



Universität
Bremen



careercenter

Internship in Germany

Guide for students



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Foreword

In order to meet students' demand for "practical experience" during their studies, internships are recommended - or even mandatory components - as part of the study regulations in almost all degree programs.

The term ›internship‹ generally refers to a temporary or fixed-term practical activity that students carry out in companies or institutions to gain experience in the labor market.

Since the introduction of tiered degree programs, this term has come to refer not only to general practical experience but also to the performance of activities in the

intended academic career fields directly related to the degree program.

A key goal of a bachelor's degree is ›employability‹. This goal encompasses much more than the literal translation of the term into „ability to work“ or „professional competence“ suggests. The reform of degree structures has established a new dimension of practical relevance at the University of Bremen. It is no longer just about being trained for an academic career. The bachelor's program now also includes subject-specific and methodological components that promote and demand the development of competencies in the intended career field.

To support these goals, the faculties and the Career Center at the University of Bremen offer a wide range of programs to develop interdisciplinary competencies such as communication techniques, business skills, application and (self-)presentation techniques, and intercultural competencies.

The internship is another essential building block for a successful career start. This means that both the selection and approval of an internship must follow certain quality standards to ensure a win-win situation not only for students but also for employers.

The “Guide to Internships in Germany” offers important information for both students and employers. It provides legal guidance on topics such as contract design, insurance coverage, payment arrangements, and quality standards for internship content. It also answers questions such as:

- How do I find a suitable internship or suitable interns?
- What can and should I expect from an internship or from an intern?
- Which procedures ensure the greatest possible mutual satisfaction?

1. Do I have to do an internship?

Without a doubt: to study on its own is no longer enough to be considered an attractive candidate on the job market. In addition to acquiring subject-specific knowledge, it is also important to reinforce these academic skills through practical experience. This is where the internship comes in.

In many degree programs, an internship is part of the curriculum. Your program's study or examination regulations provide information on this. Follow the recommendations and requirements of your degree program and use the materials provided there.

Regardless, we recommend that all students complete at least one – ideally two

or more – internships, meaning you should consider complementing mandatory internships with voluntary ones. This will give you insights into possible career fields, allow you to apply theoretical knowledge, and acquire additional skills.

Internships can be broadly divided into exploratory internships and professional internships. You should also pay attention to whether an internship is voluntary or mandatory, as this distinction entails legal differences that you should navigate strategically.

Exploratory Internships

The main goal of an exploratory internship is to gain experience in unfamiliar social situations and to gain insights into the pro-

fessional world. Such internships often lead through various departments or areas of a larger institution. Your own tasks will primarily be in the learning phase and offer limited independence. Insights into the industry, the company, different work areas, and roles will help you to orient yourself, to develop ideas for your next career steps, or evaluate your existing career aspirations against reality.

Professional Internships

Professional internships focus on applying the qualifications and skills acquired during your studies to a professional setting. It is important that at least some of the tasks during the internship are completed independently. To make the internship effective, a project aligned with the interns-

hip's timeframe should be agreed upon, including a clear objective that can be worked on independently.

A professional internship is about acquiring in-depth knowledge of organizational structures and work practices in a professional field you are interested in. It allows you to put your academic knowledge and skills into practice. At the same time, it helps you further develop your qualifications – such as teamwork, communication, persuasiveness, and sensitivity to professional issues.

A research internship also counts as a professional internship. This is especially relevant for master's students who are interested in research-related activities after graduation. The internship can take place within or outside the university. Stu-

dents aiming for industrial or corporate research positions (e.g. market or opinion research) should consider doing their internship outside the university to gain experience in that environment.

Whether, when and for which duration you are required to complete an internship is defined in your study or examination regulations. These regulations also include requirements such as the task profile, timing within your studies, documentation duties, and recognition of practical experience.

Regardless of your program's regulations, we recommend completing two to three internships during your studies. The first should be an exploratory internship to help you orient yourself in a potential professional field. The second exploratory internship can be used to reevaluate your

career ideas or preferences regarding company size or internationality. By the third internship at the latest, you should complete a professional internship aligned with your program's requirements for mandatory internships.

The overall goal of these internships is to prepare you for future employment.

Mandatory Internship

Mandatory internships are compulsory and specified in the study regulations of the respective degree program. Usually content, duration, and goals are predefined. Rules and requirements are derived from the study regulations as well as possibly additional agreements. Mandatory internships are typically fully integrated into

the study program, such as in the form of a practical semester, during lecture-free periods, or as a pre-study internship. Therefore, students retain their student status during these internships. This has implications for aspects such as remuneration, vacation entitlement, permissible working hours, and social security status. Many employers prefer to offer internships as mandatory internships- which can only be realized if a mandatory internship is compulsory as per study or examination regulations.

