appropriate greetings and keep my messages clear and direct. I noticed I still apologise too much in my writing. Next week, I'll focus on being more confident in my requests."

Part 5: Regular review

Schedule monthly reviews of your progress by asking:

- How am I progressing toward each goal?
- What successes have I achieved?
- What challenges am I still facing?
- Do I need to adjust any goals?
- What new goals should I set?



Communication development is an ongoing journey. Small, consistent improvements lead to significant long-term growth in your professional communication abilities.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how to develop a comprehensive learning plan that incorporates both technical and interpersonal skill development, using structured documentation systems to track professional growth
- methods for translating broad development goals into specific, measurable objectives that align with workplace opportunities and organisational needs
- techniques for building self-awareness in professional settings, including recognising emotional patterns and developing strategies to manage workplace challenges effectively
- strategies for strengthening self-regulation capabilities through conscious practice and reflection, enabling better management of professional responsibilities and relationships
- the critical importance of developing empathy and social skills in modern workplaces, supported by research showing their impact on career success and professional effectiveness
- approaches to adapting communication styles for Australian workplace cultures, including specific strategies for both written and verbal interactions in professional settings.

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5. REFLECTIVE WRITING FOR YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- understand the value and importance of reflective writing in professional contexts
- apply the DIEP (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate, Plan) framework to create meaningful reflective writing pieces
- transform your reflective writing practice into a powerful tool for ongoing professional growth and development.

A Tale of Two Interns

James and Michael started their policy internships at the Department of Infrastructure on the same Monday morning in February. Both were assigned to analyse the impact of remote work on urban planning, a complex project requiring data analysis, stakeholder interviews, and policy recommendations. While their academic backgrounds were similar, their approaches to the internship experience proved markedly different.

From day one, James maintained a detailed reflective journal. Each evening, he spent twenty minutes writing about his experiences, challenges, and insights. He documented his learning process, including his initial confusion about government procedures, breakthroughs in understanding departmental dynamics, and strategies that helped him navigate the organisational culture. When faced with challenges, James used his writing to explore different perspectives and potential solutions, often arriving at innovative approaches through this reflective process.

Michael, however, dove straight into the technical aspects of the project without taking time to process his experiences. While he worked diligently, he found himself increasingly frustrated by bureaucratic processes and overwhelmed by the project's complexity. His initial confidence gave way to anxiety as he struggled to connect different aspects of the research and translate them into actionable policy recommendations. By the sixth week, he had amassed considerable data but struggled to synthesise it into meaningful conclusions.



Noting the diverging progress, their supervisor asked James to help Michael get the project back on track. James approached this delicately, sharing his own early struggles and the strategies he'd developed. He noticed that while Michael had strong analytical skills, he seemed stuck in the details, unable to see the broader implications of their research. Through their conversations, James began to understand how his reflective practice had helped him maintain perspective and adapt to challenges that had similarly stumped Michael.

In their final week, as they prepared their presentation for the department executives, Michael asked James how he'd managed to maintain such clear direction throughout the project. "Actually," James replied, "I've been keeping a reflective journal. Each day, I write about what I've learnt, what's challenging me, and how it all connects to our project goals. It helps me process the experience and spot patterns I might have missed otherwise. It's not just about documenting what happened, it's about making sense of it all." Michael nodded thoughtfully, realising how this kind of structured reflection might have helped him avoid some of his struggles.



The internship concluded with a successful presentation, thanks to their combined efforts. While both interns had developed valuable skills, James's reflective practice had given him additional insights into organisational dynamics, project management, and his own professional growth, insights that would prove invaluable in his future career. Michael left with not just project experience, but also a new appreciation for the role of reflection in professional development.

Why Bother with Reflective Writing?

The story of James and Michael illustrates a pattern that researchers have observed repeatedly in internship settings: the transformative power of reflective writing on professional development. Dr. Reinekke Lengelle's research provides robust evidence that structured reflective writing during internships significantly enhances employment outcomes. In her 2014 study of bachelor's students, those who engaged in reflective writing practices received notably higher workplace evaluations from their employers, with 84% of their assessments rated as "excellent" or "very satisfactory" compared to a more distributed range of ratings for non-writing students (Lengelle et al., 2014). Beyond immediate performance metrics, the research revealed that reflective writers developed stronger professional identities and were better equipped to articulate their experiences to future employers. They demonstrated enhanced 'luck readiness', the ability to recognise and capitalise on career opportunities, and showed greater career adaptability, a crucial skill in today's dynamic job market (Lengelle et al., 2016). Perhaps most significantly, these students were more likely to receive offers of continued employment or professional referrals from their internship supervisors, with employers noting their superior ability to integrate feedback and contribute meaningfully to workplace discussions.

Lengelle's research delves deeply into the mechanisms by which reflective writing enhances skill development during internships. Her studies reveal that students who engage in reflective writing develop what she terms a "double-loop learning" process. They not only acquire technical skills but also develop

a sophisticated understanding of how and why they are learning (2014, p. 79). In particular, her 2016 study found that reflective writers showed marked improvement in three crucial areas: cognitive processing, emotional intelligence, and professional adaptability. These students demonstrated superior ability to connect theoretical knowledge with practical application, showing what Lengelle calls "meta positions", the capacity to step back and analyse their own learning journey (Lengelle et al., 2016, p. 40). For instance, while non-reflective students might simply learn how to complete a task, reflective writers could articulate why certain approaches worked better than others, identify patterns in their learning, and adapt these insights to new situations. The research particularly highlighted how reflective writing helped students develop what employers consistently rate as highly desirable soft skills, including improved communication abilities, better emotional regulation in challenging situations, and enhanced capacity for professional relationship building. This mirrors the experience of James in our story, who developed not only project management skills but also the emotional intelligence to help his struggling peer.

Lengelle's research demonstrates that:

- Students who engage in reflective writing show significantly higher development of 'luck readiness', the ability to recognise and seize career opportunities. (Lengelle et al., 2016).
- Reflective writers demonstrate an enhanced capacity for 'meta-positions', the ability to observe and analyse their own learning experiences objectively. (Lengelle et al., 2014).
- Employers rate reflective writing students more positively, with 84% receiving 'excellent' or 'very satisfactory' evaluations compared to a broader range for non-writers. (Lengelle et al., 2014).
- Students who write reflectively show superior emotional regulation and professional resilience when faced with workplace challenges. (Lengelle et al., 2016).
- Reflective writing enhances students' ability to connect theoretical knowledge with practical workplace applications, leading to better professional competency development. (Lengelle et al., 2014).

Utilising the DIEP Model of Reflective Writing

While Lengelle's research provides compelling evidence for maintaining a reflective journal during your internship, you might wonder about the practical process of reflection itself. Many students find themselves unsure where to begin, after all, there's a significant difference between casually writing about your day and engaging in purposeful professional reflection that enhances your career development.

The DIEP model offers a structured approach to reflection that helps transform your daily experiences into meaningful professional insights. This model, widely used in professional development contexts, breaks down the reflective process into four key components: Describe, Interpret, Evaluate, and Plan. Each component builds upon the previous one, helping you move from simple observation to actionable professional development.

Think of the DIEP model as similar to the scientific method you likely use in your technical work. Just as you wouldn't jump straight to conclusions in a laboratory experiment without first gathering and analysing data, effective reflection requires a systematic approach to processing your experiences. The DIEP model provides this structure, ensuring you don't miss crucial insights that could enhance your professional development.

Consider this example: Imagine you've just completed your first major presentation to your internship team. Rather than simply noting "That went well" or "I was nervous," the DIEP model guides you through a deeper analysis:

- Describe: What actually happened during the presentation? What did you do? How did others respond?
- Interpret: Why did things unfold this way? What factors contributed to the outcomes you observed?
- Evaluate: What worked well and what could be improved? How does this experience align with your professional goals?
- Plan: Based on these insights, what specific actions will you take to enhance your presentation skills for next time?

This structured approach transforms a single experience into a valuable learning opportunity that contributes to your professional growth. Students who systematically documented their experiences were significantly more likely to identify and articulate specific skill development in professional contexts (Dunne, 2017). In addition, Dunne (2017) found that structured reflection helped students move from simply describing events to explicitly recognising and naming the professional competencies they were developing, a crucial skill for future job interviews and career advancement. For example, students using a structured approach were more than twice as likely to explicitly name skills like 'emotional intelligence' or 'collaborative working' compared to those who reflected more casually.

The power of structured reflection lies in its ability to bridge the gap between experience and professional development. When students follow a systematic approach to reflection, they develop an enhanced capacity to recognise and name specific professional competencies in their experiences. Rather than simply describing events, they can explicitly connect their experiences to professional skill development, making their learning more concrete and articulate (Dunne, 2017). In the following sections, we'll explore each component of the DIEP model in detail, providing practical examples and templates to help you implement this evidence-based approach in your own reflective practice.

Describe

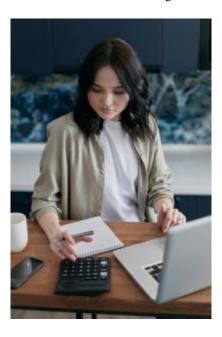
In reflective writing, the describe phase focuses on capturing the raw details of your learning experience before diving into deeper analysis. This initial step creates a foundation for meaningful reflection by

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establishing what occurred and what you learned from it. The key is to identify a specific moment of insight or learning that stands out as significant to your professional development.

When describing your experience, aim to be objective and precise about what happened. Rather than jumping straight to your feelings or interpretations, focus on the concrete details: what was said, what you observed, what you did, or what you read. Include relevant contextual information like when and where the learning occurred, and what specifically triggered your insight. This helps create a clear picture of the learning moment that you can then examine more deeply.

Your description should focus on a single, specific insight rather than trying to cover multiple learning points at once. This insight should represent something new that you've learned or realised, a moment where your understanding shifted or deepened. While the insight itself might seem simple, capturing it clearly is essential for the deeper reflection that follows. Think of this step as creating a snapshot of your learning moment that you can then examine from different angles.



The most effective descriptions strike a balance between being concise and providing sufficient detail. Include enough context that someone else could understand the situation but avoid including irrelevant information that doesn't contribute to understanding your key insight. Remember that this description serves as the foundation for your subsequent interpretation, analysis, and future planning.

Example

During my third week of internship at the environmental engineering firm, I learned the

importance of double-checking all calculations, even for seemingly simple tasks. This insight came while I was working on a routine water quality analysis report. I had completed the chemical concentration calculations, which I had done many times before, and was about to send them to my supervisor. However, something made me pause and review the numbers one more time. During this review, I discovered I had made a small error in unit conversion that would have significantly affected the final recommendations. Thanks to this final check, I was able to correct the error before submitting the report.

This description clearly identifies the specific insight (the importance of double-checking calculations), provides relevant context (the timing and setting), and explains what triggered the learning (finding an error during a final review). It's detailed enough to understand the situation but remains focused on the key learning moment.

Activity 5.1: Understanding How to Describe Your Learning Moments

Think of the describe phase as taking a clear photograph of your learning experience. Just like a good photograph captures the important details while keeping the focus sharp, your description should provide the key information about your learning moment without getting blurred by opinions or analysis.

Let's practice this skill together through a guided activity:

Step 1: Identifying your learning moment

First, reflect on your past week of professional experience. Think about a moment when you learned something new. Perhaps it was a realisation about how things work, a new skill you developed, or an insight into professional practice. Choose one specific moment that stands out.

Step 2: Crafting your description

Now, write a description of this learning moment using these guiding questions:

- What exactly did you learn or realise?
- · When and where did this learning occur?
- What was happening when you gained this insight?
- What specifically triggered your learning?

Remember to:

focus on observable facts rather than feelings or interpretations

- include relevant context but avoid unnecessary details
- keep your description clear and specific
- focus on a single learning moment rather than multiple insights.

Step 3: Self-review

After writing your description, check it against these criteria:

- Could someone else understand what happened based on your description?
- Have you included the what, when, where, and how of your learning?
- Have you avoided including your opinions or analysis of the situation?
- Is your description focused on a single, specific insight?

Here's a template to help structure your description:

"During [when], while [context], I learned [specific insight]. This learning occurred when [describe the trigger or specific situation]. [Add any other relevant details that help understand the learning moment]."

Looking at your description, highlight any words or phrases that express opinions or analysis. These should be saved for later stages of reflection. Your description should focus purely on what happened and what you learned.



A good description creates a solid foundation for the deeper reflection that follows. Take time to get this step right, as it will make the subsequent stages of reflection more meaningful and insightful.

Interpret

Building on the foundational work done in the describe phase, the interpret section moves your reflection into deeper analytical territory. While description focuses on capturing what happened, interpretation explores what it means, transforming your raw observations into meaningful insights about your learning and development.

When interpreting your experience, you'll examine your described insight from multiple angles, considering its broader implications and connections. This is where you begin to unpack why this learning moment matters, how it relates to your existing knowledge, and what questions it raises for your future practice. Rather than simply stating what you learned, you'll analyse how this new understanding might influence your thinking and actions going forward.

Think of interpretation as being like a detective examining evidence. Just as a detective looks beyond surface-level observations to understand the deeper story, your interpretation should look beyond the immediate details of your learning experience to understand its significance. What might this insight reveal about your professional development? How does it connect to theories or concepts from your coursework? What assumptions or previous understandings might it challenge? These questions help transform your description from a simple account of what happened into a meaningful exploration of your learning journey.



The key to effective interpretation is making connections between your insight and your previous knowledge, between theory and practice, between your immediate experience and broader professional contexts. While description asks "What happened?", interpretation asks "What does this mean for my learning and development?" This deeper analysis sets the stage for the evaluation and planning that will follow in subsequent stages of your reflection.

In reflective writing, the interpret section moves beyond describing what happened to explore the deeper meaning and significance of your insight. Rather than simply restating events, you examine why your learning experience matters and how it connects to your broader professional development.

Consider how an engineering student might interpret their insight about double-checking calculations:

Example

This experience with unit conversion errors has revealed important truths about engineering practice that go far beyond simple calculation checking. While the immediate lesson about verifying work is valuable, the deeper significance lies in understanding how routine tasks can have serious real-world impacts. In environmental engineering, even a small calculation error could lead to incorrect water quality recommendations, potentially affecting community health. This realisation transforms what might seem like basic double-checking into an essential professional responsibility.

The timing of this insight, during my third week of internship, is particularly meaningful. As I was beginning to feel more confident in my role, this experience served as a crucial reminder that expertise isn't about never making mistakes. It's about developing systematic approaches to prevent errors from affecting outcomes. This understanding connects directly to what we learned in Professional Practice about engineering ethics and public safety responsibilities. The experience has also sparked important questions about how to develop robust quality control habits early in my career, especially when dealing with time pressures and competing deadlines.

Perhaps most significantly, this experience has highlighted how professional judgment develops. That internal prompt to pause and review the calculations, despite my initial confidence, represents an emerging sense of professional intuition. It suggests I'm beginning to develop the kind of reflective practice that experienced engineers rely on to maintain high standards of work.

Notice how this interpretation examines the broader implications of the experience, makes connections to professional practice and learning, and considers how this insight might influence future behaviour.

Activity 5.2: Moving from Description to Deeper Understanding

Let's practice developing your interpretation skills through a guided activity that builds on your description of a learning moment.

Step 1: Starting with your description

Take the description you wrote in our previous activity or use this example:

During my third week of internship at the environmental engineering firm, I learned the importance of double-checking all calculations, even for seemingly simple tasks. This insight came while I was working on a routine water quality analysis report. I had completed the chemical concentration calculations, which I had done many times before, and was about to send them to my supervisor. However, something made me pause and review the numbers one more time. During this review, I discovered I had made a small error in unit conversion that would have significantly affected the final recommendations. Thanks to this final check, I was able to correct the error before submitting the report.

Step 2: Exploring deeper meaning

Take your description and answer these guiding questions. Write at least two sentences for each.

Why does this insight matter?

- Think about:
 - How might this learning affect your future practice?
 - What broader principles does this insight reveal?
 - What might have happened if you hadn't gained this insight?
 - What connections can you make?
- Consider how this links to:
 - your previous knowledge or experiences
 - theories or concepts from your studies
 - professional standards or practices
 - broader industry implications
 - What questions does this raise?
- Reflect on:
 - What else do you need to learn?
 - What assumptions has this challenged?
 - What might you do differently in the future?
 - What broader issues does this highlight?

