



HERDWORK HUMANITIES

HERDWORK HUMANITIES INTERN RESOURCE

Getting the Most from Mentorship

A Practical Guide for HerdWork Humanities Interns

Use mentorship to ask better questions, practice professional skills, learn from feedback, and take greater ownership of your experience.

Fall 2026 edition

College of Liberal Arts, Marshall University

Supported by the Mellon Foundation

Your Role in Mentorship

Your HerdWork Humanities internship is more than a work placement. It is a structured learning experience supported by a site mentor, a faculty mentor, HerdWork leadership, Humanities at Work or the Ambassador Pathway, and your own active participation.

You are not expected to know every workplace rule, understand every assignment immediately, or complete every unfamiliar task without help. You are expected to participate actively: prepare, ask, communicate early, act on feedback, reflect, follow through, and take ownership of appropriate decisions and next steps.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

"Asking is better than wondering." — Caitlyn White, HerdWork Humanities student intern

1. Understand Your Mentoring Team

Who	How this person supports you
Site mentor	Helps you understand the organization, role, tasks, workplace norms, communication, feedback, relationships, confidentiality, and day-to-day priorities.
Faculty mentor	Helps you connect site work to your major, reflect, complete progress reports and final materials, prepare for the Showcase, and translate learning into career-ready language.
HerdWork leadership	Supports program requirements, timekeeping, stipends, Humanities at Work or the Ambassador Pathway, placement questions, and concerns that cross roles or remain unresolved.
You—the intern	Prepare, ask questions, communicate capacity and changes early, complete work, use feedback, document your experience, reflect, and own appropriate next steps.

2. Start with Clear Questions

Do not wait until something goes wrong to learn how the relationship is supposed to work. During your first meetings, ask about:

- The organization's mission and current priorities
- The purpose of your role and first assignments

- How and when to communicate
- Response-time expectations
- The check-in schedule
- What a strong draft or finished product looks like
- What you may decide independently
- What requires approval
- What to do when you finish a task
- Who to contact if your primary mentor is unavailable
- Where files and work products should be saved
- What information is confidential or restricted from public use

REMEMBER

An expectation is not fully clear simply because it was mentioned once. It is clear when you understand what it looks like, can act on it, and know when to ask.

3. Ask Focused Questions Before You Become Stuck

A focused question shows that you are paying attention, trying reasonable options, and taking the work seriously.

Step	Example
1. State the goal	"I am working on the event-contact spreadsheet."
2. Explain what you tried	"I reviewed the shared folder and entered the contacts from the first two lists."
3. Name the uncertainty	"I found several duplicate names and am not sure whether to combine them."
4. Ask for what you need	"Should I merge the records or flag them for review?"

Ask early when

- The purpose or quality standard is unclear.
- Instructions appear to conflict.
- You do not have the access or information you need.
- A deadline may be missed.
- You are unsure whether you have authority to act.
- The work is public-facing, confidential, financial, or high stakes.
- You have tried reasonable options and remain blocked.
- A personal or academic circumstance is affecting your capacity.

4. Learn What “Initiative” Means at Your Site

Initiative does not mean acting without understanding the goal, making high-stakes decisions without permission, sharing restricted information, taking over someone else’s work, or pretending that you understand.

Initiative may mean sending a progress update, proposing a reasonable next step, bringing a recommendation, asking a focused question when blocked, preparing for a meeting, following up, or taking responsibility for a defined project.

ASK DIRECTLY

“What does initiative look like in this role?”

“What decisions may I make independently, and what should I bring to you first?”

“When I finish an assignment, should I wait, ask for another task, or propose a next step?”

5. Ask for the Kind of Support You Need

The same student may need different support for different tasks. You can help your mentor choose the right approach by explaining what would help you move forward.

Support	When to ask	Example language
Explain	You need the purpose, context, standard, or norm.	“Could you explain how this task connects to the larger project?”
Demonstrate	You understand the task but have not seen it done.	“Could you show me an example of a strong version?”
Practice	You need a lower-stakes first attempt.	“Could we practice the opening of the call before I contact the organization?”
Coach	You understand the basics but need help thinking.	“I have two approaches. Could you ask me questions that help me decide?”
Step back	You are ready for a defined area of ownership.	“May I take ownership of this portion if we clarify the boundaries and set a check-back point?”