Voluntary Internship

In a voluntary internship, students can explore potential career fields and gain practical experience that will benefit them in their future careers. These internships

take place during lecture-free periods or before, during, or after the study program. Voluntary internships are sometimes used as expansions of previously completed mandatory internships. During a voluntary internship, the intern holds employee status, which changes the situation in terms of remuneration, vacation entitlement, working hours, and social security coverage compared to a mandatory internship.

If you are planning a voluntary internship, make this clear in your application. A preliminary phone call may also be worthwhile to assess whether the company is open to a voluntary internship.

Time Planning

Many of the following recommendations also apply to internships abroad. To consider specific and cultural differences, please refer to the brochure »Wegweiser Auslandspraktikum«:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling/internship-abroad

Checklist: Time Planning

- Does your examination or study regulation require a mandatory internship?
- What timing and duration is recommended?
- The contact person in your degree program or faculty is also available before the internship to answer questions regarding, organizational requirements and others.
- Which voluntary internships would you like to do in addition and when?
 - Exploratory internships
 - Professional internship
- Start your research, job search, and application process in time for all internships.
- Apply to a sufficient number of positions to ensure your overall time planning is secured.

2. How do I plan an internship?

Planning your internship should be guided by three key questions:

- Which skills do you bring / want to develop and which career goals are you working towards to? (see Profile Analysis)
- What timeline is to be considered for completing your internships? (see Time Management)
- What framework conditions should be in place?

a) Profile Analysis

Before planning your internship, you should reflect on your career goals and aspired professional field. The more clearly you understand your expectations and

objectives, the better you can communicate your internship goals to potential employers.

To generate ideas for a suitable internship, it's helpful to be aware of your strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. To discover these, we recommend starting your planning with a short self-assessment:

Step 1

Start by identifying and visualizing your skills and competencies. Reflect on your previous life phases (e.g. school, university, prior internships, part-time jobs, volunteer work, extracurricular activities, etc.) and list the tasks and topics you have dealt with. Highlight those you particularly enjoyed or excelled at and add topics you engaged with in depth. As a final step in this analysis, consider who could offer

meaningful feedback on your strengths and weaknesses – people who know you well in a relevant context (e.g. former classmates, colleagues, current fellow students, family or friends). Ask them only about your strengths – this exercise focuses on discovering your key competencies, not on pointing out weaknesses.

Step 2

Summarize the feedback you received in a table or mind map and add your own assessment of your strengths. Helpful guiding questions may include:

- What activities do you particularly enjoy?
- What academic or personal interests dominate?
- Which school subjects did you enjoy most?

Also include assessments of skills such as analytical or conceptual thinking, assertiveness, teamwork, initiative, creativity, communication and willingness to learn. You will likely see emerging patterns regarding your strengths.

Step 3

Your next task is to create a self-description based on the key points from Step 2. Start by describing your past achievements – projects, jobs, academic papers, etc. – and build a narrative that connects them to your current situation and future plans.

Step 4

Now explore the various occupational fields related to your degree program and align your self-image from Step 3 with them. Once your self-perception is clearly defined, it will be much easier to

assess where you would like to work after graduation. Furthermore only with a precisely defined profile and transparency on your preferences and career aspirations you have a clear standard to compare any potential job opportunity against for making good career decisions. Beyond this (almost) every profession offers some degree of freedom to shape the role to align specific activities and tasks with your individual strengths.

Once you have completed your self-analysis, you can start developing ideas for your internship. The following questions are intended to support you in this process:

- What areas of work would you like to explore?
- Which skills and knowledge would you like to apply during the internship?
- What knowledge, skills or experiences

do you hope to acquire or develop further?

- Which theoretical concepts would you like to test in practice?
- What contacts would you like to make?

For particularly competitive employers, it is also worth developing a strategic self-presentation to stand out from the crowd. Not only should you demonstrate that you meet the requirements, but also highlight outstanding assets - like international experience, voluntary commitments, soft skills, passion, or relevant knowledge beyond the advertisement (e.g. in AI).

