

Tips for Remote Externs – Summer 2020¹

INTRODUCTION:

Due to COVID-19, externships currently look very different, and for summer 2020 we know that remote work will continue. While it is becoming more common for lawyers to telework, it remains uncommon for newer lawyers (let alone student learners) to have this option. This will be great practice for your future career, which will hopefully involve regular in person engagement soon, but for many, this is a major adjustment. To help you students across the country be as successful as possible, Denver Law's Externship Program developed a tips and best practices document to guide summer externships. This version is designed to be distributed to students outside of Denver Law. For questions/comments, contact Prof. Alexi Freeman, Associate Professor of the Practice and Director of Externships and Public Interest Initiatives at Denver Law, at afreeman@law.du.edu.

TIPS:

Cut Yourself Some Slack

- It will take time to adjust to this “new normal” we are all experiencing, let alone the unique questions and challenges that exist for your externship work and your personal situation. Be patient with yourself and others, be kind to yourself, and recognize that it is ok if everything does not go as planned.
- Some extra self-care and care for others may have to take place during work hours so be realistic in setting expectations. For example, if you need to do some meditation, get some fresh air, go out for groceries, or care for a neighbor during the day, plan that in your schedule. It is ok and expected.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

- Communication in externships contributes to a positive experience. This is even more critical with remote work. So be sure to stay in touch with your supervisor and others at your externship site during this period. Do not fall out of touch when telecommuting. Remind everyone of your schedule (i.e. when you'll be working) and revise it as needed (in consultation with your supervisor). Volunteer to still join calls/zoom sessions remotely so you can get as much engagement as possible.
- At the same time, remember this is likely an adjustment for your supervisor as well and they also may have challenges. So, be patient and kind with them, expect that they also

¹ Note: this has been adapted from the Tips document shared by Denver Law's Externship Program in Summer and Spring 2020 and from *Seattle University Law School's Tips for Telecommuters*.

have personal and professional obligations on their plates, and don't be surprised if it takes a minute for a response.

- Do not become invisible because of the remote work. Try to virtually attend office gatherings and group meetings when you are available. Where online social interaction is available, be sure to join. Be mindful of your attire during these video meetings. We don't think anyone is expecting a suit from the home office unless the meeting really calls for a suit. But a sweatshirt isn't appropriate in most settings either.
- If you have skills in technology to set up online platforms and come up with creative ideas to prevent remote workers from being isolated, share them with your supervisor and offer to set them up if you have time and capacity.
- In addition to communicating about your regular work schedule as described below, it is generally useful to let your supervisor (and other team members as needed) know when you're "logged on" for the day, provide an update at the end of the week with what you've been able to do, and share in advance what you would like to discuss in your next meeting.
- If you have any circumstances that make it more difficult to work at various times (e.g., children, health issues, poor access to technology or bad Internet connection, and so on), please let your supervisor know this early on. If you are concerned about discussing this topic with them, reach out to us. We can help guide you in this conversation, reach out to your supervisor on your behalf, and/or figure out another way to notify them.

Find Your Best Working Location

- If you live alone, consider the best setting to do your work. Think about natural light vs. artificial light and what your physical background will be if/when you have a video meeting. Think about where your internet connection is most stable. Consider whether background noise – whether music or TV on low – helps or hinders your concentration. If you normally work in a very loud, busy office, some noise might be good. Just think about what you're used to and how you succeed, and try to replicate that as much as possible.
- For those living with roommates, live-in partners, children, parents, and the like, it can be hard to find a quiet place to work. Consider whether you can take shifts with another adult in the home so that you can have private access to the best workspace. As we discuss later, this will also help prevent the inadvertent disclosure of confidential information to others in the home (e.g., overhearing conversations or seeing work papers on a work surface).
- Be sure to let your supervisors know what your "home office" situation is like. If you anticipate a child making a noise, just let them know in advance. People get it. Setting expectations makes even more sense here.

Make Others Aware of Your Externship Situation

- Take the work seriously and avoid having too many interruptions. Determine what questions, favors, and needs may cause interruptions. Ask your family or roommates to help develop ground rules to follow while you are working remotely. Getting their input ensures participation in the process. Ensure folks know when you can't engage or answer the phone (unless it's an emergency).