Step 3: Crafting your interpretation

Now, combine your answers into a coherent paragraph that explores the meaning of your

insight. Start with a sentence that connects to your description, then weave together your responses about significance, connections, and questions.

Step 4: Self-review

Check your interpretation against these criteria:

- Have you moved beyond describing what happened to explain why it matters?
- Have you made meaningful connections to your learning or professional practice?
- Have you identified questions or implications for future practice?
- Does your interpretation demonstrate deeper thinking about the experience?

Step 5: Peer discussion

Find a classmate and share your interpretations. Discuss:

- What aspects of each other's interpretations seem particularly insightful?
- What additional perspectives could be considered?
- How might these insights apply in different professional contexts?



Effective interpretation transforms a simple observation into meaningful professional learning by examining its broader significance and implications. Your goal is to demonstrate how this insight contributes to your developing professional understanding.

Evaluate

While interpretation helps us understand the meaning of our insights, evaluation takes our reflection further by assessing the value of what we've learned. This phase asks us to make thoughtful judgments about how our learning experiences contribute to our professional development and future practice. When evaluating your insights, you examine not just what you learned and what it means, but how this learning will benefit you going forward. This might include assessing how your new understanding will change your approach to professional tasks, enhance your confidence in certain areas, or influence your future decision-making.

Effective evaluation requires examining your learning experience from multiple angles. Beyond simply stating that something was useful, you need to articulate specifically how and why this learning matters for your professional development. You might consider how your new understanding changes your

capabilities, influences your professional confidence, or shapes your approach to future challenges. For instance, you could assess how a new insight affects your technical skills, your professional judgment, or your ability to work with others.



Making connections to your broader professional or academic context strengthens your evaluation. Consider how your learning aligns with professional standards, industry best practices, or theoretical frameworks from your studies. This might involve examining how your new understanding supports or challenges existing theories, or how it contributes to your developing professional identity. By grounding your evaluation in these broader contexts, you demonstrate a deeper understanding of your learning's significance within your field.

When evaluating your learning, it's important to be specific about future applications. Rather than making general statements about usefulness, describe concrete ways you plan to apply your new understanding. Think about how this learning might influence your decision-making, change your work practices, or enhance your professional relationships. Consider also any limitations or conditions that might affect how you apply this learning, being realistic about both the benefits and potential challenges of implementing your new understanding demonstrates mature professional judgment.

Let's examine how to evaluate the learning experience of double-checking calculations.

Example

This experience with catching a unit conversion error has proven invaluable for my development as an environmental engineer. While it might seem like a simple lesson about checking calculations, understanding its importance has fundamentally changed how I approach all technical work. Previously, I viewed double-checking as a time-consuming extra step that demonstrated a lack of confidence. Now, I recognise it as an essential professional practice that

reflects a mature understanding of engineering responsibility. This shift in perspective has already improved my work quality and professional confidence.

The most significant value of this learning lies in how it has transformed my understanding of professional judgment. I now appreciate that engineering expertise isn't just about being able to perform calculations correctly. It's about developing systematic approaches to ensure accuracy and safety. This realisation has changed how I structure my work time, deliberately building in review periods rather than rushing to complete tasks. In team projects, I've started advocating for peer review processes, which has not only improved our collective work quality but has also helped me develop valuable leadership skills.

Looking ahead, I can see how this understanding will benefit my future practice in several ways. First, it provides a foundation for developing more robust quality control processes in my work. Second, it has enhanced my ability to mentor others by helping me articulate why certain professional practices matter. Perhaps most importantly, it has given me a deeper appreciation for how seemingly small decisions in engineering work can have significant real-world impacts. This awareness will guide my professional decision-making throughout my career, helping me maintain the high standards that environmental engineering demands.

Notice how this evaluation:

- makes specific judgments about the learning's value
- describes concrete changes in professional practice
- connects the learning to broader professional development
- looks forward to future applications
- demonstrates growth in professional understanding.

Activity 5.3: Developing Your Evaluation Skills

This activity helps you move beyond describing and interpreting your learning to making thoughtful judgments about its value for your professional development. Through guided practice, you'll learn to evaluate how your insights contribute to your growth as a professional.

Part 1: Examining value

Take the learning experience you've been working with (or use our engineering calculation example) and answer these questions in detail.

Think about the immediate value of your learning:

- How has this insight already changed how you work or think?
- What specific improvements have you noticed in your practice?
- How has it affected your professional confidence?

Consider the broader professional value:

- How does this learning align with professional standards in your field?
- What aspects of professional practice does it help you understand better?
- How might it influence your interactions with colleagues or clients?

Part 2: Looking forward

Write two paragraphs exploring future applications.

First paragraph: Focus on specific ways you plan to apply this learning in your future practice

- What processes or approaches will you modify?
- How will you incorporate this understanding into your daily work?
- What specific situations will benefit from this new knowledge?

Second paragraph: Consider broader professional implications

- How might this learning influence your long-term career development?
- What additional skills or knowledge might you need to develop?
- How could this understanding help you contribute to your field?

Part 3: Testing your evaluation

Review your writing by asking:

- Have you moved beyond just saying something was "useful" to explaining specifically how and why?
- Have you identified concrete changes in your practice or thinking?
- Have you considered both immediate and long-term benefits?
- Have you demonstrated how this learning contributes to your professional development?

Part 4: Peer discussion

Find a partner and take turns sharing your evaluations. For each other's work, discuss:

- What specific benefits or applications did your partner identify that you hadn't considered?
- How might their learning be valuable in different professional contexts?

- What additional opportunities for applying this learning can you suggest?
- How does their evaluation demonstrate professional growth?



Strong evaluation demonstrates mature professional judgment by examining both the immediate and long-term value of your learning. Your goal is to show how this understanding contributes to your development as a professional in your field.

Plan

After evaluating the value and impact of our learning experiences, the natural next step is to consider how we can deliberately apply these insights in our future practice. While evaluation helps us understand how our learning has changed us, planning transforms these reflections into concrete actions that will shape our professional development. This forward-looking phase moves us from understanding the significance of what we've learned to map out specific ways to implement and build upon these insights, ensuring our reflective learning translates into tangible professional growth.

The planning phase bridges the gap between reflection and action, helping us identify specific opportunities to apply our learning and areas where we need to develop further. By thoughtfully considering how we'll use our insights in future situations, we transform our reflective learning from a passive understanding into an active guide for professional development.



When writing the planning section of your reflection, begin by identifying specific contexts where your

insights could be valuable. These typically fall into three main categories: your current academic program, your future professional practice, and your broader personal development. Consider how your learning might be relevant in each of these areas, being as specific as possible about potential applications.

For example, rather than simply stating "I will use these communication skills in my future career," you might write: "Understanding the importance of clear documentation will be particularly valuable when I begin my engineering career, especially in project handovers and team collaborations. I plan to develop templates for different types of technical documentation to ensure consistent and thorough information sharing."

Time frames are crucial in planning. Consider both immediate applications within your current studies and longer-term implementations in your future career. You might discuss how you'll apply your learning in upcoming assignments or group projects, as well as how these skills will transfer to professional situations you expect to encounter after graduation

It's also important to identify any additional learning or development needed to fully implement your insights. This might include recognising gaps in your knowledge or skills that need to be addressed. For instance, you might write: "To build on my understanding of sustainable design principles, I will need to familiarise myself with current environmental regulations and certification requirements. I plan to complete online modules in environmental compliance during the semester break."

When writing your plan, use future tense to emphasise the forward-looking nature of this section. Begin sentences with phrases like "I will..." or "This learning will be applied..." to clearly indicate your intended actions. Be specific about how you will implement your insights, including concrete steps or strategies you plan to use

Remember to connect your plans back to your professional context. Consider how your intended actions align with industry expectations and professional standards in your field. This helps demonstrate that your reflective learning is grounded in practical, professional applications rather than remaining purely theoretical.

Finally, consider potential challenges or obstacles you might face in implementing your plans, and outline strategies to address these. This shows that you've thought critically about the feasibility of your plans and are prepared to overcome potential difficulties.

Example

This experience with calculation verification will be particularly valuable as I progress through my environmental engineering degree and into my professional career. In my remaining coursework, I will implement a structured verification process for all technical assignments, setting aside a specific portion of time (at least 15% of the total allocated time) for thorough review. This approach will help embed good practices before I take on professional responsibilities where the stakes are much higher.

When I begin my career as an environmental engineer, I will develop a comprehensive quality control checklist for different types of calculations and analyses. This checklist will include common conversion factors, typical value ranges for various parameters, and key verification steps. I plan to share this resource with my future teams, contributing to a culture of rigorous verification while helping junior engineers avoid similar mistakes.

To further strengthen this practice, I will seek out opportunities to learn about quality control systems used in environmental engineering firms. During my remaining internship time, I plan to discuss this topic with senior engineers, understanding how they've developed their verification processes over their careers. This knowledge will help me build more robust professional practices early in my career.

In the broader context of professional development, I will use this insight to develop a more comprehensive approach to risk management in engineering work. This includes not only calculation verification but also understanding how different components of environmental analysis interconnect and influence final recommendations. I plan to maintain a log of near-miss incidents (like this unit conversion catch) to help identify patterns and develop more effective preventive measures.

Beyond my individual practice, I anticipate using this experience when I eventually mentor junior engineers or interns. I will share not just the technical lesson about double-checking calculations, but also the deeper understanding about professional responsibility and the development of engineering judgment. This will help create a positive cycle of learning and improvement within the profession.

By following these guidelines, your planning section will effectively bridge the gap between reflection and action, creating a clear roadmap for applying your learning in meaningful ways. This approach ensures that your reflective practice contributes directly to your professional development and growth.

This activity helps you transform personal insights into professional development plans by connecting your experiences with industry standards and professional expectations. Through research and reflection, you'll create a detailed plan that aligns your learning with professional practice.

Part 1: Starting with experience

Begin with your descriptive reflection about a significant learning moment from your placement. You can use your own reflection or this example:

During my third week of internship at the environmental engineering firm, I learned the importance of double-checking all calculations, even for seemingly simple tasks. This insight came while I was working on a routine water quality analysis report. I had completed the chemical concentration calculations, which I had done many times before, and was about to send them to my supervisor. However, something made me pause and review the numbers one more time. During this review, I discovered I had made a small error in unit conversion that would have significantly affected the final recommendations. Thanks to this final check, I was able to correct the error before submitting the report.

Part 2: Professional context research

Before developing your plan, research the professional context of your insight:

- Professional Association Standards
 - Identify the key professional associations in your field (e.g., Engineers Australia, Australian Institute of Environmental Engineers).
 - Review their professional practice standards and guidelines.
 - Find specific standards or guidelines related to your insight (e.g., quality control processes, verification procedures, ethics or code of conduct).
 - Document how your insight connects to these professional standards.
- Industry Best Practices
 - Research current best practices in your field related to your insight.
 - Find at least two peer-reviewed articles or industry publications discussing these practices.
 - Identify any emerging trends or developments in this area.
 - Note how these practices might influence your future professional development.

Part 3: Development planning

Using your research and reflection, identify professional development related to your experience. Highlight:

- Immediate Applications (Current Studies)
 - How will you apply this learning in your remaining coursework?
 - What specific assignments or projects could benefit from this insight?
 - What additional skills do you need to develop?
- Early Career Implementation
 - How will you apply this learning in your first professional role?
 - What systems or processes will you develop?
 - How does this align with professional standards you've researched?
- Long-term Professional Growth
 - How might this insight influence your career trajectory?
 - What ongoing professional development will you need?
 - How will you contribute to your profession's development in this area?

Part 4: Writing your plan reflection

Using your research and reflections, write a detailed plan section that connects your personal insight to professional standards while outlining specific implementation strategies. Your plan reflection should move from immediate applications through to long-term professional development.

Begin by identifying specific contexts where you'll apply this learning, referencing the professional standards and best practices you've researched. For example:

The importance of systematic calculation verification, as emphasised in Engineers Australia's Standard 3.2, will inform both my remaining studies and future engineering practice. In my final year of coursework, I will implement a structured verification process aligned with industry best practices, allocating specific time for peer review and documentation. This approach aligns with the Australian Institute of Environmental Engineers' guidelines on quality control in environmental assessments.

Then, describe specific strategies for implementing your learning, connecting these to your research findings. For example:

Drawing on current industry practices identified in the Journal of Environmental Engineering, I will develop a comprehensive verification checklist incorporating both technical accuracy and contextual reasonableness checks. This system will evolve through my early career as I gain experience with different types of environmental assessments and their specific requirements.

Consider your longer-term professional development needs, using your research to identify areas for growth:

To further develop my professional capabilities in this area, I plan to pursue specialised training in quality management systems, particularly focusing on environmental monitoring and assessment. The Environmental Institute of Australia and New Zealand offers professional development courses in this area, which will help me build on my current understanding while staying current with evolving industry standards.

End by connecting your plans back to broader professional responsibility:

By implementing these structured approaches to verification and continuing to develop my professional practices, I will contribute to maintaining the high standards our profession demands while helping to mentor future environmental engineers in developing similar rigorous approaches.

Remember to:

- reference specific professional standards and guidelines you've researched
- connect your personal learning to industry best practices
- outline concrete implementation steps
- · consider both immediate and long-term applications
- show how your plans align with professional expectations
- use future tense to emphasise planned actions
- maintain a professional tone while showing personal commitment to growth.

Your plan reflection should demonstrate thoughtful consideration of how your learning experience connects to professional practice while providing clear pathways for implementation and development.

Maintaining Reflective Practice

Developing a consistent reflective practice during your internship helps build professional insight and document your growth. Think of these weekly reflections as creating a professional learning journal that you can draw upon throughout your career. Here's how to make the most of this practice:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=309#h5p-34



Remember

Reflective writing is itself a skill that develops over time. Your early reflections might feel basic or uncertain. This is completely normal. As you progress through your internship, you'll likely find your reflections becoming more nuanced and insightful. What matters most is maintaining the practice consistently and pushing yourself to think deeply about your learning each week.

By maintaining thoughtful weekly reflections, you're not just documenting your internship experience, you're actively shaping your professional development and creating a valuable resource for your future career. Each reflection builds upon previous insights, helping you develop the kind of thoughtful, reflective practice that characterises successful professionals in your field.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how structured reflective writing enhances professional development during internships, helping transform daily experiences into meaningful insights that contribute to career growth and learning
- the systematic application of the DIEP (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate, Plan) framework to create detailed, purposeful reflections that demonstrate professional growth and understanding
- methods for crafting precise descriptions of learning experiences that provide clear foundations for deeper analysis, focusing on specific moments that reveal important professional insights
- techniques for interpreting experiences by examining their broader significance, making connections to professional standards and theoretical knowledge, and identifying questions for future learning
- strategies for evaluating learning experiences by assessing their immediate and longterm value for professional development, including specific ways they enhance technical and interpersonal capabilities
- approaches for developing concrete, actionable plans that connect personal insights to professional standards while creating clear pathways for implementing learning in both immediate and future practice.

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6. USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- develop personalised strategies for effectively integrating artificial intelligence tools into your professional workflow while maintaining authenticity in your work
- apply artificial intelligence tools ethically and productively to enhance your professional capabilities without compromising academic or workplace integrity
- evaluate different approaches to artificial intelligence use across various professional contexts to determine appropriate applications for your field.

Imagine this Scenario

Sarah, Wei, and Priya started their summer internships at Horizon Solutions on the same Monday in June. All three were assigned to the product strategy team, tasked with analysing market opportunities and developing recommendations for clients. Their supervisor, James, gave them similar projects to start. Each needed to research emerging trends in their assigned industry sectors and prepare detailed reports with actionable insights. James also arranged for the interns to be given access to the company's full suite of artificial intelligence tools and encouraged the students to use them.

Sarah embraced artificial intelligence tools with unbridled enthusiasm but little strategy. She would paste entire research briefs into AI assistants and accept the outputs without verification. While she turned in assignments remarkably quickly, her work often contained subtle but significant errors: misquoted statistics, outdated market data, and occasionally

recommendations that didn't align with the client's actual capabilities. "I'm being efficient," she would say when questioned, but her team members began double-checking all her numbers, which ultimately created more work.

Wei took the opposite approach. A self-proclaimed AI sceptic, he insisted on doing everything manually, from market research to data analysis to report writing. While his work was generally accurate, he consistently missed check-in deadlines and struggled to process the volume of information needed for comprehensive analysis. His productivity lagged notably behind his peers, and he often stayed late trying to catch up on work that could have been streamlined.

