

Interning, if done right, is awesome. Just ask Wendy, *Girlfriend's* ex-intern-now-editorial-assistant. She got great experience and was able to show off her skills – skills that impressed our ed Sarah so much that she hired her. Now Wendy's living happily ever after, standing up for K-Stew, eating a never-ending supply of baked goods, and writing for the mag.

But it's not always as easy as that – which is why we've compiled this list of everything you need to know before you start.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS

Tom O'Shea, executive director of policy for the government's Fair Work Ombudsman, says there's been a huge rise in the number of people doing internships over the last few years. "People are interested in doing internships, but, sadly, some of them are being exploited," he says.

So what is fair? Here are some key things to look out for.

IN THE LAST FINANCIAL YEAR THERE WERE 28,412 INVESTIGATIONS INTO UNFAIR WORK CONDITIONS IN AUSTRALIA, WITH \$40 MILLION AWARDED.

IS THE INTERNSHIP SERVING YOUR PURPOSE?

As an intern, you should be learning about a job you're interested in. If you're not learning anything but the company is getting a free pair of hands to help out, there's a problem.

There has to be some give and take, however. Your supervisor is taking the time to mentor you so there should be something in it for them, like an occasional coffee run or mail duty.

If you feel you're not learning, speak up. Ask your supervisor if they have a few minutes to chat; outline the areas you're interested in and ask if there's any way you could be involved.

HOW LONG ARE YOU THERE FOR?

As a general rule, an intern should have fewer/more flexible hours than permanent staff, or work for a shorter period of time (full-time is OK for a week, but not six months). But remember, people are giving up their time to manage you so being late isn't cool, and not showing up at all is totes inappropriate.

HOW REALISTIC ARE YOUR BOSS'S EXPECTATIONS?

You're there to learn, so you should be allowed to make a mistake now and then. "There can't be an expectation from the boss that the company lives and dies by this person's performance," Tim says.

In the same way that you can't be expected to perform like an employee, you shouldn't expect the perks of one. So if you're a mag intern, you probably won't be styling shoots or interviewing celebs.

You can exceed your boss's expectations though! If you want to go above and beyond, that's your choice and a great way to get noticed.

THINK YOU'VE BEEN UNFAIRLY TREATED?

The Fair Work Ombudsman offers free and totally confidential legal services.

- Log on and live chat: fairwork.gov.au.
- Phone: 13 13 94.

Ace your first day

DRESS TO IMPRESS. Don't be afraid to ask what attire is appropriate. If in doubt, black pants, a cute top, blazer and ballet flats are suitable for basically every environment.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING. It is SO important to arrive on time. If you can, do a test run the day before so you know how long it'll take to get there.

WRITE A FLOOR PLAN. This will help you keep track of people's names. **(DON'T) CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM.** Research the company you are interning with, and let them know how excited you are.

THE INSIDER

Aubrey Hamlett, founder of the blog *My Interning Life* (myinterninglife.wordpress.com) thinks an internship is crucial to getting a job in the media.

"In uni, I remember a guest lecturer from a newspaper telling [my Communications class], 'It's well known that with your degree, it's not going to get your foot in the door, not even if you're a straight-A student. You just need that industry experience to back you up.'"

Aubrey has had four internships and knows firsthand not every internship is a dream. "I was a promotional and sales intern, but I didn't get to learn much about [that] side of the company. I was basically like their secretary – I'd pick up their post and pack CDs.

That's all good experience, but it wasn't what I was looking for."

Luckily, her next internships were happier experiences. "I've been really lucky to be hands-on in the majority of my internships," she says. As an intern, she's helped out at events, convinced a *Cosmopolitan*

columnist to dedicate a whole piece to her expo and, during her time at the Melbourne Storm, managed the team's official Twitter account.

Internships also allowed Aubrey to find out what she loves – and it's not what she thought it'd be. "I always wanted to be a features writer for a magazine, but when I got into sports, I really loved it," she says. She's now communications co-ordinator at Netball Australia. "Interning helped me decide what I do and don't like, and what I do and don't want to do." **GF**

"INTERNING HELPED ME DECIDE WHAT I DO AND DON'T LIKE, AND WHAT I DO AND DON'T WANT TO DO." – Aubrey Hamlett

Even millionaires Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen did internships while studying at NYU.

FAQs

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN INTERNSHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCE?

This varies between organisations, but, on the whole, work experience is for a short period of time and no experience is needed. Interns tend to already be studying their chosen field and will stay for a longer period of time.

DOES GF OFFER INTERNSHIPS?

We sure do! Head to Girlfriend.com.au for more deets.

CAN I DO AN INTERNSHIP WHILE I'M STILL AT HIGH SCHOOL?

It depends on the organisation, but most of the time the internship hours won't work with your class schedule.

ARE THEY REALLY ALLOWED TO ASK ME TO PICK UP DRY-CLEANING?

If it's a one-off, then yes, they really are! If you spend all your time doing personal tasks for someone though, it's time to start thinking twice.