- At the same time, remain flexible. Sometimes you may need to go on an errand or talk to a friend to take a break and that's ok.

Engage in Some Early Planning With Your Supervisor

- You can set the stage for a successful summer through early planning that accounts for your needs and preferences, and the supervisor's needs and preferences. For example, you are required to set learning goals as part of your externship. Utilize this as an opportunity to discuss with your supervisor what you hope to get out of the summer and learn about what they hope to have you accomplish.
- It may take a bit for a supervisor to respond to an email and you can't just pop by with a knock at their cubicle/office door. At the beginning of summer, ask for some longer term assignments so that you will always have something to do. Relatedly, ask for access to trainings, readings, and the like that can provide context to your work, inform you about the practice, and broaden your understanding and skills (and fill time when you're in the waiting period).
- You might also want to ask your supervisor about their expectations for how/when you will contact them for work, with questions, etc. Students may be worried about "intruding" on their supervisor's time, particularly when they cannot see in person whether they're busy, etc. Having an understanding about what is ok (e.g., phone, email, text?) might help you feel comfortable reaching out.
- Confirm which research databases they would like you to use (i.e. your Lexis/Westlaw/Bloomberg accounts or their accounts). Note: Denver Law students paid by their placement cannot use their student Lexis/Westlaw accounts.
- Confirm whether you should use your law school email or an office email. Generally, we do not recommend using your personal email to transfer or store client data. For all of your online accounts, use strong passwords.
- Notify your placement that you are required to track time for the externship program (which supervisors have access to if they would like to review), but also inquire as to whether you should be tracking your time for them in any particular place or with any specific format.
- Ask for deadlines for assignments. Experience tells us that students generally work better when there's a clear goal in mind even if there's some flexibility. You can always ask for an extension if needed. Some supervisors won't give you a deadline because they don't want to pressure you, but we still suggest you ask for some sort of marker.
- If the supervisor is unavailable for questions, find out who you should communicate with instead.
- If at any point work "runs out" from your supervisor and/or you experience a lack of responsiveness on their end, let your externship faculty or foundation funder know as soon as possible. Generally, these individuals can help you communicate with your supervisor to get additional work, engage with your supervisor directly, and/or identify other ways for you to complete your hours.

Set a Routine / Consider Implementing Structure

- As much as possible, we strongly recommend that you set a work schedule and stick to it as much as possible. Begin and finish work at a regular time and let your supervisor know when you will be online, available for calls, video conferencing, and checking

emails. If you need to be offline for focused work such as research and writing, let supervisors know. Consider the in-office externship schedule that you were going to have.

- If your office blocked access to social media or personal email, consider doing the same to ensure you are focused and able to get your work done. If you want to ensure you're on email because of the crisis we are in, then maybe just block access to certain websites to limit distractions.

Replace the Ritual of Getting Ready for Work and Ending the Day

- Remote work eliminates the traditional office rituals like morning conversations or coffee, the reading of news articles on your commute, and so on. Consider whether it will be helpful to set up new rituals. Rather than Starbucks, make your coffee, read your articles on your couch, maybe check in with a law school friend (as a substitute for a co-worker), and then get yourself settled. You might even want to take a walk to get fresh air to start the day. Just do something so it's routine and then signals, when it's done, you're ready to work. The ritual will be different for each student.
- Relatedly, consider the best way to end your day. Maybe you send an email to your supervisor, maybe you take a look at your to-do list (see next section), or maybe you call a friend or check the weather if that's what you used to do before you would leave the office. Either way, set up something!

Set Goals for the Day/Week

- What do you hope to accomplish today? What do you hope to accomplish this week? Come up with tangible things to do. Check the list at the end of the day and see how you did. If you weren't as successful in checking things off and it wasn't because it was just very complex, reflect on what happened. Maybe you didn't stick to the routine – that can be easy to fix. Or maybe you're very worried or stressed because of all that is happening. That's ok. Give yourself time to have those moments and then break away and give yourself time to do your work. We have *time* right now that we didn't have before. No commuting, no coffee runs...so give yourself that time for what you need it to be.
- Consider whether it is worth sharing your daily or weekly goals with your supervisor so they know you're on track and so that they can help you prioritize if needed.

