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# **ATA Guidelines for Internships in the Language Industry**

Prepared by the American Translators Association Ad Hoc  
Internship Guidelines Committee, and approved by the  
American Translators Association Board of Directors January 2006.

## **ATA Guidelines for Internships in the Language Industry**

### **1. General: Is your organization in a good position to sponsor an internship?**

This document is designed to provide guidelines on how to organize internships (sometimes called a practicum, pl., practica). *Creating a professionally-oriented language industry internship is the act of employing a supervised student currently studying in a degree program in translation and/or interpreting (or related programs) to assist professional language and language management employees to complete tasks more efficiently.* The act of assisting the professionals provides a learning experience for the students in a professional environment. The employer, called the *receiving organization*, in this document, gets work projects completed thoroughly and efficiently, while the intern gets to apply skills learned previously in the classroom, to learn new skills, and to collect experience on how to operate successfully in a professional language industry organization.

In contrast, a part-time/full-time semester or summer job is simply the compensation of students with already practiced skill sets to produce work required on deadline. There is usually far less learning going on in such arrangements except that the student becomes familiar with a receiving organization's specific operation procedures and tools. In some cases, these jobs are not supervised in-house since they are completed on a freelance basis.

It is recommended that potential receiving organizations and interns work through the accompanying points to decide whether they want to offer an internship or to participate in one.

The conditions spelled out in these Guidelines are suitable for both small and larger companies, for internships can be a positive experience both for the intern and the receiving organization, whatever its size.

## 2. Basic Guidelines

### a) The Internship Agreement

- i) **The Internship Agreement Document:** Every internship should be governed by an agreement involving the sending academic institution, the student, and the receiving organization. This agreement should cover all practical and legal aspects of the internship. All parties involved are, of course, free to choose whether they want to enter into a formal contractual agreement or whether they want to agree on a verbal level. There is NO obligation to enter into a binding legal agreement for such internships, but it is important for everyone to understand the conditions for the internship as outlined in a document (the Internship Plan). Expectations and responsibilities for all three parties (intern, the receiving organization, and the academic institution) should be made very clear, as it is usually failure to meet the expectations of the receiving organization or of the intern that creates an unsuccessful internship.
- ii) **Internship Plan:** The Internship Plan shall comprise a full written description of the internship and related tasks, including the compensation package and additional company information. Before the selection process (submission of résumés, interviews, etc.), the receiving organization must make the Internship Plan available to the academic institution, which, in turn, is responsible for providing this information to its students in order to facilitate a focused selection process. Refer to Section 3.a for Internship Plan details.
- iii) **Initialing the Plan:** All parties involved (the student, the receiving organization, and the sending academic institution) should read the Internship Plan carefully. If there is no intent to enter into a formal agreement, it would be at least useful for everyone to initial the Plan acknowledging that they have read it. This document should cover the exact scope of activities (with a percentage breakdown of time to be spent on each task) in order to allow both the organization and the student to prepare for the internship. This document should be reviewed two weeks after the start of such an internship in order to adapt it to current realities.
- iv) **Accurate Information:** Students applying for an internship should give accurate and honest replies to all questions. Likewise, the receiving organization should provide the potential intern with a realistic description of the job and work conditions.
- v) **Discrimination and Harassment:** No intern should be exposed to racial, sexual, religious, or other harassment during the selection process and the actual internship. The intern should apply the same rule and be respectful towards other cultures at the internship location. All parties involved should always act in line with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**vi) Visas:** If an internship takes place outside the student's nation of residence or citizenship, the receiving organization should make every reasonable effort to support the candidate in obtaining the necessary visa or work permit. The receiving organization is obligated to allow enough time and supply timely documents in the selection/planning process for the student to obtain the proper visa for legal work in the country of the receiving organization. The receiving organization shall clearly inform students what their responsibilities are with respect to obtaining visas.

Under no circumstances should the receiving organization be legally responsible for obtaining a visa, however, and no legal claims may be raised against a receiving organization if in the end the appropriate authorities do not issue the student the necessary visas or permits.

Students should also check with their local student exchange support resources in order to find out as much as possible concerning regulations governing student work in the target country. Organizations such as the Council on International Educational Exchange can be very helpful in advising and assisting students. See: <http://www.ciee.org>.

ATA does not support receiving organizations' hiring interns outside legal bounds.