Priya developed what she called a "partnership approach" with AI tools. She learned to identify which tasks benefited from AI assistance (like initial data sorting and identifying patterns in large datasets) and which required human judgment and verification (like understanding client context and making strategic recommendations). She would use AI to generate initial drafts but always enhanced them with her own analysis and industry knowledge. Her process led to consistently high-quality work delivered on time, with original insights that went beyond surface-level analysis.



The differences became starkly apparent during their final report, a comprehensive analysis of the electric vehicle charging market. Sarah's report, completed in record time, contained several outdated statistics and failed to account for recent regulatory changes. Wei produced thorough research but missed key market opportunities because he couldn't process the vast amount of available data in time. Priya's report struck the perfect balance, leveraging AI to process vast amounts of market data while applying her own critical thinking to develop nuanced, actionable recommendations.

By summer's end, Priya's balanced approach had not only improved her productivity significantly but also enhanced the quality of her analysis. Her integration of AI tools with human insight allowed her to take on additional projects while maintaining exceptional standards. She developed a reputation for delivering work that was both thorough and innovative, demonstrating that the future of professional work likely lies not in wholesale

adoption or rejection of AI, but in learning to become what some called a "centaur", combining the strengths of both human and machine intelligence.

As the internship program concluded, James reflected that Priya's approach represented the future of professional work, neither blindly embracing nor rejecting new tools, but thoughtfully integrating them to enhance human capabilities. Her success showed that the key to effective Al use wasn't just about access to the technology, but about developing the wisdom to know when and how to use it.

Developing an Approach to Using Al

Research by Dell'Acqua et al. (2023) on AI integration in professional settings reveals a fascinating phenomenon they call the "jagged technological frontier", where AI's capabilities vary dramatically across different tasks in sometimes surprising ways. Their study of 758 consultants at Boston Consulting Group demonstrated that thoughtful AI integration could increase productivity by 12.2% and improve work quality by over 40%, while misapplied AI could decrease performance by 19%. These findings are powerfully illustrated through the story of three interns, Sarah, Wei, and Priya, whose different approaches to AI integration mirror the patterns observed in the research. Just as Priya discovered through careful experimentation what the researchers would later quantify, the key to successful AI integration lies not in wholesale adoption or rejection, but in developing the wisdom to understand which tasks benefit from AI assistance and which require more direct human oversight. Like the high-performing consultants in the study, Priya's "centaur" approach of strategically combining human and machine capabilities demonstrates how the future of professional work will likely depend on our ability to thoughtfully navigate this new technological frontier.

Summary of Dell'Acqua et al. (2023) The Jagged Frontier

<u>Citation</u>: Dell'Acqua, F., McFowland, E., III, Mollick, E. R., Lifshitz-Assaf, H., Kellogg, K., Rajendran, S., Krayer, L., Candelon, F., & Lakhani, K. R. (2023). Navigating the jagged technological frontier: Field experimental evidence of the effects of AI on knowledge worker productivity and quality (Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 24-013). Harvard Business School. https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=64700

The research conducted by Dell'Acqua and colleagues represents one of the first large-scale studies examining how artificial intelligence, specifically Large Language Models (LLMs), affects the work of highly skilled professionals. Their study involved 758 consultants at

Boston Consulting Group, representing approximately 7% of the firm's individual contributor-level consultants. This significant sample size and the real-world nature of the tasks make their findings particularly valuable for understanding AI's impact on knowledge work.

The researchers identified what they call a "jagged technological frontier" in AI capabilities, a key theoretical contribution to our understanding of AI integration in the workplace. This frontier isn't smooth or predictable; instead, AI might excel at tasks that seem complex while struggling with others that appear simple. The researchers demonstrated this through carefully designed experiments where consultants completed both tasks within AI's capabilities (like creative product development) and tasks just outside its frontier (like certain types of data analysis requiring subtle interpretation of qualitative information).

The results were striking: when working on tasks within Al's capabilities, consultants using Al completed 12.2% more tasks and worked 25.1% faster than those without Al access. More importantly, the quality of their work improved dramatically, showing more than 40% higher quality compared to the control group. However, when tasks fell outside Al's capabilities, consultants using Al were 19 percentage points less likely to produce correct solutions than those working without Al. This finding highlights the critical importance of understanding where tasks fall relative to Al's capabilities.

Perhaps most intriguingly, the researchers identified two distinct patterns of successful AI integration. Some professionals adopted what they termed a "Centaur" approach, strategically dividing tasks between human and AI capabilities, much like the mythical creature that is half-human and half-horse. Others became "Cyborgs," deeply integrating AI into their workflow with continuous interaction between human and machine. Both approaches proved effective when matched appropriately to the task at hand. The research also revealed that AI integration had the most dramatic impact on below-average performers, helping them improve by 43%, while top performers still saw a significant 17% improvement.

The implications of this research extend far beyond the consulting industry. The study suggests that organisations need to develop new frameworks for understanding Al capabilities, train employees in effective Al integration, and potentially redesign workflows to optimise human-Al collaboration. The researchers' identification of the "jagged frontier" challenges simplistic notions about Al adoption and suggests that success with Al tools requires careful consideration of where and how they are deployed. This nuanced understanding of Al capabilities and limitations could help organisations avoid the pitfalls of both over-reliance and under-utilisation of Al tools while maximising their potential benefits.

The concept of the "jagged technological frontier" provides a useful framework for understanding how to integrate AI effectively in professional settings. As we know from the research, this uneven distribution of AI capabilities across different task types creates both opportunities and challenges.

The Boston Consulting Group study's findings about the 40% quality improvement and 12.2% productivity increase among consultants who used AI thoughtfully reinforce why strategic integration matters. These metrics, combined with the concerning 19% decrease in performance when AI was misapplied, highlight the importance of developing nuanced judgment about AI tool usage.

Consider how these findings manifest in our three interns' approaches. Sarah's indiscriminate AI use exemplifies the pitfalls identified in the research when professionals operate beyond AI's capabilities. Wei's complete avoidance of AI illustrates the opportunity cost of missing the documented productivity gains. Priya's approach aligns with the successful integration patterns identified in the research, demonstrating how understanding AI's capability boundaries leads to optimal outcomes.

The research's identification of "Centaur" and "Cyborg" patterns provides valuable models for professional AI integration. Priya's strategic task division exemplifies the Centaur approach, while the Cyborg model offers an alternative path for deeper AI integration. Both patterns, as we know, require thoughtful consideration of AI's evolving capabilities.



The study's finding that below-average performers improved by 43% while top performers gained 17% has significant implications for workforce development. This differential impact suggests that thoughtful AI integration can serve as a powerful levelling mechanism while still benefiting high performers.

These insights fundamentally reshape our understanding of professional AI integration. Rather than viewing AI adoption as a binary choice, the research demonstrates the importance of developing what we might call "AI literacy" or, the ability to navigate this jagged frontier effectively. Success, as both the research

and Priya's example show, comes from understanding AI as a tool for augmenting human capabilities rather than replacing them.

The Three Types of Al Workers

Think of choosing your AI integration approach like choosing a transportation method. A non-user is like someone who only walks everywhere. They maintain complete control and independence, but might struggle to keep pace in situations where faster travel is expected. The research shows that while non-users avoid certain ethical complications, they often fall behind productivity benchmarks that assume some level of technological integration.

A Centaur approach is like someone who drives for specific trips but walks for others, making deliberate choices about when each mode serves them best. The Harvard and Boston Consulting Group study highlights both the benefits and risks here. While Centaurs can effectively leverage AI for specific tasks, their confidence in their AI usage sometimes exceeds their actual skill, leading to that concerning 19% error rate Dell'Acqua et. al. (2023) identified.



The Cyborg approach is like someone who uses various vehicles for every journey, a car, bike, scooter, depending on the specific need. While this comprehensive integration can significantly boost efficiency, it comes with higher stakes. Just as relying entirely on vehicles might leave you stranded if they break down, Cyborgs can experience heightened stress when AI tools don't perform as expected.

To make this decision, consider asking yourself:

- What does your work primarily involve? Different fields may benefit more from different approaches.
- How comfortable are you with technological change? Cyborg approaches require constant adaptation.
- What are the consequences of errors in your work? The Harvard/BCG study's findings about Centaur error rates might be more concerning in some fields than others.
- How important is independent skill maintenance in your profession? Some fields require

maintaining strong non-AI capabilities.

Activity 6.1: Choosing Your Al Integration Path

This activity helps you explore different approaches to AI integration in professional settings, understand their implications, and make an informed decision about your preferred approach.

Part 1: Professional context analysis

Begin by examining your professional context.

Write a detailed response to these questions:

- "In my chosen profession..."
- What are the core tasks I perform daily?
- Which tasks require deep human judgment?
- Where do I see the most potential for AI assistance?
- What are the consequences of errors in my work?
- · How important is maintaining independent skills?

Consider documenting your answers in a structured format, such as recreating the table below:

Task Type	Current Approach	Potential for AI Integration

Part 2: Role-play scenarios

Find two partners to explore each AI integration approach through role-play. Each person takes turns playing different roles while working through this scenario:

"Your team has been assigned a complex project requiring data analysis, creative problemsolving, and stakeholder communication. You have three weeks to complete it."



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=310#h5p-35

Part 3: Decision making and reflection (10 minutes)

Based on your exploration, write a reflection addressing:

- Which approach best aligns with your:
 - professional requirements
 - personal work style
 - risk tolerance
 - learning preferences.
- What specific steps will you take to:
 - develop necessary skills for your chosen approach
 - mitigate identified risks
 - maintain professional effectiveness
 - adapt to changing technology.
- How might your approach need to evolve as:
 - your career progresses
 - Al capabilities change
 - industry standards shift.
- Share your reflection with your group, discussing:
 - How did others' perspectives influence your decision?
 - What concerns remain about your chosen approach?
 - What resources might you need to implement your approach effectively?



There's no universally "right" approach. The goal is to find the integration style that best serves your professional development and work requirements.

Using Artificial Intelligence Ethically in the Workplace

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, the integration of artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT has

created both unprecedented opportunities and significant ethical challenges. While AI can dramatically enhance your efficiency and innovation, the manner in which organisations choose to implement and use these tools profoundly impacts their effectiveness and ethical implications. Their research identifies several key workplace applications where AI tools can provide meaningful support, including:

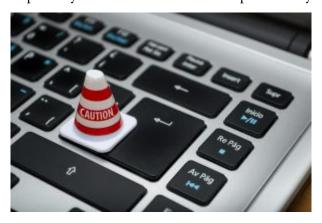
- data mining and analysis for research and operational insights
- language editing and enhancement of written communications
- generation of preliminary ideas and content drafts
- technical calculations and problem-solving in fields like engineering
- administrative task automation and streamlining
- real-time translation and cross-cultural communication support
- personalised learning content development for workplace training.

However, Griszbacher (2024) emphasises that the decision of how to approach AI implementation extends far beyond simply selecting appropriate software. It requires careful consideration of data privacy, bias mitigation, transparency, and the maintenance of human agency in decision-making processes. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in workplace operations, organisations must thoughtfully evaluate not just what AI tools to adopt, but how to implement them in ways that uphold professional integrity, protect employee wellbeing, and ensure responsible innovation. This makes the development of ethical AI usage frameworks a crucial priority for modern workplaces seeking to harness AI's benefits while proactively addressing its risks.

As an intern entering a workplace, you'll likely encounter various systems and policies governing the use of AI. Understanding these frameworks within your workplace is crucial for navigating your early career effectively. Most organisations now have structured approaches to AI implementation that directly affect how you'll interact with these technologies in your daily work. For example, you might find that while AI helps analyse data or generate initial reports, your supervisor will always review AI-generated outputs with you, providing context and helping you understand how to interpret and use these insights effectively. This human oversight isn't just a formality, it's part of a carefully designed system ensuring that AI remains a tool to enhance your work rather than replace your professional judgment.



You'll also discover that many organisations have what's known as "social contracts" regarding AI usage, essentially, clear guidelines about how AI should and shouldn't be used in the workplace (Wright & Schultz, 2018). These policies are particularly important to you because they protect your interests while you're developing your professional expertise. For instance, if AI tools are used to track your early performance or suggest training opportunities, you'll have the opportunity to discuss these assessments with your managers and provide input. Most organisations will provide training about their AI systems during your onboarding, explaining not just how to use these tools but also the ethical considerations behind them. You might even be invited to participate in AI ethics committees or feedback sessions, giving you a voice in how these technologies are implemented in your workplace. This involvement can be a valuable opportunity to develop both your technical and leadership skills early in your career.



Not every organisation has embraced artificial intelligence with open arms, and many organisations maintain restrictive policies around AI usage due to legitimate concerns about data security, privacy, and regulatory compliance. For interns entering these environments, understanding that these restrictions aren't merely bureaucratic obstacles but often reflect serious considerations about protecting sensitive information, maintaining client confidentiality, and ensuring consistent quality control is crucial. Security concerns are particularly relevant in fields handling personal, financial, or proprietary data, where even

seemingly harmless AI tools could potentially expose the organisation to significant risks (Jackson & Allen, 2024). Rather than viewing these policies as limitations, interns benefit from approaching them as important guardrails that protect both the organisation and its stakeholders.

Within these constraints, interns can still engage with AI ethically and professionally by focusing on approved tools and processes whilst maintaining transparent communication about their technology use. This involves being upfront with supervisors about AI tool preferences, clearly documenting any approved AI assistance usage, and ensuring all AI-supported work goes through appropriate review channels. For example, if a workplace allows AI for specific tasks like data analysis but prohibits it for client communications, respecting these boundaries absolutely whilst seeking opportunities to demonstrate the value of permitted AI use through careful documentation and quality results is essential. When uncertainty arises about whether an AI tool is appropriate for a particular task, seeking explicit guidance from supervisors rather than making assumptions represents the best approach. This commitment to transparency and respect for organisational policies helps build trust whilst positioning interns as professionals who can thoughtfully balance innovation with security requirements.

Activity 6.2: Navigating AI Implementation in Your Internship

Read the following scenario carefully:

Mateo has started his internship at TechnoCore Solutions, a medium-sized consulting firm. Throughout his university undergraduate studies, he frequently used AI tools to enhance his work and research projects. However, on his first day in Australia, he learns that TechnoCore has strict policies around AI usage: all AI-assisted work must be clearly documented, AI cannot be used for client communications, and all Al-generated content must undergo human review before being incorporated into any deliverables.

In his second week, Mateo's supervisor assigns him a major data analysis project examining five years of client feedback to identify emerging trends and patterns. Looking at the sheer volume of data, Mateo realises this task would take several days of manual analysis, but he could complete it in just a few hours using AI tools he's familiar with from university. He wants to make a good impression with efficient work, but he's uncertain how to proceed under TechnoCore's AI policies.

Later that week, after attending several project meetings, Mateo finds himself responsible for drafting the internal meeting summaries. He knows AI could help him create comprehensive summaries quickly, particularly useful since English is his second language. However, while

reviewing the company's AI policy documentation, he notices there's no clear guidance about using AI for internal communications, leaving him unsure about the appropriate approach.

The situation becomes more complex when one of his colleagues, impressed by his data analysis work, suggests they use AI to help brainstorm solutions for a challenging client problem. "We don't need to tell anyone since it's just for initial ideas," his colleague says with a wink. Mateo feels uncomfortable with this suggestion, remembering the strict policy about AI use in client-related work, but he also doesn't want to damage this budding professional relationship.



Part 1: Navigating the scenarios:

- Consider the data analysis project. How could Mateo propose using AI tools for this task in a way that demonstrates both efficiency and respect for TechnoCore's policies? Think about specific documentation and approval processes he might suggest to his supervisor.
- In the meeting summaries situation, where policy guidance is unclear, what principles should guide Mateo's decision-making about AI use? Consider how his role as an intern and a non-native English speaker might influence this decision.
- When his colleague suggests using undisclosed AI for client work, how might Mateo maintain positive professional relationships while upholding ethical standards and company policies? Consider suggesting an alternative approach that achieves both goals.
- Looking across all three situations, how do they reflect the broader challenge of balancing technological efficiency with professional responsibility and organisational requirements? What consistent principles could Mateo apply when facing AI-related decisions?
- How might Mateo's international background and previous experience with AI tools at

university both help and hinder his navigation of TechnoCore's AI policies? Consider how cultural differences in workplace norms and technology use might influence his approach.