The advisors at the Career Center or your department's internship office will gladly support you in this process:

→ <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling>

Checklist: Profile Analysis

- Reflect on knowledge, skills, and experiences based on past activities during different life stages and visualize them using a table or mind map.
- Consider both hard and soft skills and also reflect on the relevance of private activities for your professional life.
- Ask acquaintances, friends etc. for feedback on this.
- Add strengths and preferences.
- Formulate a self-profile.
- Research job or activity fields related to your degree program and compare them with your own skills.
- What do you offer that is relevant for employers and sets you apart from other applicants (e.g., international experience, special commitments, soft skills, passion/motivation, special competencies such as AI)?
- Strategically build your self-presentation (application documents, LinkedIn etc., self-presentation during the application process...).
- Support from the Career Center's advisors.

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/studies/starting-your-studies/practice-oriented-studies

b) Time Management

Time management is a crucial factor for a successful internship. The timing of your internship is usually determined by your study progress – although your study regulations may only suggest a rough timeframe.

A later internship within your studies has the advantage of higher qualifications, making you more attractive to employers. However, it may be harder to fit in due to final exams or thesis deadlines.

You may be able to closely integrate your internship with your studies by writing your thesis in cooperation with an employer.

An exploratory internship is best done early, between the third and fourth semester of your bachelor's program. This

allows you to align your future studies with practical experience in your target field and focus your development of key competencies accordingly.

Regardless of when you plan to do your internship, allow enough time for preparation. Many underestimate how long it takes, especially when facing delays such as rejections, slow responses from employers or the university, or even having to cancel a poor-fit internship.

Plan at least four months for the application phase. For highly competitive internships, this may take even longer. Start with profile analysis and research in advance.

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling/internship-in-germany

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling/internship-in-germany/internship-guide

For internships abroad, we recommend even longer preparation. See our brochure »Wegweiser Auslandspraktikum« for more details:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling/internship-abroad

c) Framework Conditions

To make a well-informed internship choice, you should also consider the essential framework conditions. This includes deciding on the location – where your internship should or could take place. While most internships are done near your university

or hometown, it can be worthwhile to explore new regions.

Consider whether you are willing and financially able to live temporarily in another city. You might need to organize housing locally. Also consider financial needs – since not every internship is paid – this can be a crucial factor and should be thought through before committing.

Only once your self-assessment is complete and you have a clear idea of your internship goals should you start your internship search.

Checklist: Internship Planning

- Mandatory internship: Find out about the required conditions for recognition in advance.
- Voluntary internship: Check the legal requirements (e.g. do you have the relevant working permit, does your scholarship allow working, what are the legal working hours...).
- What do you want to gain from the internship? (Insights into certain industries / a specific company / a specific field of work, skill development in a particular area, strategic profile building for future career goals...)
- What other conditions should be met? (Region, finances, family ties, etc.)
- Start applications approx. 4 months before the planned start (profile analysis and research are to be done beforehand)
- For internships abroad and highly competitive positions: start significantly earlier! (1 year)
- Do you plan to do your internship abroad? If yes, please use the brochure »Wegweiser Auslandspraktikum«.

3. How do I find a suitable internship?

By searching and applying for internships, you become familiar with opportunities and risks in the job market, as well as with communication structures and application requirements. There are many ways to find internships.

You can apply for open positions or take the initiative by contacting your desired employers directly. Below is an overview of possible information sources.

University of Bremen

The job portal on the Career Center's website offers a wide range of current internship listings. The Career Center is a

joint initiative of the University of Bremen and the Agentur für Arbeit Bremen – Bremerhaven, supporting students preparing for their career entry as well as graduates beginning their careers. More information can be found on the Career Center website:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/jobs-internships/job-fair

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links

Many institutes and degree programs share subject-specific internship offers via bulletin boards, emails, Stud.IP or mailing lists managed by internship offices or coordinators. You can find information regarding the relevant contact person here:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/downloads

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/studies/starting-your-studies/practice-oriented-studies

Please also check whether your faculty or Career Orientation Office offers career orientation events.

Other Job Advertisements

In addition to the resources provided by the University of Bremen, there are many other ways to find and apply for job postings.

Larger companies often only post job openings on their own websites. Smaller companies may also post vacancies on their own website in addition to other platforms.

So if you are interested in a specific employer, it is worth checking their site regularly.

There are also several general platforms covering most industries, fields, and regions. Examples include LinkedIn, XING, Stepstone, and Indeed.

For certain industries, types of organizations, or professional areas, it's worth checking whether specific databases or job portals exist. This is especially relevant for the public sector, NGOs, nonprofit organizations, associations, foundations and others. An online search focused on your field of interest will often lead you to these industry or region specific portals as well.

