



Department of Rhetoric

Scientific and Technical Communication

Internship Guide

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Scientific and Technical Communication Internship Guide

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Scientific and Technical Communication Program

Internship Guide

The internship is a very important part of your Scientific and Technical Communication program because it allows you to take your classroom skills and knowledge out into the workplace and apply them in a practical work environment. Through the internship you'll learn what it's like to work as a technical communicator in a business setting and how to adapt to an organizational culture. You will gain practical experience in working with and for others. You may also discover new strengths about yourself and uncover areas that need improvement. The internship experience may help you reach decisions about the type of technical communication work you would like to pursue and often leads to job offers after graduation.

All undergraduate and graduate students in the Scientific and Technical Communication program are required to complete a S/N graded internship experience as part of their degree program. Internships may be for 3-6 credits, with a minimum of 3 credits required for graduation.

Rhet 4196 - Internship for Undergraduate Students

Note to undergraduates: You cannot enroll in an internship until you are officially accepted into the major.

Rhet 5196 - Internship for Graduate Students

Note to graduate students: Graduate students who have had experience in the technical communication field are not required to complete an internship. Talk with your adviser about these exemptions.

Getting started: How do I locate an internship site?

Begin your search for an internship well in advance of the semester in which you plan to complete it. Internship opportunities are posted regularly to the UMRHET-S electronic listserv and on the departmental bulletin board outside of 64 Classroom Bldg. Check your email and the bulletin board frequently for internships.

Career Services for the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences also offers useful information about finding internships, writing resumes, and going on interviews. The office is located in 120 BioSystems and Agricultural Engineering and their phone number is 612-624-2710. They have a database for matching students to employers. Add your name to the database by visiting Career Services.

The Office of Special Learning Opportunities (OSLO), 220 Johnston Hall, is another source for finding internships. OSLO's phone number is 624-7577 and their flyer is usually posted on our bulletin board.

You should also ask other Scientific and Technical Communication majors about internships they may have had or have heard of because networking is an excellent way to locate your ideal position. Attending the meetings of professional societies such as the Society for Technical Communication or the Medical Writers Association may provide leads on possible positions. Don't forget to check the want-ads for openings you may be able to fashion into an internship experience. Also, don't overlook volunteer positions as internships, either. You may find one that particularly meets your needs and interests.

Your adviser can help you locate internship possibilities as well as assist you with refining job search documents: a resume, cover letter, reference lists, and marketing portfolio. Also, talk with your adviser about a reasonable salary range. Do not sell yourself short as you have many valuable skills to offer an employer.

After you have assembled your job search documents, contact potential internship

employers for interviews. During an interview, discuss the functions and responsibilities of the internship position with the internship employer and skills you bring to the workplace. Once you are offered and you accept an internship, you will need to describe these functions and responsibilities in your internship proposal (discussed on page 7).

How do I register for internship credit?

In order to register for Rhet 4196 (undergraduate) or Rhet 5196 (graduate), Internship in Scientific and Technical Communication, you must complete the following steps:

- First, go to Sharon Norman in the main office (64 Classroom Ofc. Bldg.) and ask her for a special course registration form. Or, you can also tear out page 17 of this guide, if that's more convenient. Take it with you when you meet with your advisor to discuss your ideas for an internship.
- Second, schedule an appointment with your faculty adviser to discuss your prospective internship site and job description. Your adviser does not expect a detailed internship proposal at this point but does need a general idea of what it will involve. He or she will help you determine the number of credits to register for (3-6 credits, with a minimum of 3 needed to graduate). This is a good time to ask your adviser what they will expect from you and the employer in order to issue a final S/N grade. Fill in your adviser's name on the registration form.
- Next, return your completed form to Sharon Norman and she will issue you a magic number so you can register.

You can complete more than one internship. However, six internship credits is the maximum allowed. For example, you could chose to work at two internships over two different semesters and receive three credits for one and three credits for another. In deciding the number of credits to register for, consider that **30 hours of internship work equals one credit hour**. This number of hours of work required per credit may change in the near future.

What other involvement will my adviser have in the internship process?

Your adviser can help you define your educational objectives for the internship proposal and help you understand internship expectations. You should meet with your adviser at least twice throughout your internship experience to discuss your progress toward meeting these objectives and expectations. Use this meeting time to discuss insights, joys, fears, problems, and your internship journal/final report.

Toward the end of your internship, you must request a final evaluation letter from your supervisor (or your adviser may have a form for your supervisor to complete). Your adviser needs this evaluation to complete your internship grading. Without this letter or form your internship is incomplete and you will not receive credit for the experience.