Part 2: Professional email exercise

Task: Write a professional email from Mateo to his supervisor seeking clarification about AI usage for the data analysis project. This task will help develop skills in professional communication and ethical technology use.

Email writing guidelines:

- the email should demonstrate understanding of existing policies
- present a clear business case for AI usage in this specific context
- propose specific documentation and review processes
- maintain a professional yet collaborative tone
- show respect for organisational security considerations.

Here is a model email structure to guide your response:

Subject Line: Clarification Request: Al-Assisted Data Analysis for Client Feedback Project

Dear [Supervisor's name],

First paragraph: Reference the assigned project and current status.

Second paragraph: Present the proposed AI approach and its benefits.

Third paragraph: Acknowledge company policies and suggest compliance measures.

Fourth paragraph: Request guidance and propose next steps

Your email should be approximately 200-250 words. Consider how to balance efficiency gains with policy compliance, and how to demonstrate professional judgment while seeking guidance as an intern.

After writing your email:

- Review it from your supervisor's perspective. Have you provided all the information they need to make an informed decision?
- Consider what questions or concerns they might have and whether your email addresses these proactively.
- Evaluate whether your tone strikes the right balance between initiative and respect for organisational hierarchy.

Part 3: Reflecting on ethical AI usage

Write a reflective piece (approximately 300-400 words) addressing the following prompt:

Consider how your approach to using AI tools might evolve throughout your internship and early career. Drawing from Mateo's situation, explore how you would develop your own framework for making decisions about AI use in professional settings.

Don't forget the DIEP structure we encountered in Chapter 5. This may help you write your reflection in greater detail and clarity:

Describe	Describe the event factually	
Interpret	Interpret the event for its meaning and significance	
Evaluate	Evaluate its importance	
Plan	Plan for future scenarios	

Your reflection should consider:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

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Working with Artificial Intelligence on Internship

The story of Priya, Wei, and Sarah at the beginning of the chapter illustrates a key insight that aligns with Industry 5.0's emphasis on human-machine collaboration. Just as Industry 5.0 seeks to create "symbiotic relationships between humans and machines" (Gamberini & Pluchino, 2024, p. 6), successful interns need to develop human-centric connected systems. During your internship, you will have a unique opportunity to experiment with finding this balance in a supported environment. Gamberini & Pluchino emphasise that Industry 5.0 focuses on "merging the creativity and expertise of human experts with efficient and intelligent machines" (2024, p. 5) rather than replacing humans with automation. This is exactly what Priya demonstrated in her approach. She didn't just use AI tools blindly like Sarah or reject them entirely like Wei, but rather developed a nuanced understanding of how to leverage AI's strengths while applying her own critical thinking and professional judgment.

An internship provides an ideal testing ground for developing these crucial capabilities. When interns like Priya experiment thoughtfully with AI tools, they aren't just learning to use specific technologies, they're developing skills such as curiosity, resilience, flexibility, agility, and systems thinking. These are precisely the attributes that are essential for adapting to changes brought about by automation and digitalisation. By practising this balanced approach during your internships, you can begin building the professional capabilities you'll need throughout your career in an increasingly AI-enabled workplace.

Selecting AI Platforms for Professional Development

When beginning your journey with AI tools, the first step is selecting appropriate platforms that align with your professional needs. While numerous AI platforms exist, it's important to approach platform selection strategically rather than attempting to master every available tool. Each platform has distinct strengths and capabilities that make it suitable for different professional tasks.

Currently, several major platforms dominate the professional landscape. OpenAI's ChatGPT provides broad capabilities in text generation and analysis. Microsoft's Copilot excels in both text and image generation tasks, making it particularly valuable for creative and visual projects. Google's Bard offers strong capabilities in current events analysis and data interpretation. Anthropic's Claude demonstrates strength in detailed analysis and precise writing tasks, especially valuable for professional documentation and research.



Rather than attempting to become proficient with every available platform, consider developing expertise with two or three that complement each other and align with your professional needs. For instance, you might pair a platform strong in visual generation (like Microsoft Copilot) with one specialising in detailed writing and analysis (like Claude). This approach allows you to develop deep proficiency with specific tools rather than surface-level familiarity with many.

When selecting your platforms, consider these factors:

- the specific requirements of your professional field
- the types of tasks you most commonly need to accomplish
- the platform's reliability and accuracy for your use cases

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- the platform's ability to integrate with your existing workflow
- the platform's approach to data privacy and security.

Remember that platform selection is not a permanent decision. As you develop experience and as the technology evolves, you may adjust your choices based on changing needs and capabilities. The goal is to build a toolkit that enhances your professional capabilities while maintaining your judgment and expertise as the guiding force in your work.

Bringing AI into Your Daily Professional Practice

Think of learning to work with AI like learning a new language. Immersion is key to developing fluency. Instead of reserving AI tools only for complex or challenging tasks, incorporate them into your regular workflow for routine activities. This approach serves two important purposes: it helps you develop comfort and competency with the tools while also helping the AI learn to match your professional communication style and standards.

Consider starting with straightforward professional communications. When booking travel for conferences or meetings, use AI to draft your initial emails to hotels and airlines. While you could certainly write these emails yourself, having AI generate a first draft gives you opportunities to refine its output and teach it your preferred tone and style. For instance, if the AI's draft is too formal or casual, you can adjust it and use similar prompts in the future with notes about your preferred formality level.

Professional documentation provides another excellent opportunity for AI collaboration. When working with spreadsheets, instead of immediately searching online for formula solutions, engage with AI to help construct them. This process not only helps you complete the immediate task but also builds your understanding of formula logic through the AI's explanations. You might ask the AI to explain its thought process or suggest alternative approaches, turning each interaction into a learning opportunity.



Discussion forums and professional networking platforms offer particularly valuable opportunities to develop your AI collaboration skills. Rather than simply using AI to generate responses, engage with it as a thought partner. Share your initial ideas and ask the AI to help you refine them or consider different perspectives. This approach helps you maintain your authentic voice while leveraging AI's ability to suggest enhancements or identify areas that might benefit from clarification.

The key is to view these everyday interactions as training opportunities, both for yourself and the AI. Each time you refine an AI-generated draft or adjust its tone to better match your professional style, you're developing your ability to effectively collaborate with these tools while teaching them to better serve your needs. Think of it as developing a professional partnership rather than simply using a tool.

Building an Effective Partnership with AI

The key to productive AI collaboration lies in understanding that these systems are designed to engage in natural, conversational interactions. Just as clear communication and professional courtesy enhance human workplace relationships, they also improve the quality of AI interactions. When we frame our requests with clarity, context, and courtesy, we create conditions for more precise and useful AI responses.

Consider how you would approach a knowledgeable colleague for assistance. You wouldn't simply demand information, you would provide context, explain your needs, and frame your request respectfully. The same principle applies to AI interactions. Instead of issuing abrupt commands like "Write hotel email," take a moment to set the stage with context and specific parameters. For example: "I need to write a professional email to confirm my hotel booking for a business conference. The booking is for three nights starting July 15th at the Marriott downtown. Could you help me draft an email that's courteous and includes all essential details?" This approach gives the AI the context it needs to generate more relevant and useful responses.

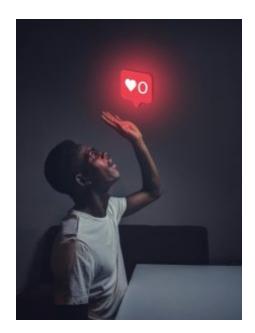


This principle extends beyond simple task requests. When working on complex projects, treat the AI as a collaborative partner by sharing your thought process and objectives. For example, when starting a data analysis project, you might say: "I'm analysing customer feedback data to identify trends in product satisfaction. Could you help me think through effective approaches to categorising this data? I'd particularly like to focus on identifying recurring themes in the comments." By providing this level of context and engaging in a more collaborative dialogue, you enable the AI to provide more targeted and valuable assistance while maintaining your role as the decision-maker guiding the process.

Learning Together: The Feedback Loop in Al Collaboration

Effective AI collaboration requires developing a two-way learning relationship where feedback plays a crucial role in improving outcomes. Just as you would help a new colleague understand your preferences and standards, providing constructive feedback to AI helps refine its responses to better match your professional needs. This feedback process isn't just about correcting mistakes, it's about guiding the AI to better understand the nuances of your requirements and professional context.

Consider how feedback works in professional mentoring relationships: specific, constructive comments help people understand not just what to change, but why the change matters. The same principle applies when working with AI. Instead of simply accepting or rejecting outputs, engage in a dialogue about refinements. For example, if an AI generates a client report that's technically accurate but too informal, you might say: "The analysis is thorough, but could you revise this using more professional language appropriate for senior executives? In particular, I'd like to see more industry-specific terminology and a more formal tone." This specific guidance helps the AI understand the professional standards you're aiming to meet.



Remember that feedback works best when it's:

- specific about what works and what needs improvement
- constructive rather than simply critical
- focused on the desired outcome
- clear about the professional context and standards
- building toward better future interactions.

For instance, you might say: "The structure of this analysis is excellent, particularly how you've organised the key findings. However, could you enhance the recommendations section by including more specific, actionable steps? Our clients typically expect detailed implementation guidance." This type of feedback not only improves the current output but helps the AI better understand your professional needs for future interactions.

By consistently providing thoughtful feedback, you help create a more effective working relationship with AI tools while developing your own skills in professional communication and quality assessment. This feedback loop becomes an integral part of your professional development, helping you refine both your use of AI tools and your ability to articulate professional standards and expectations.

Activity 6.3: Developing Your AI Partnership Strategy

This activity helps you develop practical experience working with AI tools in a professional context, learning how to effectively integrate AI assistance into your workflow while maintaining professional judgment and standards.

Part 1: Platform selection and setup

Choose two AI platforms to work with during your internship. Write a brief paragraph explaining why you selected these platforms, considering:

- what specific professional tasks you plan to accomplish
- how these platforms complement each other
- any limitations or considerations that influenced your choice.

Part 2: Initial experimentation

Create three different versions of a professional email requesting information about potential internship opportunities in your field. This exercise helps you understand how different approaches to AI collaboration affect outcomes.

Version 1: Write the email entirely by yourself, without AI assistance

Version 2: Use AI to generate the complete email

Version 3: Use a collaborative approach where you:

- prime the AI with context about your background and goals
- request an initial draft
- provide feedback for improvements
- work together to refine the final version.

Compare these three versions, analysing:

- the strengths and weaknesses of each approach
- how well each version reflects your professional voice
- the time invested in each method
- the quality of the final product.

Part 3: Week-long implementation challenge

Over the next week, maintain a "Partnership journal" documenting your Al interactions.

For each day:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

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Sample Journal Entry:

Today I used Claude to help analyse client feedback data. I started by explaining the context: 'We're looking for patterns in customer satisfaction with our new software interface.' The initial analysis missed some industry-specific nuances, so I provided feedback: 'Could you consider how these feedback patterns align with standard UX principles in enterprise software?' The refined analysis was much more useful. Tomorrow, I'll start by providing more industry context upfront.

Part 4: Peer discussion and analysis

At the end of the week, share with someone else who completed this activity and discuss:

- What surprised you about working with AI?
- Which tasks benefited most from AI collaboration?

- How did your approach to AI interaction evolve over the week?
- What best practices did you develop?
- How might these lessons apply to your future career?



Remember

The goal isn't to maximise AI usage but to develop thoughtful, effective patterns of human-Al collaboration that enhance your professional capabilities while maintaining your judgment and expertise as the guiding force in your work.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how successful AI integration requires a balanced "partnership approach" where professionals strategically use AI tools while maintaining human judgment, as research demonstrates this can improve work quality by up to 40% while avoiding the performance decreases associated with over-reliance.
- how developing proficiency with AI requires systematic practice starting with everyday professional tasks, like language immersion, allowing professionals to build competence gradually before tackling more complex applications.
- how organisational AI policies serve as essential safeguards for data security, privacy and regulatory compliance, requiring professionals to understand and respect these guidelines while finding ways to innovate responsibly within established frameworks.
- how effective AI collaboration requires treating AI systems as professional partners by providing clear context, specific guidance, and constructive feedback, enabling more precise and valuable AI assistance while maintaining professional standards.
- how successful professionals in the AI era become "centaurs" by thoughtfully combining human and machine capabilities, developing both technical skills with AI tools and essential meta-competencies like critical thinking and professional judgment.

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7. DEVELOPING POSITIVE WORKING **RELATIONSHIPS**

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- cultivate meaningful professional relationships across all levels of your organisation, from support staff to senior leadership, while understanding the unique value each relationship brings to your professional development
- analyse and adapt to workplace cultures by recognising both explicit and implicit organisational norms that influence professional relationships
- implement specific strategies for building and maintaining positive workplace relationships through effective communication, professional boundaries, and collaborative approaches.

Imagine this Scenario

Zhang stares at his computer screen, the Micro-Cap software displaying yet another error message. His shoulders tense as he reads the technical documentation for the third time, trying to understand why the circuit diagrams won't import correctly. After twenty minutes of unsuccessful troubleshooting, he finally gathers the courage to ask for help.

"Excuse me, John," Zhang says, careful to pronounce each word clearly. "Could you help me with Micro-Cap? I cannot get these diagrams to import."

John, or "Johnno" as everyone calls him, swivels in his chair, flashing a friendly smile and slides on over next to Zhang, looking at his screen. "What you got is pretty old hat, mate. Dunno how to get around it, Micro-Cap ain't my bowl of rice. Have a yarn with Sunil, that cobber will get you sorted lickety-split."

Zhang blinks, understanding perhaps half of what Johnno has said. After three months of studying engineering in Australia, he thought his English was improving, but this conversation makes him feel like he's back on his first day. The words individually make sense. He knows what a bowl is, and rice, and yarn is something to do with string, but strung together, they might as well be another language entirely.

In the open-plan office, Zhang feels acutely aware of being one of only three non-Caucasian employees in the fifty-person firm. The fluorescent lights seem suddenly brighter, the air conditioning a bit colder. He considers returning to his desk to spend another hour with the technical documentation, but remembers his supervisor's encouragement to ask questions when stuck.

With careful steps, Zhang makes his way to the IT department, where he finds Sunil engrossed in what appears to be several lines of code across multiple monitors. Like Zhang, Sunil wasn't born in Australia, having moved from Bangalore five years ago.

Zhang hovers uncertainly in the doorway of the IT department. Through the glass walls, he can see someone who must be Sunil working intently across multiple monitors. Zhang's hand tightens around the notebook where he's written his technical question in careful English. After several deep breaths, he gently knocks on the door frame.

"Ex-excuse me," Zhang's voice comes out quieter than intended. "Are you Sunil? John, I mean, Johnno, said you might be able to help with Micro-Cap?"



Sunil startles slightly at the interruption, taking a moment to transition his attention from the code on his screens. He turns in his chair, adjusting his glasses as he faces Zhang. "Yes, that's me," he responds, his voice carrying a hint of an Indian accent. "You must be the new intern?"

"Yes, I am Zhang," he says, still standing in the doorway. "I'm sorry to interrupt your work..."

"No, no, please come in," Sunil gestures to a spare chair, though his smile seems a bit reserved, perhaps remembering his own early days as the newcomer. "What seems to be the problem?"

Zhang edges into the room, carefully pulling the chair to maintain a polite distance. He opens his notebook, pointing to his carefully written notes about the technical issue. As he explains the Micro-Cap problem and his confusion about Johnno's response, his voice grows steadier.

Sunil's initial reserve begins to fade as he recognises the familiar struggle of navigating both technical challenges and Australian workplace culture. His smile becomes more genuine as he shares his own experience.

After Zhang explains both his technical issue and his confusion about Johnno's response, Sunil chuckles knowingly. "Ah, welcome to Australian English. Let me translate, 'old hat' means outdated or old-fashioned, 'bowl of rice' is Johnno's attempt at being culturally relevant but missing the mark a bit, 'have a yarn' means to have a chat, and 'cobber' is mate or friend. As for 'lickety-split,' that just means quickly."

Seeing Zhang's overwhelmed expression, Sunil continues more gently. "Look, I know it's a lot to take in. When I first started here, I spent half my time confused by these expressions too. The good news is, most people here are like Johnno: they mean well, even if their attempts at cultural connection sometimes miss the mark."

Whilst helping Zhang resolve the Micro-Cap issue, Sunil shares more insights about navigating the workplace culture. "The key is to remember that informal language here often signals friendliness, not disrespect. When Johnno calls you 'mate' or uses casual expressions, he's trying to make you feel included, even if it has the opposite effect sometimes."

