



Mentorship Guide for Interns

How to build a thoughtful, productive, and growth-centered mentoring relationship

Based on the August 26, 2025 Mentorship Workshop
Presented by Michael Tierney and contribution from participants

Mentorship is more than receiving instructions or career advice. It is a learning relationship that can help you connect academic knowledge, site-based work, professional relationships, and future goals.

Mentorship at a glance. Enter the relationship ready to learn, but do not underestimate what you bring. Your mentor offers experience, context, feedback, and connections. You contribute questions, knowledge, ideas, abilities, effort, and perspective.

1. Approach the experience as an apprenticeship

A strong internship begins with curiosity and humility. Your assigned mentor will be an important guide, but your learning may also come from coworkers, other interns, volunteers, clients, community members, and people whose work differs from your own. Pay attention to how people communicate, solve problems, serve others, make decisions, and contribute to the organization's purpose.

2. Begin with shared expectations

Early in the relationship, talk with your mentor about:

- What you hope to learn or experience.
- What your mentor hopes you will gain.
- How and when you will communicate.
- How you prefer to receive feedback.
- What confidentiality, boundaries, and professional conduct will look like.
- What to do when you have a question, make a mistake, or encounter a concern.

These expectations can change as you learn more about the work. Revisit them when your responsibilities, goals, or support needs shift.

3. Protect trust and confidentiality

You may hear sensitive information, observe difficult workplace moments, or learn about the experiences of people the organization serves. Treat that access as a privilege. Do not share another person's story, private conversation, or organizational information without appropriate permission. Your mentor should show the same care with information you share.



"Everyone owns their own story."

- Michael Tierney

4. Keep a reflection practice and a "memory bank"

Experience does not automatically become learning. Keep a journal, notebook, phone note, or other dependable system for capturing details before they are forgotten. Record:

- Questions you want to ask.
- Names and professional connections.
- Tasks, accomplishments, and decisions.
- Feedback you receive and how you apply it.
- Moments that surprise, challenge, or inspire you.
- Skills you observe in others and begin to recognize in yourself.
- Examples you may later use in a resume, interview, portfolio, or presentation.

5. Use mentoring conversations for more than task updates

A check-in should include what you completed, but it should also help you understand what the experience is teaching you. Consider discussing questions such as:

- What have I learned since our last conversation?
- What surprised me, and why?
- What did I bring to this situation?
- What skill did I observe someone else demonstrate?
- Where am I beginning to demonstrate that skill?
- What is becoming easier, and where do I still need guidance?
- What is one next step I can take before we meet again?

6. Seek feedback, take initiative, and learn from mistakes

A mentor may invite you to speak in a meeting, contact someone new, attempt unfamiliar work, share an idea, or take greater ownership of a project. Ask for the context and tools you need, then be willing to stretch.

You are also likely to make mistakes. Respond professionally: communicate early, take responsibility, help correct the issue, ask what you should learn from it, and apply that lesson the next time. The goal is not perfection; it is stronger judgment, reliability, and confidence.

7. Look beyond the immediate situation

Community and workplace interactions can be complicated. Before making assumptions about another person's behavior, consider what information may be missing, what circumstances may be affecting the interaction, and whether communication should be adapted. Understanding context does not mean excusing harmful conduct; it helps you respond with awareness, empathy, and professional judgment.

8. Learn to name and communicate your skills

Do not describe your internship only by listing tasks. With your mentor, practice explaining:

- The need, problem, or goal you addressed.
- Your specific responsibility.
- The actions and decisions you took.
- The skills and humanities perspectives you used.
- The contribution, result, or learning that followed.
- What you would carry forward or do differently next time.

This process helps you translate the experience into evidence for resumes, interviews, professional conversations, portfolios, and future opportunities.

9. Build relationships, not just contacts

Networking is not simply collecting names or asking for a job. It is learning how to participate in a professional community. Prepare for introductions, ask thoughtful questions, listen carefully, follow through on commitments, and send appropriate follow-up messages. Your mentor can help you understand who you are meeting, why the connection matters, and how to maintain it.

10. Finish by making meaning from the experience

Before the relationship or internship ends, discuss five questions with your mentor:

1. What did I accomplish?
2. What skills did I strengthen?
3. How did I contribute to the organization or community?
4. Who influenced or inspired me?
5. How will I describe this experience to a future employer or professional contact?

The goal is to leave with more than completed tasks or hours. A strong mentoring experience should help you develop greater confidence, clearer evidence of your transferable skills, stronger professional relationships, and a better understanding of how you can contribute.

"You're going from being a consumer of knowledge to a producer of knowledge."

- Workshop participant



Quick Mentorship Checklist

At the beginning

- Share your goals and ask about your mentor's hopes for the experience.
- Clarify communication, feedback, confidentiality, and decision-making expectations.
- Set a routine for check-ins and reflection.

During the experience

- Bring questions, observations, and examples to mentoring conversations.
- Ask for feedback and apply it.
- Pay attention to what you are learning from the whole organization or community.
- Capture accomplishments, skill evidence, and professional connections.

Near the end

- Review your contribution and growth with your mentor.
- Practice telling the story of your experience.
- Thank the people who supported your learning and maintain appropriate relationships.

Source note. This guide is based on themes and recommendations from the HerdWork Humanities "Mentoring & Humanities in the Workplace" Workshop held August 26, 2025, and the accompanying workshop notes. It focuses on mentoring practice and does not replace official program, site, or academic requirements.