MENTORING CYCLE

Observe → Ask before assuming → Choose a move → Agree on a next step → Check back and adjust

6. Use Feedback as Part of Learning

Before feedback

- Ask how your mentor prefers to give feedback.
- Clarify what “draft” means at the organization.
- Ask how many rounds of revision are normal.
- Identify which parts of the assignment are flexible and which standards are not negotiable.

While receiving feedback

- Listen before responding and take notes.
- Ask for an example when a comment is unclear.
- Separate feedback about the work from a judgment about yourself.
- Restate the requested revision in your own words.
- Confirm the next step and deadline.

After feedback

- Make the requested changes.
- Ask whether the revision now meets the standard.
- Apply the lesson to future work.
- Record useful feedback for your portfolio and reflection.

WHEN YOU MAKE A MISTAKE

Name what happened, take responsibility for your part, propose a repair, ask what else is needed, and explain how you will prevent a repeat. Do not disappear because you are embarrassed.

7. Prepare for Mentor Check-Ins

A check-in should be more than a list of completed tasks. Use these five questions to prepare:

Focus	Prepare to discuss
Wins	What went well since the last check-in?
Challenges	What was difficult, confusing, delayed, or different from what you expected?
Learning	What are you learning about the work, organization, community, or yourself?
Next step	What is your highest-priority goal before the next check-in?

Focus**Prepare to discuss**

Support

What feedback, clarification, resource, introduction, or decision would help?

SIMPLE PREPARATION NOTE

Progress: what I moved forward

Question: what I need clarified

Learning: what I noticed

Next action: what I plan to do

Support: what I need from my mentor

8. Prepare for Difficult Conversations

A difficult conversation may involve a missed deadline, unclear feedback, workload, a communication problem, a changed project, a need for more or less direction, confidentiality, or a concern about the scope or safety of the work.

Before the conversation

1. Write down what happened.
2. Identify the outcome you want.
3. Prepare the question or request you need to make.

Separate facts from interpretations

EXAMPLE

Fact: "I submitted the draft Monday and have not yet received feedback."

Interpretation: "My mentor does not care about my work."

Professional question: "I want to make sure the draft reached you. When should I expect feedback, and should I continue with the next section while I wait?"

Your faculty mentor can help you clarify facts, identify assumptions, practice the opening, develop a professional request, and plan follow-up. The goal is usually to help you speak for yourself, not to have the faculty mentor take over immediately.

9. Understand Site–Faculty Mentor Communication

Your site mentor and faculty mentor may communicate to compare perspectives and support your progress. They may discuss strengths, current work, communication, workload and hours, academic progress, support needs, final materials, confidentiality, and priorities.

You may ask what will be shared, why it will be helpful, whether you should participate, what will remain private, what decisions were made, and who will follow up. When information is personal, it is reasonable to ask what needs to be shared and why.

STUDENT VOICE

Mentor coordination should support you—not make you disappear from your own experience.

10. Protect Confidentiality and Ownership of Stories

Your internship may give you access to client or participant information, internal records, unpublished documents, photographs, community stories, financial information, personnel matters, drafts, or other restricted material.

Do not assume that you may include something in your portfolio, Showcase, résumé, social media, class work, or public presentation simply because you helped create it or encountered it during the internship.

- May I include this work sample in my portfolio?
- May I use this photograph in my Showcase poster?
- Should the organization or individual be named?
- What details need to be removed or anonymized?
- Who needs to approve this before it is shared?

ETHICAL STORYTELLING

Everyone owns their own story. Ask before sharing another person's experience, image, words, or identifying information.

11. Learn from Process, Revisions, and Setbacks

Not every meaningful experience ends with a polished product. You may learn from a first draft that needs major revision, outreach that receives no response, a changed project, routine administrative work, an event that does not go as planned, an unfamiliar skill, or a project that remains unfinished when the placement ends.

Reflect on

- What did I try?
- What did I learn about the process?
- What was within my control and what was not?
- What would I do differently next time?
- What professional skill did I practice?
- How did I respond when the plan changed?
- What evidence of growth remains even if the intended result did not occur?

You are allowed to be new at something. The goal is not to perform immediately like someone with years of experience. The goal is to learn, improve, and become more able to approach the next challenge.

12. Turn Your Experience into Evidence

Practice moving from what you did to why it mattered, what you contributed, what skill you used, and what resulted or became clearer.