The Internship Experience

The internship is an experiential learning project. To help you document your internship experience and receive class credit, your adviser will ask you to submit the following:

- Internship proposal
- Progress Report
- Internship Journal (optional — ask your adviser)
- Final report, samples or portfolio of work from the internship, or other summary material as per your adviser's instructions
- Evaluation letter from internship supervisor

At the end of your internship, you will submit your final report to your adviser and request an evaluation letter from your internship supervisor. Your adviser must receive these documents before he or she assigns a final grade (S/N).

The Internship Proposal

Soon after accepting a position, develop and write an internship proposal and present it to your adviser. It should be completed before you begin your internship. The proposal should include the following information:

- The internship position and the name of your internship supervisor, company address, and workplace phone number.
- The duties you will perform or projects you will complete.
(You do not need to know every function/task that you will perform for approval of your internship proposal. Give your adviser as clear a description as possible at this point.)

- The length of the internship and number of credit hours.
(30 hours of work generally equal one credit. Because you have to pay for credits, you may opt to work for more hours at your internship than you receive credit for. The number of hours required to equal one credit will change after spring semester 2000.)
- Your educational objectives, such as what you hope to learn, produce, and accomplish in this internship experience.

This proposal is also a contract between you and your adviser. It defines your internship responsibilities and the objectives you and your adviser have decided need to be met in order to successfully complete the internship. Negotiate any modifications to the proposal with your adviser if conditions change as the internship progresses.

You can write your proposal in memo form addressed to your adviser. It should be at least one to two pages in length.

The Internship Progress Report

About half way through your internship, write a description of the work you have done to date and the work you have left to do. The report can be in the form of a memorandum report three to four pages in length. Include the following:

- a recap of the project or position
- time/task breakdown of work done and work remaining
- skills you have used or developed
- a preliminary analysis of the organization
i.e., how does the organization function? What are its stated and implied goals and values? From your experience, is your work and the way you are functioning in agreement with the stated/implied goals and values?
- an overall statement of the status of the internship project

The Internship Journal

Your internship is a rich, experiential learning experience. To focus your attention on that learning, your adviser may ask you to keep an internship journal in which you should write regularly (at least one page, two to three times a week) about your experiences.

Before the end of the internship you will prepare a final report in which you examine what you learned through your internship and what professional relationships you developed with your employer and co-workers. If you keep a journal, your entries can provide much of the information you will need for your report.

A good way to structure your journal is to use your first entry to project what you expect to learn in each of the seven general areas (see pages 10--12) before you actually begin the internship. Then, during the internship you can write about your real work experiences in each area. At the end of the internship, you can compare your actual experiences with your earlier expectations.

The following are some guidelines for you to use in monitoring your learning as you write in your journal. You can assess your progress in the seven general categories of learning by asking yourself the specific questions listed and responding to them in your journal. You'll find that most of the questions apply to your internship experiences, though some may not. As your internship progresses, some questions will seem more relevant than others.

General Job Competencies

Developing broad abilities such as facilitating, advocating, organizing, interviewing, creating layout, editing, designing, problem solving, etc.

- What are you learning about how to get something done in an office or in the community?
- Are you becoming conscious of the steps involved in decision making? How so?
- Can you describe any specific situations involving you or others that presented a problem? How were they resolved? Or, why were they not resolved?
- In what ways are you becoming aware of the difficulty of solving certain problems?

Career Exploration

Understanding the work of professionals in a career area and gaining awareness of possible job opportunities.

- In what ways does this experience confirm or modify your ideas and plans for a career as a technical communicator?
- What do you think makes a person working in this area truly “professional”?
- What suggestions do you have for another student considering your internship position?

Interpersonal Skills

Learning how to communicate effectively with others; how to listen well; how to read non-verbal signs; how to be tactful in conversations, etc.

- Are you developing the ability to work with others, especially those who are quite different from you? In what ways?
- Are you developing an understanding of the values, feelings, and attitudes of the people you work with? How so?
- Are you improving your speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities? How?

Responsibility

Learning to organize and manage your own time; understanding and defining your limits and values.

- Are your experiences conflicting with or clarifying any personal values? In what ways?
- What are you learning about your strengths and weaknesses in this kind of position and environment?
- Does this experience affect your attitude about yourself in any way? Does it affect your attitudes toward others?

Research Skills

Locating information and resource persons; organizing and synthesizing information gathered from various sources.

- What information sources are you using or developing on the job? Are there others you have not tried? Why not?
- What frustrations do you encounter while trying to gather information you need? How do you overcome these frustrations?
- What have you learned about working with people to define problems, collect information, carry out decisions, and so forth?
- What have you learned about how to synthesize and evaluate information?