Zhang nods slowly, beginning to understand. "So when they use these informal expressions..."

"It means they see you as part of the team," Sunil finishes. "Though I did have to tell Johnno that 'bowl of rice' wasn't the most culturally sensitive way to relate to Asian colleagues," he adds with a wry smile.

The technical problem solved, Zhang returns to his desk with more than just a working circuit diagram. He has gained a valuable ally in Sunil and a better understanding of how to navigate the complex intersection of technical work and Australian workplace culture.

Working Relationships: The Key to Person-Environment-Fit

Building positive working relationships in professional settings extends far beyond simple collegiality: it fundamentally influences our sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and career success through what organisational psychologists call "person-environment fit." This concept suggests that our professional effectiveness and wellbeing depend not just on our technical capabilities, but on how well we align with our workplace's social environment, values, and cultural norms. When we experience strong person-

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environment fit, we're more likely to receive mentoring opportunities, be included in informal knowledge sharing, and gain access to the kind of tacit organisational knowledge that proves invaluable for career advancement.

For those who feel like cultural outsiders, whether due to linguistic differences, cultural background, or being new to a profession, developing this fit might initially seem daunting. However, research consistently shows that person-environment fit isn't static, it's something we can actively develop through intentional relationship building, cultural learning, and open communication. Understanding this dynamic nature of workplace fit helps us approach relationship building not as a fixed challenge to overcome, but as an ongoing process of professional growth where each interaction, even those that feel awkward or uncertain, contributes to our developing sense of workplace belonging and professional identity.

International students face unique challenges with person-environment fit as they enter university life, particularly because they must navigate multiple types of alignment simultaneously. Unlike domestic students who primarily focus on academic adjustment, international students must achieve fit across academic, cultural, social, and physical dimensions, all while operating in a new language and cultural context. Research shows this complex adjustment process significantly impacts their psychological wellbeing, especially when there are misalignments between their goals and expectations and the university environment.

These fit challenges materialise in various ways throughout their university experience. Academically, students might struggle to adapt to different teaching styles or assessment expectations, while culturally, they may find it difficult to understand unwritten social norms or classroom participation expectations. For example, a student might be academically capable but find themselves struggling to engage in tutorial discussions due to language barriers or cultural differences in classroom interaction styles. These challenges are further complicated when students cannot easily access or effectively utilise university support services, either because they don't understand how to navigate these systems or because the services themselves don't align with their cultural expectations of support. Understanding these multiple dimensions of fit helps explain why some highly capable international students still struggle to thrive in their new university environment, even when they possess strong academic abilities.

Shared dimensions of university and workplace cultural fits

Person-environment fit forms the foundation of workplace satisfaction and success, with working relationships serving as the crucial bridge between individual characteristics and organisational culture. Even when someone's skills and values align perfectly with their organisation's mission and requirements, the quality of their daily interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and stakeholders ultimately determines whether they thrive in that environment. These relationships act as the practical manifestation of organisational culture, translating abstract concepts like "collaborative environment" or "innovation-focused culture" into tangible experiences through everyday interactions, shared problem-solving, and mutual support. When professionals develop positive working relationships, they create informal networks that help them navigate organisational complexities, access resources and opportunities, and receive the emotional and practical support needed to overcome workplace challenges. These relationships become particularly vital during periods of change or stress, as they provide the psychological safety necessary for individuals to take risks, share ideas, and maintain resilience in the face of setbacks.

Research by Rose et al. (2021) reveals fascinating insights about how workplace relationships influence intern-to-employee conversion through person-environment fit. The path analysis demonstrates that while both supervisor and coworker relationships matter, coworker relationships have a stronger influence on whether interns are ultimately offered permanent positions.

Let's break down the key findings from their path analysis: The research showed that coworker relationships had a path coefficient of 0.48 to person-environment fit, whilst supervisor relationships had a lower coefficient of 0.29. This means that positive relationships with colleagues were almost twice as influential in determining how well interns felt they "fitted" within the organisation compared to relationships with supervisors.

This makes intuitive sense when considering the daily reality of internships. While supervisors provide

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important guidance and feedback, it's often colleagues who give interns the most complete picture of organisational culture, unwritten norms, and what it's truly like to work there. Coworkers tend to have more frequent, informal interactions with interns and often feel more approachable for questions about day-to-day work life. These regular interactions help interns determine whether they can envision themselves as permanent members of the organisation.

The research also revealed that person-environment fit strongly predicted conversion intentions, with a path coefficient of 0.52. This suggests that when interns develop positive relationships with colleagues and come to feel they belong in the organisational culture, they become much more likely to accept permanent positions if offered. The effect is compounded: strong coworker relationships enhance person-environment fit, which in turn increases the likelihood of conversion to ongoing employment.



For interns, these findings emphasise that while impressing their supervisor is important, investing time in building authentic connections with colleagues may be even more crucial for long-term career success. Simple actions like joining colleagues for lunch, participating in informal team discussions, and seeking advice from coworkers can significantly impact whether interns feel "at home" in an organisation and ultimately transition from intern to employee.

The research provides strong empirical support for treating internships not just as extended job interviews with supervisors, but as opportunities to become genuinely integrated into the organisational community through peer relationships. For organisations, it suggests that fostering strong intern-coworker bonds may be one of the most effective strategies for converting high-performing interns into valuable permanent employees.

Activity 7.1: Mapping Your Workplace Network

This activity helps interns understand and strengthen their workplace relationships, drawing on

Rose et al.'s (2021) research about the crucial role of colleague interactions in personenvironment fit.

Part 1: Network reflection

Create a detailed map of your workplace relationships. Draw yourself in the centre of a page, then add:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=311#h5p-38

Part 2: Relationship analysis

Review your network map and write brief notes addressing:

- Balance assessment
 - What is the ratio between supervisor and colleague interactions?
 - Are your strongest connections mainly with other interns or with experienced staff?
 - Which departments or teams are represented in your network?
- Quality evaluation
 - Which relationships help you understand the organisation's values?
 - Who gives you insight into the workplace culture?
 - Which connections make you feel more integrated into the team?

Part 3: Strategic development

Based on Rose et al.'s (2021) findings about the importance of colleague relationships, create an action plan to strengthen your workplace network:

Identify three colleagues you'd like to develop stronger professional relationships with.

- For each person, plan:
 - a work-related topic you could discuss with them
 - a specific question about their role or experience
 - an opportunity for natural interaction (e.g., shared projects, lunch breaks).
- Set specific, measurable goals such as:
 - having two meaningful professional conversations each week

- · learning about a different department each month
- contributing to team discussions in meetings.

Part 4: Reflection questions

Consider how your planned interactions might influence your person-environment fit:

- How might stronger colleague relationships help you understand:
 - the organisation's unwritten rules?
 - team dynamics and communication styles?
 - career development opportunities?

What aspects of organisational culture would you like to learn more about through these relationships?

- How could expanded workplace connections influence your:
 - professional development?
 - understanding of the organisation?
 - likelihood of seeking permanent employment?



Rose et al.'s (2021) research demonstrates that colleague relationships have nearly twice the impact on person-environment fit compared to supervisor relationships. This activity helps interns develop the professional networks that research shows are crucial for successful intern-to-employee conversion.

Professional Duality: Creating a Work Persona

The concept of professional duality, how we develop and maintain distinct personal and professional identities, plays a crucial role in workplace success. Understanding how to navigate this duality helps interns develop authentic yet professionally appropriate workplace behaviours that align with organisational expectations whilst remaining true to their core values.

Having a slightly different personality at work, what we call a "work persona", is a normal and helpful way to adapt to the professional environment. Research by Chung et al. (2023) looked at 300 employees

and found that people naturally develop a work style that combines their organisation's values with the informal social rules of their workplace. This helps them fit in while still being themselves.

The study shows that we tend to act somewhat differently depending on who we're talking to at work. With managers and supervisors, we often show a more formal, professional side that matches what the organisation expects. But with our colleagues at the same level, we usually blend our professional and personal sides more naturally. This isn't about being fake, it's about knowing how to communicate effectively in different work situations. When people can adjust their style this way, they usually feel more connected to their organisation and more satisfied with their job.

It's important to understand that having a work persona doesn't mean you're pretending to be someone else. Instead, think of it like choosing appropriate clothes for work, you're still yourself, just dressed for the professional environment. The research found that people who develop a comfortable work style tend to build better relationships at work and do better in their careers. Just as we might act differently at a family dinner compared to a night out with friends, it's natural and healthy to have a slightly different way of presenting ourselves at work.

The relationship between our work persona and person-environment fit helps us understand how we become part of an organisation's culture. When we join a workplace, we naturally begin to absorb both the written and unwritten rules of how things work. These unwritten rules, like how people communicate, how they handle disagreements, or what behaviour gets rewarded, often matter more than the official values posted on office walls.

As we develop our work persona, we start to incorporate these organisational values into how we act at work. For example, if an organisation values open communication but expects people to challenge ideas privately rather than in meetings, we learn to adapt our communication style accordingly. This isn't about changing who we are fundamentally, it's about understanding and working effectively within the organisation's culture. The research by Chung et al. (2023) shows that this adaptation helps us form stronger connections with both colleagues and supervisors.

These workplace relationships then reinforce our understanding of the organisation's values and help us fit in better. Through daily interactions with colleagues and feedback from supervisors, we continuously refine our work persona to better align with the workplace culture. What makes this process particularly interesting is how it creates a cycle: our work persona helps us build relationships, and these relationships in turn help us better understand and adapt to the organisation's culture. This cycle explains why people often feel more comfortable and natural in their work persona over time, as they develop a deeper understanding of their workplace's unwritten rules and values.

This short reflective activity helps interns understand how their work persona develops in response to organisational values and culture.

Think about your workplace and note down your observations about:

The Written Rules

Write down two or three official organisational values or rules from your workplace. For example, these might be values displayed on walls or mentioned in company materials.

The Unwritten Rules

Now think about how people actually work together. Write down two or three unwritten rules you've noticed. For example:

- How do people typically handle disagreements?
- When do people tend to speak up in meetings?
- How do colleagues communicate with supervisors?

Your Adaptation

Reflect on how you've adjusted your behaviour to fit these unwritten rules. Write down:

- one way you act differently at work compared to outside work
- how this adjustment has helped you build workplace relationships
- whether this change feels natural or forced.



There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to understand how you naturally adapt to your workplace culture while maintaining your authentic self. This awareness can help you develop more effective workplace relationships.

Trust, Enjoyment and Unspoken Boundaries in Workplace Relationships

The relationship between duality and trust in professional settings represents one of the most nuanced aspects of workplace dynamics. While we naturally seek genuine connections with our colleagues, we must simultaneously maintain appropriate professional boundaries, a balance that directly impacts the development of trust. This duality manifests in how we share personal information while preserving privacy, how we build friendships while maintaining professional objectivity, and how we navigate the complex territory between being approachable and maintaining authority. Understanding this delicate

balance proves crucial because trust emerges not from completely removing these boundaries, but from managing them thoughtfully and consistently. When we demonstrate both genuine care for our colleagues and respect for professional limitations, we create an environment where trust can flourish naturally. This careful navigation of personal and professional spaces allows us to build authentic workplace relationships while maintaining the structure and boundaries necessary for effective professional collaboration.

Trust in professional settings emerges from a complex interplay of individual, organisational, and cultural factors that shape how we perceive and evaluate trustworthiness. Research across multiple societies reveals that professional trust operates through two fundamental dimensions, warmth and competence, which manifest differently depending on organisational roles and cultural contexts (Kwantes & Kartolo, 2021; Wöhrle et al., 2015). When colleagues demonstrate both technical capability and genuine concern for others' wellbeing, they create the foundations for trust to develop. However, this trust must be carefully cultivated within the established norms and expectations that govern professional relationships.



The development of professional trust requires a sophisticated understanding of how different workplace roles shape trust dynamics. Supervisors and colleagues face distinct expectations regarding how they should demonstrate trustworthiness, with most cultures placing greater emphasis on competence for those in leadership positions (Wöhrle et al., 2015). Yet this competence must be balanced with appropriate displays of warmth and concern for others, what researchers term "benevolence", to build sustainable trust. The challenge lies in calibrating these demonstrations of capability and care to align with both organisational needs and cultural expectations about professional behaviour.

Modern workplace relationships have grown increasingly complex as organisations become more globally connected and culturally diverse. Trust must now be built and maintained across cultural boundaries, often in virtual or hybrid environments where traditional trust-building mechanisms may be limited. This evolution demands a more nuanced approach to professional trust, one that acknowledges how cultural values and practices influence perceptions of trustworthiness while remaining sensitive to the universal human need for both competence and warmth in professional relationships (Kwantes & Kartolo, 2021). Success in this environment requires developing what researchers call "swift trust", the ability to quickly establish functional trust based on role expectations while remaining open to deeper trust development over time.

The Notion of "Swift Trust"

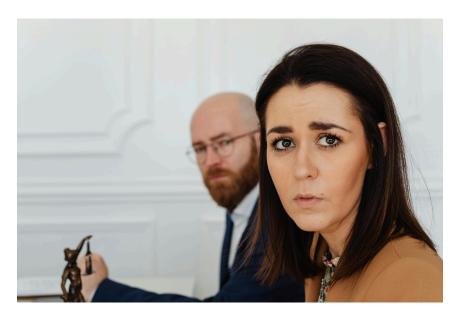
During your internship, you'll need to quickly establish working relationships with supervisors and colleagues despite having limited time to build trust naturally. This is where 'swift trust' becomes crucial. It's a practical form of professional trust that develops rapidly based on roles and initial impressions rather than long-term experience. When you first join your workplace, people will form swift trust assessments of your trustworthiness based on how well you demonstrate both competence in your role and warmth in your interactions. Similarly, you'll need to make quick judgments about trusting your new colleagues based on their professional roles and early interactions. Understanding swift trust can help you navigate these early workplace relationships more effectively. You can actively demonstrate your reliability through consistent performance while also showing appropriate warmth and collegiality in your interactions. Remember that while swift trust helps establish initial working relationships, it serves as a foundation for developing deeper professional trust over the course of your internship through continued positive interactions and demonstrated reliability. By being mindful of how you present both your capabilities and your interpersonal approach from day one, you can help foster the swift trust necessary for productive workplace relationships.

Trust and enjoyment in the workplace share a fascinating reciprocal relationship. When employees feel they can trust their colleagues and supervisors, they experience greater psychological safety, which allows them to relax and express themselves more authentically at work. This emotional security creates space for spontaneous moments of connection, shared laughter, and genuine camaraderie. Conversely, in environments where trust is lacking, people tend to maintain rigid professional personas, carefully monitoring their words and actions, which inhibits the natural development of enjoyable workplace relationships. Research consistently shows that teams with high levels of trust not only perform better but also report higher job satisfaction and engagement, largely because they feel comfortable enough to share jokes, celebrate successes together, and support each other through challenges. This comfortable atmosphere, built on a foundation of trust, transforms daily work interactions from mere professional obligations into opportunities for meaningful connection and enjoyment.



Research from Mak et al. (2012) shows that workplace relationships and psychological safety are deeply intertwined with the appropriate use of humour, particularly during internships and early career transitions. Just as social bonds often form through shared laughter and jokes, professional relationships tend to develop when colleagues can relax and engage in appropriate workplace banter. However, navigating humour as a new employee requires careful attention to workplace norms and power dynamics.

For interns and new employees, understanding the role of humour in workplace culture presents both opportunities and potential pitfalls. While established employees may engage in more casual or edgy humour based on their longstanding relationships, interns should maintain a more conservative approach until they better understand the specific workplace culture. The most successful interns typically focus first on demonstrating competence and reliability while carefully observing how humour is used by others in the organisation.



Rather than trying to match the joking style of longtime employees, you can build positive relationships by appreciating others' appropriate humour and occasionally contributing light, professionally safe comments. This measured approach allows you to participate in workplace camaraderie while avoiding potential missteps that could damage their professional reputation. As relationships develop naturally over time, the boundaries of appropriate humour may expand, but this should happen gradually and organically rather than being forced.

A crucial reminder: While humour and playful banter can build positive workplace relationships, jokes should never come at your expense or make you feel targeted, uncomfortable, or unsafe. Professional humour builds people up rather than tears them down. If you experience bullying, harassment, or discriminatory behaviour disguised as

"jokes," this is unacceptable in any workplace. Your university's placement coordinator is there to support you. Don't hesitate to reach out to them if you feel unsafe or singled out. You can also access support through your university's counselling services and student advocacy teams. Remember that reporting inappropriate behaviour helps protect both yourself and future interns who might face similar situations. Your wellbeing and professional development should always be the priority during your internship experience.