Task-only statement	Evidence-based statement
"I entered information into a spreadsheet."	"I organized and verified program information, helping the organization maintain accurate records and strengthening my information-management skills."
"I helped with social media."	"I created and revised audience-specific digital content that supported the organization's public communication goals."
"The outreach did not work."	"The outreach did not produce the hoped-for response, but I practiced professional communication, follow-up, and adapting a strategy."

Ask your mentors

- What contribution might I be overlooking?
- What skill did you observe me using?
- What work sample would be appropriate to save?
- What could I discuss in an interview?
- What should I include in my portfolio?
- What must remain confidential?
- Where have you seen the most growth?

13. Know When to Contact HerdWork

Contact HerdWork leadership early when:

- You are unsure whether an activity counts toward internship hours.
- Your timekeeping record is inaccurate or incomplete.
- Your workload does not match the approved plan.
- You lack the access, information, equipment, or supervision needed.
- Your responsibilities differ substantially from the approved role.
- Communication has repeatedly broken down.
- A concern remains unresolved after a reasonable direct conversation.
- A task or situation feels unsafe or inappropriate.
- Your wellness is affecting participation.
- You are considering leaving or changing the placement.
- A concern could affect program completion.

PROGRAM CONTACT

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14. Ready-to-Use Professional Language

Situation	Language you can use
When you need clarification	"I want to make sure I understand the goal before I continue. Could we review what the finished product should accomplish?"
When you are blocked	"I have tried ___ and ___. I am still blocked by ___. What would you recommend as the next step?"
When you need an example	"Could you show me an example or model of what strong work looks like?"
When you may miss a deadline	"I may not meet Friday's deadline because ___. I can complete ___ by Friday and the remaining work by ___. Would that recovery plan work?"
When you want more responsibility	"I feel ready to take greater ownership. What decisions may I make independently, and where would you like me to check in?"
When feedback is unclear	"I want to apply the feedback correctly. Could you give me an example of the change you would like to see?"
When you made a mistake	"I realized that I ___. I have corrected ___. My plan to prevent this next time is ___. Is there anything else I should do?"
When you want to use a work sample	"Would the organization be comfortable with me including this in my portfolio or Showcase? What should be removed, anonymized, or approved first?"

Intern Quick-Start Checklist

At the beginning

- Learn the organization's mission and priorities.
- Clarify your role, schedule, first assignments, communication, and check-ins.
- Identify primary and backup contacts.
- Ask what strong work and initiative look like.
- Clarify decision authority, file systems, confidentiality, and public-sharing rules.
- Tell your mentor what you hope to learn or practice.

Each week

- Keep time and required documentation current.
- Review priorities and communicate schedule changes early.
- Bring one update, one question, and one proposed next step to check-ins.
- Record important feedback and at least one thing you learned.
- Save appropriate evidence and ask before saving restricted materials.
- Follow through on agreed actions.

When a problem arises

- Separate facts from interpretations.
- Identify missing information and the appropriate first contact.
- Prepare what you need to say or ask.
- Communicate before the problem grows.
- Propose a reasonable next step and confirm the agreement.
- Contact HerdWork when the issue crosses roles or remains unresolved.

Near the end

- Identify major contributions and skills developed.
- Ask mentors what growth they observed.
- Confirm what may be shared publicly.
- Select portfolio and Showcase evidence.
- Translate the experience into résumé and interview language.
- Thank the people who supported your learning and clarify professional follow-up.

A Final Test of Your Growth

- Am I more willing and able to ask informed questions?
- Do I communicate changes earlier?
- Can I receive feedback, revise, and try again?
- Do I understand which decisions I can make?
- Can I explain what I contributed and learned?
- Do I know when and how to seek support?
- Am I more prepared to enter another professional setting?

CLOSING REFLECTION

One thing I want my mentors to understand about how I learn is...

One question I need to ask this week is...

One responsibility I am ready to take greater ownership of is...

One part of my experience I want to explain professionally is...

Source Note

This publication was prepared from the following HerdWork Humanities materials:

- August 2025 HerdWork Humanities Mentorship Workshop transcript
- January 2026 HerdWork Humanities Mentorship Workshop transcript
- September 2026 HerdWork Humanities Mentorship Workshop transcript, chat, and presentation
- Fall 2026 HerdWork Humanities intern and mentor guidance