Employment-academic Relations

Understanding how your internship relates to your academic experiences; finding ways to improve relations between the two.

- What are you learning about a particular field of study, such as government, social science, media, medical technology, etc.?
- Can you identify one or more ideas or principles from your course studies that have been illuminated or tested through your internship experiences?

- What academic courses do you want to take as a follow-up to your internship? Why?
- What in your academic background has been most helpful in preparing you for this internship?

Position Assessment

Formulating opinions on the value of this internship.

- To what extent has this experience fulfilled or not fulfilled your expectations?
- What thoughts or questions do you have in mind as you look ahead to further work experiences?
- What improvements in the organization might you suggest to your employer?
- What improvements in the nature of this internship might you suggest?

The Final Report

Your final report should be addressed to your adviser. The final report should include an introduction, body, and conclusion. Make the body of the report no longer than five pages in length. The final report should contain an executive summary of your experiences and should highlight what you learned and how these learnings will influence your future career. Use cover and title pages, headings, subheadings, and lists to facilitate reading of your report. Include graphics if needed. Choose your own organization for the report (this could include headings from your internship journal). Attach appendices that include samples of technical writing or other work completed during the internship. Remember, your internship journal can provide much of the information and reflection required in the final report.

Specific internship issues that you may want to address in your final report are:

- What tasks did you perform as part of your internship?
- What did you accomplish?
- What did you learn about applied work in technical communication?
- If this internship were typical of the full-time work in S & TC, how would you feel about your future career in this field?
- What did you learn about the culture of the organization you worked for?
- What were the positive aspects of your experience? What were the negatives?
- What did you learn about yourself? About others?
- What strengths did you realize you possess? What areas need improvement?
- Has your coursework prepared you for your internship? What additional academic skills do you feel you need to obtain before graduation?

Submit one copy of your final report to your adviser. This report must be submitted before internship credit will be given. Your report may also be circulated to other students and faculty in the program for reference information; therefore, your report must reflect the standards of professionalism in scientific and technical communication, both in content and presentation.

Evaluation Letter

Also, do not forget that your internship is not complete and you will not receive a grade until your adviser receives an evaluation letter from your internship supervisor. You are responsible for notifying your internship supervisor of this requirement. Suggested areas that your supervisor may want to reference are your attitude, initiative, work quality, dependability, cooperation, and attendance. Have your supervisor send the letter to your adviser at the Department of Rhetoric. You may want to provide a pre-addressed envelope as a courtesy. The department's address is Dept. of Rhetoric, U of M, 64 Classroom Ofc. Bldg., 1994 Buford Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108.

Checklist

In summary, to complete the internship and receive credit for the experience, you need to complete the following:

Getting Started

- ___ 1) Locate an internship
- ___ 2) Obtain special course registration form in 64 COB (or use page 17)
- ___ 3) See adviser to
 - discuss internship
 - sign special course registration form
- ___ 4) Return to 64 Classroom Ofc. Bldg.
 - submit special course registration form
 - receive magic number so you can register
- ___ 5) Register for Rhet 4196 (undergrad) or 5196 (grad student), Internship in Scientific and Technical Communication, online (as part of your regular registration) or at any registrar's office
 - Internships are S/N graded
 - 30 hours of internship work equals 1 credit hour
 - Register for a minimum of 3 credits and a maximum of 6 (a minimum of 3 total credits are required for the major)

The Internship Experience

- ___ Job proposal
- ___ Progress Report
- ___ Internship Journal (optional — ask your advisor)
- ___ Final report, samples or portfolio of work from the internship, or other summary material as per your advisor's instructions
- ___ Evaluation letter from internship supervisor

Registration Form Unscheduled Course Instruction

Circle Course Number

Rhet 3291 Independent Study (undergrads)

Rhet 4196 Internship (undergrads) Rhet 5196 Internship (graduate students)

Rhet 5270 Special Topics Rhet 5291 Independent Study (graduate level)

Rhet 8505 Design Project (Plan B) Rhet 8995 Special Problems in RSTC

Today's Date_____

Student's Name_____ID#_____

Overseeing Instructor's Name_____

Instructor's Signature_____Date_____

Dept. Head Signature_____Date_____

(Required Only For Independent Study)

Semester/Year Registered_____

Proposed Completion Date_____

No. Credits_____

Brief Description of Paper or Project_____

Note:

To ensure proper credit is given for this unscheduled class, this form must be filled out and submitted to Sharon Norman, Dept. of Rhetoric, 64 Classroom Ofc. Bldg.