Activity 7.3: Understanding Trust and Humour in Professional Setting

Part 1: Reflection exercise

Using the DIEP (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate, Plan) model, reflect on a time when you were new to a professional or academic group and had to navigate social dynamics, particularly around humour and trust.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/stem-advantage/?p=311#h5p-39



The goal of this reflection is not just to recall past experiences, but to develop a thoughtful, professional approach to workplace relationships that will serve you throughout your career. Consider sharing your insights with your peers to learn from their experiences as well.

Part 2: Scenario analysis

Read the following scenario carefully:

Sarah has been interning at an engineering firm for three weeks. She notices that her team often makes playful jokes about their manager Tom's intense coffee addiction, and he goodnaturedly joins in these jokes himself. During a team meeting, Sarah attempts to participate by commenting, "Watch out, everyone, Tom hasn't had his hourly coffee yet!" However, the room falls silent, and several colleagues look uncomfortable. Later, a senior colleague explains that while the team does joke about Tom's coffee habits, only his direct reports who've known him for years participate in this banter.

Working with a partner, discuss:

- What assumptions did Sarah make about workplace relationships?
- How could she have better understood the unwritten rules about humour in this workplace?
- What would be more appropriate ways for Sarah to begin building rapport with her
- How might Sarah recover professionally from this misstep?

Remember to consider both trust and humour when analysing this scenario. The goal isn't to discourage participation in workplace camaraderie, but to understand how to navigate it appropriately as a newcomer.

When Trust Is Broken

Despite our best efforts to build positive workplace relationships, sometimes interactions can sour or trust can be damaged. Even the most carefully navigated professional relationships may encounter difficulties, whether through misunderstandings, cultural differences, or genuine conflicts. The skills required to repair workplace relationships draw on many of the same fundamentals we've discussed, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and professional judgment, but require us to apply them in more challenging circumstances. What matters most isn't that we never experience conflict, but rather how we handle these situations when they arise. The mark of a true professional isn't avoiding all interpersonal challenges, but addressing them with maturity, self-awareness, and a commitment to positive resolution.

Workplace friendships, while potentially valuable for both job satisfaction and professional development, can be particularly fragile and subject to various forms of deterioration. Research by Sias et. al. (2004) identified several key triggers that commonly lead to the breakdown of workplace relationships, including betrayals of trust, violations of organisational values, and changes in professional status through promotion. These deterioration factors are especially impactful because they challenge the delicate balance between professional obligations and personal connections that workplace friendships must maintain.

The complexity of workplace friendship deterioration lies in its often unavoidable nature, particularly when organisational changes occur. For instance, when one friend is promoted to a supervisory position over another, the fundamental dynamics of their relationship must shift to accommodate new power structures and professional responsibilities. This transition can create tension between maintaining personal rapport and upholding professional boundaries. Similarly, extended absences from work, whether through leave, transfers, or other circumstances, can strain these relationships as the regular contact and shared experiences that help maintain workplace friendships are disrupted.



What makes workplace friendship deterioration particularly challenging is that traditional friendship repair strategies often prove ineffective in the professional context. Unlike personal friendships outside of work, workplace relationships must continue to function at some level even after deterioration occurs, as colleagues typically need to maintain professional interactions. Sias et. al's (2004) research demonstrated that attempts to resolve these friendship breakdowns were largely unsuccessful, suggesting that once certain professional boundaries or trust levels are breached, the unique combination of personal and professional expectations that characterise workplace friendships becomes difficult to rebuild. This understanding highlights the importance of maintaining clear boundaries and managing expectations in workplace friendships from the outset.

Activity 7.4: A Tricky Situation

Jenna is coordinating environmental impact assessments for Blue Ocean Dive, a wellestablished diving operator in the Cairns region. The company is considering expanding their operations to include Cowboys Reef, a more remote and pristine area of the Great Barrier Reef. While this expansion could significantly boost profits, it also raises important environmental considerations given the reef's relatively untouched state.

Following the weekly operations meeting, Marcus approaches Jenna privately. He expresses serious concerns about Isabella, one of the marine scientists conducting the environmental impact studies. Marcus claims that Isabella seems to be downplaying the potential environmental risks in her preliminary reports, particularly regarding the impact of increased boat traffic on the reef's delicate ecosystem. He tells Jenna that during a recent site visit, he overheard Isabella telling another staff member that "more cancelled trips due to weather would mean more paid days off for the dive masters." Marcus couldn't provide concrete evidence but insists that Isabella's personal benefit might be influencing her scientific assessment.

That same afternoon, Jenna and Isabella are having coffee together, as they often do. During their conversation, Isabella appears visibly upset and confides in Jenna about a recent personal situation. She had gone on several dates with Marcus, but their last encounter ended terribly. Isabella mentions that Marcus accused her of being "too stuck up" and not "open-minded enough".

The situation presents Jenna with a complex dilemma. The environmental impact assessment is crucial for both the company's future and the reef's protection. Should she take Marcus's allegations seriously and launch a formal investigation into Isabella's methodology and data analysis? This could potentially damage both professional relationships and the project's timeline. Alternatively, should she interpret Marcus's claims as potentially biased by their failed romantic connection? Yet ignoring his concerns entirely could mean overlooking genuine issues with the assessment's integrity.

What steps should Jenna take to handle this situation professionally while ensuring both the integrity of the environmental assessment and the maintenance of a healthy workplace environment?

Part 1: Individual reflection

After reading the scenario carefully, consider the following questions:

- What are the key professional and personal relationships at play in this situation?
- How might different types of workplace trust (professional, emotional, ethical) be affected?
- If you were Jenna, what aspects of this situation would concern you most from:

- a project integrity perspective
- a team dynamics perspective
- a professional ethics perspective.

Write a brief reflection addressing these points, considering how the concepts of workplace trust and relationship boundaries we've discussed apply to this scenario.

Part 2: Small group discussion

In groups of 3-4, discuss the potential consequences of each possible course of action Jenna might take:

- investigating Isabella's work formally
- dismissing Marcus's concerns
- seeking a middle-ground approach
- how might this situation affect:
- the team's professional dynamics
- future workplace relationships
- the credibility of the environmental assessment.

Develop a specific action plan for Jenna that addresses both the professional and interpersonal aspects of this situation.

Part 3: Professional communication exercise

Draft two professional emails that Jenna might need to write:

- a follow-up email to Marcus acknowledging his concerns while maintaining professional boundaries
- an email to her supervisor explaining the situation and her proposed course of action.

Remember to consider:

- · appropriate professional tone
- clear documentation of concerns
- protection of all parties' professional integrity
- maintenance of appropriate confidentiality.

Part 4: Discussion and debrief

Share key insights from your group discussions, focusing on:

- how workplace relationships can affect professional judgment
- strategies for maintaining professional boundaries
- best practices for handling conflicts between personal and professional relationships
- ways to protect project integrity while managing interpersonal dynamics.

Extension activity

Consider how this situation might be different if:

- the relationship breakdown had occurred after the allegations
- multiple team members had raised similar concerns
- the environmental assessment had already been completed.

How would these variations affect the appropriate professional response?



Remember

The goal is not to judge the personal choices of any party involved, but to understand how to maintain professional integrity and workplace trust when personal and professional boundaries become blurred.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- the crucial role of person-environment fit in workplace success, with research showing that positive coworker relationships have nearly twice the impact on successful internship outcomes compared to supervisor relationships, highlighting the importance of building authentic connections with colleagues at all levels
- how developing an effective professional work persona allows us to adapt to workplace culture while maintaining authenticity, enabling us to build trust and navigate organisational dynamics successfully without compromising our core values
- the intricate balance between trust and professional boundaries in workplace relationships, including how to develop "swift trust" early in internships while maintaining appropriate professional distance and navigating cultural differences
- the complex role of workplace humour and enjoyment in building positive professional relationships, with research demonstrating that successful interns carefully observe existing workplace dynamics before participating in casual banter or jokes
- strategic approaches for handling workplace relationship challenges, including how to

maintain professionalism when trust is damaged, navigate conflict between personal and professional relationships, and rebuild productive working relationships after difficulties arise.

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8. DEVELOPING A PORTFOLIO

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- develop a professional portfolio that effectively showcases your capabilities and achievements while building your reputation in your chosen field
- select and organise compelling evidence of your professional capabilities that aligns with industry expectations and demonstrates your readiness for practice
- implement systematic approaches to gathering, documenting, and presenting evidence of your growing professional competence throughout your career development.

Imagine this Scenario

Marley sat in her university's cafe, barely touching her lunch as she stared at the email on her phone, a job offer from the prestigious Anderson Marine Research Centre. The position would place her directly under Dr Bernice Guest, whose groundbreaking work on endangered marine species had featured in multiple documentaries. Dr Guest's recent discovery of what might be the last colony of Java stingrays had made international headlines, and her lab consistently secured major government research grants.

"I got the job!" Marley announced to Professor Chen during their next project meeting. Rather than sharing her excitement, Professor Chen's smile seemed strained. She congratulated Marley politely but quickly changed the subject. The same thing happened with Professor Roberts, another oddly muted response to what Marley considered incredible news.

Later that week, over coffee with her friend Jade, Marley mentioned these puzzling reactions.

Jade's face fell. "Oh Marley Dr Guest has a terrible reputation as a supervisor. Everyone in marine biology knows about it."

Concerned, Marley sought out her professors again, this time asking directly about Dr Guest. Professor Chen hesitated before speaking. "I've never met her personally, but I've heard concerning stories from multiple colleagues. Her students and staff often leave within months, usually quite distressed." Professor Roberts nodded in agreement, adding that while Dr Guest's research output was impressive, her lab had an unusually high turnover rate.

Looking at Dr Guest's professional profile, Marley saw an impressive list of achievements, numerous publications in top journals, successful grant applications, groundbreaking discoveries. Surely the opportunity to work with someone so accomplished outweighed any potential workplace challenges? Despite the warnings, Marley accepted the position.



Six months later, Marley barely recognised herself. The enthusiastic graduate who had eagerly joined the lab had been replaced by someone who struggled to get out of bed each morning. Dr Guest's demanding and erratic management style meant Marley never knew when she would be praised or berated. Weekends became meaningless as she was expected to be available at all hours. The constant stress led to panic attacks, and Marley found herself experiencing severe anxiety about even routine workplace interactions.

The irony wasn't lost on Marley, she had focused entirely on Dr Guest's documented achievements while dismissing the undocumented but crucial evidence about her reputation as an employer. This painful experience taught her that professional portfolios tell only part of the story, and that reputation and workplace relationships matter just as much as technical achievements.

Building a Reputation

Professional reputation develops through three interconnected channels that each provide different perspectives on someone's capabilities and character.

Public Profiles

Include published work, social media presence, and formal achievements, and offer a curated view of professional accomplishments that can be easily verified. For instance, Dr Guest's impressive publication record and research discoveries represented the public face of her reputation.

Private Experiences

These reveal how someone actually operates in day-to-day professional settings, their management style, communication approach, and treatment of colleagues. These experiences often remain hidden from public view but profoundly impact workplace relationships and team dynamics, as Marley discovered through her distressing time in Dr Guest's lab.

Word of Mouth

This serves as a crucial bridge between public and private spheres, with informal networks sharing insights about working styles and professional behaviour that might never appear in a formal portfolio. In Marley's case, her professors' hesitance and colleagues' warnings represented this vital oral history of Dr Guest's reputation as a supervisor. Understanding how these three channels interact helps professionals make more informed career decisions and manage their own reputational development more effectively.



Just as a tree needs both visible branches and hidden roots to thrive, a strong professional reputation requires alignment between public achievements, private conduct, and the stories others tell about our work.

As you begin your internship, developing a positive professional reputation requires understanding both the explicit and implicit norms of your workplace. Zinko et al. (2017)'s research highlights that reputation forms when your actions deviate from these organisational norms in consistent, noticeable ways. For instance, if you consistently submit work ahead of deadlines in an environment where most people just meet them, you may develop a reputation as a high performer. However, it's crucial to first observe and understand your organisation's culture, as the same behaviours that build a positive reputation in one workplace might be viewed neutrally or even negatively in another.

Your reputation develops through three interconnected channels: public profiles, private experiences, and word of mouth. While public profiles showcase your formal achievements, private experiences, how you actually operate in day-to-day professional settings, form the foundation of your workplace reputation (Zinko et al., 2017). These private experiences include your management style, communication approach, and treatment of colleagues. Crucially, these experiences become known to others through word of mouth, which the researchers identify as a vital mechanism for reputation building. What's interesting is, workplace gossip, while often viewed negatively, accounts for two-thirds of all organisational communication and plays an essential role in spreading information about your consistent behaviours throughout the organisation.



Building a reputation takes time and must be approached strategically. You should focus first on developing expertise in specific areas that your organisation values, as this provides the foundation for positive reputation development. You need what researchers call "willing promoters" (Zinko et al., 2017, p. 92), colleagues who will vouch for your capabilities and share stories about your achievements through word of mouth. These promoters help bridge the gap between your private experiences and your broader organisational reputation by sharing their firsthand knowledge of your work with others. However, remember that small, consistent positive deviations from norms often build stronger reputations than single dramatic achievements. Your goal should be to become known for reliable excellence in specific areas rather than sporadic moments of brilliance.

According to Zhao (2021), LinkedIn serves as a critical platform for professional reputation development through two key mechanisms: strategic personal branding and differentiated positioning.

The first crucial outcome from the research shows that effective personal branding on LinkedIn requires a strategic approach focused on consistent, professional communication. This means regularly updating your profile with multimedia content like presentations and articles, maintaining active connections with at least 50 relevant professionals in your field, and engaging meaningfully in industry group discussions. The study emphasises that it's not enough to simply list your experiences, you need to communicate them in a way that demonstrates clear value, for instance by describing not just what you did, but how well you did it and who benefited from your work.

The second key finding highlights the importance of differentiation through authentic personal narrative. The research demonstrates that successful LinkedIn profiles go beyond standard professional accomplishments to showcase unique qualifications, skills, and experiences that set you apart. For example, rather than just listing "strong communication skills," you might highlight specific language abilities, volunteer experiences, or professional certifications that make your profile distinct. This differentiation needs to be complemented by artifactual elements, personalised written and visual communications that reflect your authentic professional personality while maintaining appropriate workplace boundaries.

In essence, the research suggests that LinkedIn serves as much more than just a digital CV, it's a platform for strategic reputation building that requires careful attention to both consistent professional communication and authentic personal differentiation. This combined approach helps create a recognisable professional identity that can significantly impact career opportunities and advancement.

Activity 8.1: Enhancing Your LinkedIn Profile

This activity helps you evaluate and improve your LinkedIn profile using evidence-based criteria for effective personal branding. You should plan to spend about 45 minutes on this reflective exercise.

Part 1: Strategic assessment

Begin by examining the strategic elements of your profile. Score yourself from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on these key areas:

- Profile Completeness: Review your profile's multimedia elements. Have you included a professional photo, relevant presentations, articles, or project work? If you need help on deciding what to include, check the JCU LinkedIn guide.
- **Network Development:** Check your connection count. While quality matters more than quantity, aim for at least 50 relevant professional connections in your field. How many industry-relevant connections do you currently have?
- Professional Engagement: Look at your last month of activity. Have you joined and participated in discussions in groups relevant to your field? Have you shared any industry insights or articles?

Part 2: Positive impact analysis

Examine how effectively you communicate value in your profile.

Review one of your work experience entries and enhance it using this formula:

- What did you do? (Specific task or responsibility)
- How well did you do it? (Quantifiable results where possible)
- Who did it impact? (Beneficiaries of your work)

For example, instead of "Managed social media", write: "Managed company social media accounts, increasing engagement by 25% and helping local small businesses reach new customers."

Part 3: Differentiation check

Identify what makes you unique:

- List three specific qualifications, skills, or experiences that differentiate you from others in your field.
- Review your profile summary. Does it clearly communicate these differentiating factors?
- Check the JCU Career Snapshots for your discipline to identify industry-specific keywords you should include.

Part 4: Reflection

Based on this assessment, write a brief action plan identifying:

- three immediate improvements you can make to your profile
- two longer-term goals for developing your professional presence
- one area where you need to gather more evidence or experience.