**b) Managing the Internship**

- i) Mentors and Supervisors:** Every intern must have a mentor and a supervisor within the receiving organization. The supervisor generally selects interns, assigns them to workgroups or projects, and is responsible for the overall organization of the internship. The mentor provides both professional advice in the workplace and even personal guidance with respect to such things as getting settled in the community and assistance with such issues as cultural differences and homesickness. Hence, the two individuals play different roles, but in small organizations or special circumstances, they may have to be the same person.
- ii) Periodic Evaluation:** Every internship should be reevaluated by all parties involved on a regular basis. This program assessment should be carried out at appropriate intervals as agreed upon in the Internship Plan. The review should be formalized and is meant to ensure that the educational and work-related objectives are being met. This assessment is NOT a performance review, but is designed to verify whether the objectives outlined are being met or need to be adapted.
- iii) Performance Review:** The intern also has a right to a performance review at the end of the internship in the form of a mutually agreed upon format such as the customary employer review of regular employees or a form used in other internship evaluations.
- iv) Compensation:** Every intern is entitled to fair compensation for his/her work. The receiving organization should agree upon the amount before the internship begins and could include, e.g., hourly compensation, housing, travel, etc. Additional benefits can be arranged individually (health insurance, lease car, etc., if applicable). It is important that all of these arrangements not conflict with the ethical standards of any of the parties involved. See 3.b, Compensation Package, for further details.
- v) Termination Policies:** In every internship, the receiving organization, the student, and the academic institution should have the right to terminate the internship after an initial appropriate period of time and with adequate notice if the internship content or the intern's performance with respect to that content do not match the Internship Plan. If, however, all the parties involved agree, the scope of the program can be amended to reflect the actual situation. This provision is intended to allow for flexibility if an intern turns out to be very interested in and suitable for a different kind of task than the one originally defined for that intern.

Before terminating an internship, any issues should be addressed during the assessment process and communicated in writing to all parties involved in order to allow for improvement on the points of criticism or to resolve any possible points of misunderstanding.

**c) Intern Work Assignments**

- i) Work Assignments:** The bulk of an intern's work should be of a professional nature. In comparison to the overall task assignments of the company's staff, interns should not be expected to spend more time than the rest of the professional staff on tasks that are not outlined in the Internship Plan. For instance, if everyone in the group does copying, answers phones, etc., this is to be expected of the intern as well, but the intern should not be relegated to routine, menial tasks.
- ii) Intern Responsibilities:** While independent work should be encouraged, interns should not be assigned projects for which they have to bear the sole responsibility. Interns should be entitled to refuse such projects where the level of responsibility exceeds their actual capabilities or experience. By the same token, sometimes interns are chosen to do a job that they are specially equipped to handle through experience or training. In such cases, all parties to the agreement should concur that the intern has the skills required to do independent work.
- iii) Resources:** The receiving organization should provide the intern with all information and tools needed to carry out any given task.
- iv) Professional Demeanor:** The intern should act in a motivated, reliable and professional manner and must be willing to learn and to perform.

### 3. Internship Checklist

#### a) The Internship Agreement

i) **Internship Plan:** The Internship Plan should include the following information:

- The name, location, and business sector of the receiving organization (ideally with sources of additional information, such as a Web URL, an email address for a contact person, etc.)
- Title of internship and description of the intern's proposed tasks, duties, and responsibilities
- Statement of working hours, with a rough percentage of time allocated for various tasks
- Description of a training program (duration of training period, subjects to be covered, etc.)
- Clear definition of intern qualification skills, areas of knowledge, and abilities
- Definition of the duration of the internship, with specification of full- or part-time work, statement of first and last day of the internship, or statement of total days or hours to be worked
- Information on annual opportunities, seasonal schedules, etc., for recurring internship opportunities
- Information on whether the internship is intended to lead to a job offer or not
- Information about the town, city, or region where the internship will take place
- Specific application procedures and deadline dates; indication of selection procedures

Although not required, it would be wise to develop a learning contract for each intern like many US schools do for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). CPT is a US Citizenship and Immigration Services-sanctioned work program in which F-1 visa students may work off campus for pay in the US as long as the work is related to the student's degree program.

It should be determined if a personal project will be completed by the intern to demonstrate use of all or most skills learned by the intern over the course of the internship. This project should be negotiated by the receiving institution, the school, and the intern.

### **b) The Compensation Package**

- i) The compensation package should also be defined before the selection process and this document should include the following:
  - Student compensation should be clearly stated.
  - Ideally, student-style accommodation should be provided at no cost for the student (options include providing an apartment or paying an additional amount that allows the student to rent such an apartment). Accommodation on campuses or in similar facilities is acceptable, as are arrangements for students to stay in private homes. In cases where housing support is impossible, advice to students seeking housing is highly desirable.
  - In general, there should be no cost for health insurance, because most interns will be covered by their student health care programs. Students should be advised to check with their university student exchange programs to determine whether they need supplemental coverage for travel and work abroad. The university and the students should be responsible for working out this kind of coverage if need be.
  - The receiving organization is responsible for covering liability insurance costs as for regular employees.
  - Ideally, travel to and from the internship location should be covered by the receiving company/organization. The intern should choose the most economical way of transportation (e.g., early booking, special fares, etc.) It may be desirable for the fare to be shared between the student and the receiving organization or for the university to be involved. Since different universities have different resources and procedures for supporting students in this regard, the final solution should be discussed and included in the Internship Plan.
  - The Internship Plan shall clearly indicate pay periods and specify other benefits, e.g., transportation, room, board, personal expenses, reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, etc.
  - In some special cases, interns may agree to participate in excellent internship programs with smaller companies that cannot afford high-cost items such as travel costs, but are able to provide other perks, such as ATA conference fees, free telephone calls home, etc. Such arrangements should be very carefully negotiated to ensure that students are treated fairly.

**c) Internship Program Review**

In cases of long-term internship programs between a university and a receiving institution, there should be a contract review at mutually agreed intervals of the program as completed over the years to measure the success of all segments of the program and to recommend any changes designed to achieve greater success.

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