Utilize Your Resources

- Law schools have amazing IT staff, library professors, and other professionals who can assist you if needed remotely. Be sure to look for office hours, and special summer or remote hours and reach out!
- Externship faculty and staff, of course, are also resources.
- If you are in crisis, please contact your health/counseling center at your school and/or appropriate student affairs specialists at your school.

Engage in Best Practices with Technology

- Small things matter:
 - Utilize headphones to block out background noise.
 - Turn off email/messenger and the like unless necessary for work during virtual sessions.

- If you can, use a stable desk/table for your computer.
- Try to avoid walking and shifting locations during meetings.
- Consider handwritten notes to avoid the typing noise during meetings.
- Here are some important tips for Zoom specifically:
 - Ensure your background on Zoom is professional (we don't recommend the creative virtual backgrounds at the onset of your externship, or frankly throughout its entirety, unless it's very clear that everyone in the office does this).
 - Ensure your full name with appropriate capitalization and pronouns is listed on your Zoom video (e.g. Lexi Freeman not lfreeman or Lexi).
 - Plan to always put your video on so people can put a face to your name/voice unless your personal circumstances do not allow you to do so – but be sure to communicate about that if you need to – and turn off your video if personal business requires you to do so for a little bit.
 - Practice Sharing Your Screen in advance. Note: if you are sharing a video and want to share volume over Zoom, be sure to click on Optimize Screen Sharing once you go into the Screen Sharing option. If you are the host of a meeting, which may happen, you may need to go into Security to ensure others can share their screen.
 - To set up your own Zoom meeting, make sure you're using your school's institutional zoom account.
- Here are some additional help links/tips for common systems that might be utilized by your office:
 - [Google Hangouts Login](#) and [Hangout Help](#)
 - [Slack Login](#) and [Help with Slack](#)
 - [Help with Teams](#)

Have a Plan for Saving Documents, etc.

- Be sure to explicitly ask and confirm with your supervisor how and where you should save your documents. Generally we recommend saving to the Cloud drive that you have access to through DU vs. your hard drive, but you should check with your placement.
- Develop a system for organizing the work that will be done at home both online and at your house. For online, if you don't already have it and there aren't specific rules set out by your placement, save documents with easy to read titles and in specific folders. If you have physical paper and/or work best to print things, create your own mini files at home.

Be Mindful of Ethical Rules, Especially Confidentiality

- If you are working from home and someone else lives there with you, please be mindful of when and where you are having phone or Zoom calls, documents left open on a computer, documents left on a kitchen table, the presence of listening devices like Alexa, using speaker phone, and other similar situations. Function on a "clean desk" policy. Consider earphones so others do not hear a conversation.
- We do not envision people going to coffee shops, but of course, be mindful of any work-related conversations where others can hear and/or see your work.
- If you are engaging IT or library professionals to support you, be mindful of confidentiality rules and what you can share and show them.

- Before using resources like Google Docs to share/store documents, ask your supervisor whether this is permissible.
- It is always important for law students to avoid the unauthorized practice of law. This may prove more challenging when you are working in relative isolation – so be sure to nail down exactly what your supervisor is asking you to do for a project and who you may consult with questions (if they are not available). This is another area where clear and frequent communication really helps!
- Read your state's Rules of Professional Conduct! Ask for any specific ethical rules, standards, or handbooks that the office may have.

Stick to Deadlines (Unless Extraordinary Circumstances Exist)

- Follow the same rules for deadlines as in the office. You should not miss deadlines except in extenuating circumstances. If you are ill or caring for someone who is ill, notify supervisors in advance. If you are caring for children while working, again, notify and ask for flexibility if possible. This may affect the type of assignments you receive (e.g. things that do not require a quick turnaround) and that is ok. If physically mailing documents, send them so they arrive the day they are due or earlier. When sending work electronically it should also arrive on time.

This remains is a big change, and it will not be smooth sailing at every moment, but we are confident you can still gain skills, continue to develop your professional identity, learn new areas of law, contribute to your office's goals, and feel good about practical learning and your future legal career!