Your LinkedIn profile is a living document that should evolve with your professional development. Schedule monthly reviews to keep your content fresh and aligned with your career goals.

Recording Your Work in a Portfolio

A well-curated portfolio provides tangible evidence of the reputation you're building. While word of mouth and daily interactions shape how colleagues perceive you within your organisation, your portfolio serves as a permanent record of your achievements and capabilities. Think of your portfolio as the professional equivalent of a museum curator's collection, each piece should be carefully selected to tell a specific story about your expertise and demonstrate the consistent excellence we discussed earlier.

However, portfolio development requires more than simply collecting evidence of your work. You need to thoughtfully consider how each item connects to and reinforces your desired professional reputation. For instance, if you're building a reputation as an innovative problem-solver, your portfolio should include examples that demonstrate not just successful outcomes, but also your unique approach to challenging situations. The key is to create alignment between your daily workplace behaviours, the reputation you're developing, and the evidence presented in your portfolio.

Your portfolio should strategically highlight experiences that demonstrate key employability skills valued across industries. According to De Vos et. al. (2009), employers particularly value behaviours that show initiative and the ability to plan and network effectively. This maps directly to core competencies like adaptability, communication skills, and self-initiative that consistently appear in job descriptions. When selecting what to include in your portfolio, prioritise examples that showcase your flexibility in handling change, your capacity to communicate effectively across different contexts, and your ability to take initiative in solving problems. For instance, if you led a team project that required adjusting to unexpected challenges, this would demonstrate multiple valued skills: leadership, adaptability, and critical thinking. The key is not just collecting evidence of your capabilities, but thoughtfully curating examples that align with what research shows employers seek in candidates.

How to Record Your Portfolio



Building an effective portfolio requires a thoughtful approach to capturing and documenting your achievements. Just as a skilled photographer carefully considers lighting, composition, and timing to capture the perfect shot, you need to be strategic about recording evidence of your professional capabilities. Let's explore four key methods of documenting your accomplishments: artefacts (physical or digital items you've created), public displays (such as presentations or exhibitions of your work), visual records (photographs, videos, or screenshots that capture your achievements in action), and written records (documentation like feedback, testimonials, or reflective pieces). By understanding these different documentation methods and planning ahead to capture evidence as it happens, you'll avoid that all-toocommon scenario of trying to reconstruct past achievements from memory. Think of it as creating a professional highlight reel, you want to be ready to capture those standout moments when they occur, rather than attempting to recreate them after the fact.

Artefacts

Artefacts form the foundation of your professional portfolio, serving as tangible evidence of your capabilities and achievements. These are the actual items you've created or contributed to in your professional role, whether they're detailed technical documents, polished presentations, or physical products you've developed. Think of artefacts as the concrete proof of your skills in action, much like how an artist's portfolio contains actual examples of their work rather than just descriptions of what they can do. It's essential to maintain copies of these professional outputs whenever possible, as they provide the most direct and compelling evidence of your capabilities.

However, it's crucial to navigate this collection process ethically and within workplace guidelines. Many organisations have specific policies about retaining copies of work products, particularly those containing sensitive or proprietary information. If your employer has restrictions on keeping copies of work artefacts, don't let this discourage you, there are alternative ways to document your achievements. For example, you might create a detailed description of the project while omitting confidential details, obtain written testimonials about your contribution, or capture the process and outcomes through approved photographs

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or screenshots. The key is to be proactive in thinking about documentation while respecting organisational boundaries and intellectual property rights. Here are some examples of common professional artefacts:

- business reports and analyses
- · marketing materials you've designed
- project plans and documentation
- presentation slides and speaking notes
- process improvement documents
- training materials you've developed
- software code or technical specifications
- research papers or white papers
- newsletters or communications you've written
- design mock-ups or prototypes.

Public Displays

Public displays of your work represent powerful portfolio evidence, as they've already been vetted and deemed worthy of public consumption. These are particularly valuable because they demonstrate that your work has met professional standards and contributed meaningfully to your field or organisation. Think of public displays as your work's "greatest hits", they've already proven their worth by surviving scrutiny and earning a place in the public domain. Whether it's a presentation at an industry conference, a published article, or a successful project implementation, these achievements deserve careful documentation.



In today's digital age, there are numerous ways to capture and showcase these public accomplishments. Professional networking platforms like LinkedIn serve as a living portfolio, allowing you to document your achievements in real time and connect them to the broader professional narrative. Your own professional website can provide a more detailed and personalised space to showcase these public works, giving you

control over how they're presented and contextualised. However, don't wait until after the fact to document these achievements. Taking photographs or screenshots during the development process provides valuable evidence of your contribution and methodology. For instance, if you're leading a major project, regular documentation of key milestones can tell a compelling story about your leadership and project management capabilities.

Maintaining records of public recognition extends beyond your own documentation efforts. Professional registers, industry publications, and organisational announcements that mention your contributions serve as independent validation of your achievements. Consider maintaining a digital archive of links to these references, as they provide external confirmation of your impact. This might include links to professional association websites where you're listed as a contributor, news articles mentioning your work, or public records of successful projects you've led. Remember to regularly update these records, as links can change or become inactive over time. By systematically documenting public displays of your work, you create a robust portfolio that showcases not just what you can do, but what you have already achieved in the professional arena.

Here are examples of public displays that you should consider documenting for your portfolio:



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Capture these in real time whenever possible, as reconstructing evidence later can be challenging and important details may be missed.

Visual Records

Visual records provide compelling evidence of your professional accomplishments, capturing moments and achievements in a way that written descriptions alone cannot convey. In our increasingly visual world, high-quality photographs and images can instantly communicate the scope, complexity, and impact of your work to potential employers or clients. Think of these visual records as professional snapshots that tell the story of your career journey, from the planning stages of a major project through to its successful

completion, or from your first presentation at a small team meeting to delivering keynotes at industry conferences.

When capturing visual records, maintaining professional integrity is paramount. Your images should meet three essential criteria: clarity, uniqueness, and authenticity. Clear images ensure that viewers can easily understand what they're seeing without explanation. For visual records of public events or digital work such as website designs or social media campaigns, it's crucial that your photographs or screenshots clearly demonstrate your specific involvement. For instance, if documenting a conference presentation, ensure the image shows you actually presenting rather than just the conference banner. When capturing digital work, include elements that verify your role, such as your login credentials visible in the corner of a content management system, or your name listed as the author of a social media campaign. These details help establish the authenticity of your contribution and protect you from any accusations of misrepresenting your work. Remember, in professional settings, the consequences of appearing to take credit for others' work can be severe and long-lasting, potentially damaging both your reputation and career prospects.



Securing and managing your visual records requires the same level of professionalism as any other confidential business document. Consider these images as valuable professional assets that document your career progression. Establish a secure backup system that protects these resources while keeping them accessible to you alone. This might involve using encrypted cloud storage, maintaining multiple backups across secure devices, or utilising professional photo management software that includes security features. Remember that these images might contain sensitive information about projects, clients, or workplace environments, so treating them with appropriate confidentiality is essential to maintaining professional trust and reputation.

Written Records

Written records form a crucial component of your professional portfolio, providing a narrative thread that connects your various achievements and experiences. One of the most powerful platforms for maintaining these written records is LinkedIn, which serves as both a professional journal and a public showcase of your career journey. Through regular LinkedIn posts, you can document your professional growth in real time, sharing insights from projects, reflecting on learning experiences, and demonstrating your expertise

to a broader professional audience. The platform's endorsement and recommendation features also allow you to collect written testimonials from colleagues and supervisors, adding external validation to your own documentation of achievements.

Beyond LinkedIn, maintaining a personal professional journal provides a more private space for detailed reflection and documentation. This journal, whether maintained as a traditional notebook, a series of digital documents, or posts on your professional website, allows you to capture the nuanced details of your professional experiences that might not be appropriate for public sharing but are valuable for your own development and future reference. For instance, you might record specific challenges you've overcome, lessons learned from projects, or detailed notes about your contributions to team initiatives. The key is to establish a regular practice of documentation that works for you. Some professionals find success with daily quick notes, while others prefer weekly or monthly detailed reflections. Whatever format you choose, consistent documentation helps you build a rich repository of professional experiences that you can draw upon when updating your portfolio or preparing for career advancement opportunities.

How to Store Your Portfolio

Creating an effective portfolio requires careful consideration of not just what evidence to include, but how to present and share it. While collecting evidence of your professional development is crucial, equally important is deciding whether to keep this information private or make it publicly accessible. This decision significantly impacts both your career opportunities and professional security.

Private Portfolios

Private portfolios function like a professional vault, you control exactly when and with whom you share your information. This approach offers several important advantages for early-career professionals.

Consider your resume as an example. While it might seem counterintuitive in our connected world, keeping your detailed work history private often proves more beneficial than making it publicly available. When you maintain private control over your resume, you can:

- customise it for specific opportunities without revealing your application strategy to current employers
- protect yourself from unauthorised use of your professional information
- prevent recruitment agencies from submitting your profile without your knowledge
- maintain greater control over your professional narrative.

Private portfolios typically take the form of carefully organised digital files or password-protected ePortfolios. Think of these as your professional toolkit, always ready but only deployed when you choose. The key is maintaining comprehensive records while keeping them secure until needed.



Strategic Use of Public Portfolios

Public portfolios serve a different purpose, they act as your professional showcase, continuously visible to potential employers and industry connections. However, successful public portfolios require careful curation. Rather than sharing everything, consider making information public when:

- you want to establish yourself as a thought leader in your field
- you need to demonstrate ownership of original work or ideas
- you're actively seeking to engage with recruitment agencies
- you're building a professional brand in your industry.

For instance, a software engineer might maintain a public GitHub profile showcasing coding projects, while keeping their detailed work history and references in a private portfolio. This balanced approach allows them to demonstrate technical capabilities without exposing sensitive career information.

Making the Decision: Public or Private

When deciding whether to make specific portfolio elements public or private, ask yourself:



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For example, while you might share project outcomes or technical achievements publicly, keep

documentation like performance reviews, reference letters, and detailed work histories private. This approach allows you to maintain professional visibility while protecting sensitive information.

Implementing Your Portfolio Strategy

Once you've decided on your approach, implement it systematically:

For Private Portfolios

- create a secure digital filing system for your evidence
- maintain updated but separate versions of your resume for different purposes
- use password-protected cloud storage for sensitive documents
- keep a master list of what evidence you have available to share.

For Public Elements

- · develop a professional social media presence that aligns with your career goals
- create focused content that demonstrates your expertise without revealing sensitive details
- · regularly review and update public information to ensure it remains current and appropriate
- monitor how your public information appears in search results.



Your portfolio strategy can and should evolve as your career develops. What works during your internship might need adjustment as you move into more senior roles. The key is maintaining control over your professional narrative while strategically sharing information that advances your career goals.

Living documents

Think of your resume as a living story of your professional journey, one that needs regular care and updating to stay vibrant and relevant. Just as you wouldn't rely on an outdated map to navigate a changing city, your resume should evolve monthly to capture your growing experiences and achievements. Each role or project becomes a chapter in this story, with clear descriptions of your responsibilities forming the foundation and specific

achievements highlighting the most compelling moments. Consider LinkedIn as your professional showcase window, where you can display the public elements of your career story to a broader audience. Unlike a traditional resume, LinkedIn offers opportunities to demonstrate your professional currency through thoughtful posts about industry trends, innovative ideas, or lessons learned. This platform allows you to build a narrative that goes beyond your formal experiences, showcasing your engagement with your field and your potential for future contributions.

Managing Professional References

The art of maintaining professional references extends beyond simply collecting names and contact details. It requires thoughtful curation of professional relationships that can speak meaningfully about different aspects of your capabilities and character.

Building Your Reference Network

Think of your professional references as a carefully selected team of advocates for your career development. Aim to maintain relationships with at least three supervisors or senior colleagues who can speak to different aspects of your professional capabilities

A technical supervisor can verify your practical skills and knowledge, speaking to your ability to apply theoretical understanding to real-world challenges. For instance, a senior engineer who supervised your project work can discuss specific technical challenges you've overcome and your approach to problem-solving.

A team leader or project manager can address your interpersonal effectiveness, including your communication skills and ability to work collaboratively. They can provide concrete examples of how you interact with colleagues, handle conflicts, or contribute to team dynamics.

A direct supervisor or manager can validate your professional behaviours and work ethic. Their observations of your day-to-day conduct, from punctuality to initiative, carry particular weight with potential employers as indicators of your reliability and professionalism.

Modern Reference Practices

The landscape of professional references has evolved significantly with digital transformation. While LinkedIn recommendations and written reference letters once played central roles in professional

validation, today's employers typically prefer direct communication through email or digital forms. This shift reflects both the need for efficiency and the desire for more candid feedback about candidates.

Rather than collecting static testimonials, focus on maintaining active professional relationships with your references. Keep them updated about your career progress and notify them when you're applying for positions where they might be contacted. This ongoing communication ensures they can provide current, relevant insights about your capabilities when asked.

The strength of a reference often lies not in their title or position, but in their ability to speak specifically about your work and professional growth. When selecting references, prioritise those who can provide detailed examples of your contributions and capabilities over those with impressive titles but limited direct experience working with you. Keep your reference list current, ensuring contact details are up to date and that each reference remains willing and able to speak on your behalf.

Activity 8.2: Developing Your Portfolio Strategy

This three-part activity helps you create a structured approach to managing your professional portfolio, references, and online presence. Each part builds upon the previous one, helping you develop a comprehensive portfolio strategy that aligns with your career goals.

Part 1: Portfolio audit and planning

Begin by taking stock of your current professional evidence and planning your portfolio strategy:

- Create three columns in a document or spreadsheet:
 - evidence I currently have
 - evidence I need to collect
 - public/private classification.
- For each piece of evidence you list, note:
 - where it's currently stored

- when it was last updated
- who has access to it
- whether it should be public or private.
- Reflect on your findings by answering:
 - What gaps do you notice in your current evidence collection?
 - Which items might be better served by changing their public/private status?
 - How could you better organise your existing evidence?

Part 2: Reference network development

Create a strategic plan for building and maintaining your professional references:

- First, list potential references who could speak to your:
 - technical capabilities
 - interpersonal skills
 - professional behaviours.
- For each potential reference:
 - write a brief summary of your professional relationship
 - note specific projects or achievements they witnessed
 - identify what aspects of your capabilities they could best validate.
- Then, develop a communication plan:
 - How will you maintain contact with each reference?
 - What updates will you share with them?
 - How will you approach them when you need a reference?

Part 3: Digital presence review

Conduct a thorough review of your digital professional presence:

- Google yourself and document what appears on the first two pages of results.
- Review your LinkedIn profile, noting:
 - which experiences need updating
 - what achievements could be better highlighted
 - whether your profile presents a cohesive professional narrative.
- Create a content calendar for the next three months, planning:
 - professional updates you'll share
 - industry insights you could post

connections you want to make.

Part 4: Reflection

- How well does your digital presence align with your career goals?
- What adjustments would make your online presence more effective?
- How can you better balance privacy and visibility in your professional portfolio?



This activity isn't a one-time exercise. Return to it regularly, particularly after significant professional experiences or when preparing for career transitions.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how professional reputation develops through three interconnected channels, public profiles, private experiences, and word of mouth, with research showing that alignment between these channels creates the strongest professional credibility and career opportunities
- the importance of strategically curating portfolio evidence through multiple documentation methods including artefacts, public displays, visual records, and written documentation, while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and intellectual property considerations
- how to make informed decisions about keeping portfolio elements private versus public, based on careful evaluation of purpose, control needs, currency of information, and security considerations rather than defaulting to complete transparency
- the crucial role of maintaining active, strategically selected professional references who can speak to different aspects of your capabilities, with emphasis on keeping these relationships current and communication channels open rather than relying on static testimonials

 techniques for effectively using LinkedIn as a living portfolio platform, including regular updates, strategic personal branding, and authentic differentiation strategies that research shows significantly impact professional visibility and career advancement opportunities.

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9. COMPLETING YOUR INTERNSHIP AND PLANNING NEXT STEPS

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- develop and execute a systematic approach to completing internship projects and responsibilities while maintaining professional standards through to your final day
- create comprehensive handover documentation that ensures the continued success of your projects after your departure
- transform your internship experience into compelling evidence of your professional capabilities for future career opportunities.

Imagine this Scenario

Michael sat on his childhood bed, staring at the university degree hanging on his wall. Three months had passed since completing his environmental engineering internship at Brisbane Water, and four months since graduating. The initial euphoria of finishing university with distinction had faded into an uncomfortable reality and he had no job prospects and mounting anxiety about his future.

During his final semester, while his classmates attended career fairs and networked with industry professionals, Michael had buried himself in textbooks and assignment submissions. "I need a perfect GPA to get into a top PhD program," he'd repeatedly assured himself. He'd turned down invitations to industry networking events, reasoning that those hours were better spent perfecting assignments. His dream of pursuing groundbreaking research in environmental remediation technologies had driven every decision, including treating his internship primarily as a way to impress potential PhD supervisors with his technical capabilities.

His internship supervisor had hinted at potential opportunities within the organisation, but Michael had politely deflected these conversations, explaining his academic aspirations. He'd assumed his excellent performance reviews and impressive grade point average would naturally lead to PhD offers. Now, scrolling through his phone, he could see his former intern colleagues sharing LinkedIn updates about their new roles at engineering firms, while his own PhD applications remained unanswered. Several universities had responded that they wanted to see more research experience and industry engagement, things he'd overlooked in his singular focus on grades.

The rejection email from his fifth PhD application this week glowed mockingly on his screen. "While your academic achievements are impressive, we are seeking candidates with demonstrated research experience and project management capabilities..." The words struck him like a physical blow. His stellar academic record and completed internship somehow weren't translating into research opportunities. He realised now that he had missed valuable opportunities to engage in research projects, build relationships with potential supervisors, and develop his research network.



Tomorrow, he would start another shift at the local shopping centre, a "temporary" retail position that was starting to feel uncomfortably permanent. The irony wasn't lost on him, he had a degree in environmental engineering and dreams of a PhD, yet spent his days explaining return policies and restocking shelves. His manager had already offered him a supervisor position, seeing his capability for more responsibility. While the promotion was flattering, it felt like stepping further away from his academic aspirations.

"At least I'm earning money," he told himself, trying to ignore the growing pit in his stomach.

But each time a customer asked about his studies or career plans, he felt a sharp pang of regret. He had let the crucial transition period between graduation and further study slip away, and now faced the challenging task of trying to enter academia as an outsider rather than making a smooth progression from coursework to PhD program.

The task of restarting his academic journey felt overwhelming. His internship experience was becoming increasingly distant, his professional connections were fading, and his technical knowledge needed refreshing. What had seemed like a logical decision, focusing on grades above all else, had created a significant hurdle in his academic progression. He now understood that academic excellence alone doesn't guarantee research opportunities, and that professional relationships, research experience, and industry engagement carry just as much weight as grades in PhD applications.

Documenting Your Impact: Final Achievements and Project Handovers

As your internship draws to a close, thorough documentation of your achievements and careful preparation of handover materials become crucial tasks that impact both your future career opportunities and your professional reputation. Think of this documentation as creating a professional legacy, it demonstrates your contributions while ensuring your work continues to benefit the organisation after your departure.

Capturing Final Achievements

Recording your achievements requires more than simply listing completed tasks. Consider the story of James, a chemical engineering intern who initially struggled to document his contributions effectively. In his first draft achievement list, he wrote "Helped with laboratory testing procedures." While accurate, this description failed to capture the scope and impact of his work. After receiving feedback from his supervisor, he revised this to: "Optimised laboratory testing procedures for polymer degradation analysis, reducing processing time by 35% while maintaining 99.9% accuracy rates. This improvement allowed the team to increase weekly sample processing from 50 to 75 specimens without requiring additional resources."

Notice how the revised version includes:

- the specific technical area (polymer degradation analysis)
- quantifiable improvements (35% time reduction)
- quality metrics (99.9% accuracy)

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- business impact (increased processing capacity)
- resource implications (no additional resources required).

This detailed approach to documenting achievements serves multiple purposes. It helps your organisation understand your contributions, provides concrete examples for your portfolio, and gives future employers specific evidence of your capabilities. When documenting your achievements, consider structuring each entry around these elements:



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Creating Effective Handover Documentation

Professional handover documentation ensures your work continues to benefit the organisation after your departure. Think of it as creating a detailed map that allows others to navigate and build upon your contributions effectively.



Example

Consider the experience of Sarah, a software development intern who initially created handover notes consisting mainly of code comments and basic user instructions. When a critical bug emerged two weeks after her departure, the team struggled to resolve it because they lacked context about her design decisions and implementation approach. This situation taught her the

importance of comprehensive handover documentation that includes not just what was done, but why certain approaches were chosen.

Effective handover documentation should include:

- project overview
- clear description of project objectives
- current status of deliverables
- key stakeholders and their roles
- important deadlines and milestones
- technical Documentation
- detailed procedures and workflows
- access credentials and permissions (appropriately secured)
- known issues or limitations
- future improvement opportunities
- location of relevant files and resources
- contact Information
- key team members and their responsibilities
- subject matter experts consulted
- external vendors or contractors involved
- decision context
- reasoning behind major technical decisions
- attempted approaches that weren't successful
- potential future challenges to consider
- lessons learned during implementation.

When preparing handover documentation, imagine you're creating instructions for someone who has your technical skills but lacks any context about your specific projects. What information would they need to continue your work effectively? What potential questions or challenges might they face?



💡 Remember

Maintain appropriate confidentiality in your documentation. Work with your supervisor to understand what information can be included in your personal portfolio versus what should remain solely in internal handover documents. This distinction helps protect both your organisation's interests and your professional reputation.

Maintaining Professional Connections Post-Internship

Earlier in this book, we explored how to build professional relationships during your internship, including the strategic use of LinkedIn and the development of workplace connections. As your internship concludes, these foundational elements become crucial for maintaining long-term professional relationships. Let's examine how to effectively leverage these established connections during your transition from intern to professional.

Your LinkedIn profile serves as a living bridge between your internship experience and future opportunities. When documenting your internship achievements on LinkedIn, consider how your updates can nurture professional relationships. For example, rather than simply listing technical accomplishments, acknowledge the collaborative nature of your work. Perhaps instead of writing an update or note that states:

Contributed to the development of a predictive maintenance system that reduced downtime by 25%, working closely with the engineering team to integrate machine learning algorithms with existing maintenance protocols.

Perhaps write:

Proud to have collaborated with @Sarah Chen and @David Thompson on developing our new predictive maintenance system. By combining Sarah's expertise in signal processing with David's deep knowledge of our maintenance protocols, we achieved a 25% reduction in equipment downtime. Special thanks to our mentor @James Liu for guiding our integration of machine learning algorithms into the existing framework. Excited to see how the team continues to build on this foundation!

This approach accomplishes several goals:

- documents your technical achievement
- acknowledges team contributions, highlighting the contributions of specific individuals
- creates opportunities for colleagues to engage with your update
- demonstrates your understanding of both technical and collaborative aspects of professional work.

Remember our earlier discussion about workplace relationships and person-environment fit? Those relationships you've cultivated during your internship require careful attention during the transition period. Consider developing a systematic approach to maintaining these connections:

- document key professional relationships
- note specific projects you worked on together
- record unique insights each colleague shared
- identify areas of mutual professional interest
- track preferred communication styles and methods
- create a Communication Calendar
- schedule regular check-ins with key mentors
- set reminders to engage with colleagues' LinkedIn updates
- plan periodic emails sharing relevant industry insights
- maintain awareness of important organisational milestones
- develop value-adding Interactions
- share articles relevant to ongoing projects
- offer insights from your new experiences
- maintain interest in project outcomes
- connect colleagues with useful resources or contacts.

Let's examine how these principles played out differently for Sarah, James, and Michael.

Michael's Story Continued

Six months into his retail position, Michael received a LinkedIn notification, James had tagged him in a post about their shared environmental engineering internship project. The post celebrated the one-year anniversary of their stormwater management system implementation, acknowledging everyone who had contributed to its success. This unexpected connection prompted Michael to reflect on the relationships he had let slip away.

Rather than continuing to focus solely on PhD applications, Michael began reaching out to his former colleagues. He started with a thoughtful message to Sarah, who had recently shared her success implementing environmental monitoring systems at her new firm. Instead of leading with his own situation, he genuinely congratulated her on her achievements and asked thoughtful questions about her work. This authentic interest in her professional journey opened the door to rebuilding their connection.

Through these renewed connections, Michael gained valuable insights about combining academic and industry aspirations. Sarah shared how she maintained research connections while working in industry, even co-authoring papers with university partners. James described his involvement in industry-funded research projects that aligned academic rigor with practical applications. These conversations helped Michael understand that pursuing a PhD and maintaining industry connections weren't mutually exclusive goals.

These rekindled relationships proved transformative. When a research position opened at Sarah's firm focusing on environmental remediation technologies, perfectly aligned with Michael's PhD interests, she immediately thought of him. The role offered the opportunity to conduct industry-based research while maintaining connections with academic institutions. James, who served on the company's research advisory board, provided a strong reference highlighting Michael's technical capabilities and collaborative potential.



Michael's story demonstrates that while early career transitions benefit from maintaining consistent professional connections, it's never too late to rebuild these relationships authentically. His experience also highlights how professional networks can help bridge the gap between academic and industry aspirations, creating opportunities that serve both goals.

This experience taught Michael valuable lessons about maintaining professional relationships:

- professional connections thrive on genuine interest in others' success
- industry and academic pursuits can complement rather than compete
- authentic relationship building matters more than perfect timing
- former colleagues can provide unique perspectives on career possibilities
- professional networks often reveal unexpected opportunities aligning multiple career goals.

The path from internship to career rarely follows a straight line. As Michael's journey illustrates, our professional relationships often serve as the bridges that connect different aspects of our career aspirations. Whether pursuing academic excellence, industry recognition, or a combination of both, maintaining

authentic professional connections provides opportunities we might never discover in isolation. His initial focus on academic achievements at the expense of professional relationships could have permanently limited his career options. However, by reconnecting authentically with former colleagues like Sarah and James, Michael discovered possibilities that aligned his research interests with industry innovation. This experience demonstrates that professional networks are not just about career advancement, they're about creating a community of peers who understand and support our professional growth. When we maintain genuine interest in our colleagues' successes, remain open to different career pathways, and actively nurture professional relationships, we create an environment where opportunities can find us. As you conclude your own internship, remember that the connections you've built are not just entries in your contact list, they're the foundation of your professional community, capable of revealing pathways that might otherwise remain hidden. By maintaining these relationships authentically and remaining genuinely interested in others' successes, you build a professional network that supports not just your immediate career goals, but your long-term professional development. The time invested in nurturing these connections, as Michael discovered, often leads to opportunities that perfectly align our professional aspirations with practical possibilities.

Activity 9.1: Planning Your Professional Transition

This activity helps you create a structured approach to maintaining professional relationships and documenting achievements as you conclude your internship. Working through each section will help you develop a clear strategy for your transition from intern to professional.

Part 1: Relationship mapping

Begin by creating a detailed map of your professional relationships from your internship. Draw yourself in the centre of a page and identify:



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For each person identified, note:

- their role and expertise
- projects you've worked on together
- specific insights or knowledge they've shared

• areas of mutual professional interest.

Part 2: Documentation strategy

Create a structured plan for documenting your internship achievements that maintains professional connections. For each major project, record:

- Technical documentation:
 - project objectives and outcomes
 - key methodologies used
 - measurable achievements.
 - future development opportunities
- Relationship documentation:
 - team members' contributions
 - collaborative insights gained
 - learning moments shared
 - potential future collaboration areas.
- Professional growth:
 - skills developed
 - challenges overcome
 - mentor guidance received
 - areas for continued development.

Part 3: LinkedIn update planning

Draft three different versions of a LinkedIn update about a significant project from your internship:

- Version 1: Technical focus
 - Write a purely technical description of the project and its outcomes.
- Version 2: Relationship focus
 - Create an update that emphasises collaboration and team achievements.
- Version 3: Integrated approach
 - combine technical achievements with relationship acknowledgments
 - include specific colleague tags
 - highlight both measurable outcomes and collaborative success.

- Share these drafts with a classmate and discuss:
 - Which version feels most engaging?
 - How might each version impact professional relationships?
 - What opportunities for future interaction does each create?

Part 4: Transition timeline

Create a 3-month timeline spanning your final month of internship and two months following, including:



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Remember

The goal isn't just to create a plan, but to develop sustainable practices for maintaining professional relationships throughout your career. Consider how each element of your plan supports both your immediate transition and long-term professional growth.

Share your completed transition plan with a peer, discussing:

- How does your plan balance technical documentation with relationship maintenance?
- What challenges do you anticipate in implementing your plan?
- How might your plan adapt to different career scenarios?
- What opportunities for mutual support can you identify?

This structured approach helps ensure you maintain valuable professional connections while creating comprehensive documentation of your achievements, setting the foundation for continued career growth.

Key Takeaways

In this chapter, we covered:

- how professional documentation serves multiple purposes during internship completion, acting as both a record of achievements for future employers and a foundation for maintaining valuable professional relationships through thoughtful acknowledgment of collaborative work
- the critical importance of creating comprehensive handover materials that capture not
 just technical details but also decision contexts, future opportunities, and relationship
 connections, enabling your work to continue benefiting the organisation while
 maintaining professional bridges
- how maintaining professional networks requires intentional effort and systematic approaches, including regular communication, genuine interest in colleagues' successes, and strategic use of platforms like LinkedIn to sustain meaningful connections beyond the internship period
- the importance of recognising that career paths rarely follow straight lines, with Michael's story demonstrating how professional relationships can reveal unexpected opportunities that align academic and industry aspirations in ways we might not discover in isolation
- the lasting value of investing time in nurturing professional relationships, showing how
 authentic connections built during internships can evolve into supportive professional
 communities that enhance both immediate career prospects and long-term professional
 development.

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10. CONCLUSION

The journey to professional success begins with securing and preparing for your internship opportunity. Through careful preparation of application materials, development of interview skills, and thoughtful consideration of your career goals, you lay the foundation for a meaningful professional experience. This initial investment in career planning helps ensure your internship aligns with your aspirations and provides opportunities for genuine professional growth.

Entering the workplace brings both excitement and challenge as you navigate new professional environments and expectations. Understanding workplace norms, communication styles, and professional boundaries helps you adapt successfully while maintaining your authenticity. This transition period, though sometimes challenging, offers valuable opportunities to develop crucial professional capabilities that will serve you throughout your career.

Your rights and wellbeing in the workplace form an essential foundation for professional success. By understanding appropriate workplace behaviour, recognising potential hazards, and knowing how to access support when needed, you create a safe and productive environment for your professional development. This knowledge empowers you to focus on learning and growth while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

Setting clear goals and developing structured plans transforms your internship from a simple work experience into a powerful professional development opportunity. Through thoughtful planning and regular reflection, you can maximise learning opportunities and ensure your internship activities align with your broader career objectives. This strategic approach helps you build both technical and interpersonal skills systematically.

Reflective writing serves as a crucial tool for processing your professional experiences and extracting meaningful insights for future growth. By developing systematic approaches to capturing and analysing your learning moments, you create valuable resources for future career development. These reflective practices help you recognise patterns, identify areas for improvement, and celebrate achievements throughout your professional journey.

Artificial intelligence tools, when used thoughtfully, can enhance your professional capabilities while maintaining authenticity in your work. Understanding how to leverage these tools appropriately while upholding professional standards helps prepare you for evolving workplace technologies. This balanced approach to technology integration positions you well for future career opportunities.

Building positive working relationships creates a supportive professional network that enhances both current learning and future opportunities. Through understanding workplace dynamics, communication

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norms, and relationship boundaries, you develop crucial interpersonal skills that complement your technical capabilities. These professional relationships often prove invaluable as your career progresses.

Documenting your professional journey through carefully curated portfolios helps showcase your capabilities to future employers while maintaining appropriate privacy and security. By thoughtfully selecting and presenting evidence of your achievements, you create powerful tools for career advancement. This systematic approach to portfolio development supports both immediate job searches and long-term career growth.

The completion of your internship marks not an ending but a transition point in your professional journey. By maintaining professional connections, documenting achievements effectively, and planning strategically for future opportunities, you transform your internship experience into a strong foundation for continued career success. This thoughtful approach to career development helps ensure your internship learning continues to benefit you long after the experience concludes.

VERSION HISTORY

This page provides a record of changes made to this guide after publication. Each set of edits is acknowledged with a 0.1 increase in the version number. The downloadable export files available for this guide reflect the most recent version.

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	1.0	1 May 2025	This ebook is published via JCU Open eBooks
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