Company Databases on the Internet

The RegIS-Online company database (→ <https://regisonline.de>) offers a solid overview of over 7,000 companies in the Weser-Ems region and Northwestern Germany. It includes detailed company profiles you can use for making contact. You will find a selection under ‚Company Databases‘ on our website:

- <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links>
- www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links/jobs-and-practical-application

Trade and Industry Fairs / Company Contact Fairs

Fairs offer a good opportunity to get in touch with employers. After identifying relevant job fairs in your field, research your ‚target organizations‘. At the fair, you can easily initiate a first conversation about internships or job opportunities and possibly collect contacts.

Exhibitor catalogs, often available online, are great resources for unsolicited applications. The University of Bremen hosts the ‚Praxisbörse‘ every summer semester. More information:

- www.uni-bremen.de/praxisboerse and www.uni-bremen.de/en/praxisboerse
- www.berufstart.de/jobmessen
- www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/beratung/ratgeber-berufstart-karriere

→ www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/angebote/aktuelles/aktuelle-news

Trade Journals, Magazines and Daily Newspapers

Print media (also available online nowadays) is still a useful source when organizing internships. While daily newspaper job sections rarely target interns, they can provide insights into growing companies and required qualifications. They also, in many cases, include valuable lists of relevant contacts for applications.

Most print outlets also have an online job board. A wide selection sorted by job field is available on our site:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links/occupational-fields

Manuals and Reference Books

Manuals and directories (usually also available online) provide addresses and additional information about employers. Examples include the ‚Taschenbuch des Öffentlichen Lebens‘ by Oeckl (→ www.oeckl.de), the annually published books from Klaus Resch Verlag (→ www.berufstart.de), and Staufenbiel publications (→ www.staufenbiel.de).

These resources contain contact lists for companies and institutions, along with application tips and salary information – very helpful for targeted searches. Up-to-date editions are available in the university library or as free download.

Further directories can be found under ‚Company Databases‘ on our website:

→ <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links>

Professional Associations and Networks

You can also use professional or interest-based associations and networks for your internship search. These organizations typically consist of graduates from specific academic or training backgrounds working in a common field. Their publications and career guides provide useful company insights and updates on current trends and research.

For internships, member directories of these associations are particularly useful. You will find a selection of links, including women's professional associations, here:

→ <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/services/top-links>

You can also research and present your profile on networks like Xing or LinkedIn to connect with potential employers.

Research several companies or institutions and create a ranking list. If your first contact attempts fail, you will not have to start your search from scratch again.

Specific tips for international students

International students should be aware of certain specifics.

Before starting an internship, find out which conditions apply to you - especially regarding work permits and limits on weekly or annual working hours. This information is usually linked to your visa status as well as general legal regulations. Scholarships may also impose restrictions on working hours or income and must be considered in your internship planning.

Depending on your country of origin or nationality, there may be legal restrictions with regards to export regulations - particularly in areas such as aerospace or defense. If in doubt, indicate your nationality

in applications and diversify your choice of companies and industries to be on the safe side.

Language is also a key factor in your application. Depending on the role, the level of required German can vary widely. A posting in German typically means the language plays a significant role in the job.

If your German skills are below B2 CEFR level, a focus on finding internship advertisements in English is recommended. Beyond this, you can reflect on the team composition and your potential colleagues as well as expected ways of working and collaboration, to estimate how important language skills will be.

Production-related areas or those with significant exposure to regulations, legal re-

quirements, or direct customer contact (in case of German speaking customers) are typically stricter in their language requirements. Teams that already collaborate internationally or are primarily composed of colleagues with higher academic qualifications – where a good level of English is often present – are generally more open to an application in English or to an intern who primarily speaks English.

The language of the job advertisement is a good indicator on what will be the main language relevant for the position you are looking for. Use keywords in languages that are relevant for you to find fitting advertisements.

Checklist: Searching for Internship Positions

(Use different strategies!)

- Apply for advertised internship positions
- Jobportal Career Center Universität Bremen
www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/jobs-praxis/jobportal-fuer-bewerberinnen
- Toplinks Career Center Universität Bremen
www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/angebote/toplinks
- Job search engines (e.g., Stepstone, Indeed, industry or region specific search engines can be found through a web search)
- Job fairs of professional or trade associations
- Career pages of employers
- Trade journals, magazines, daily newspapers
- Social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, XING)
- Job fairs (a list of exhibitors can often be found online) – use personal contact
- Send unsolicited applications / use your network
- Contact employers or organizations directly.
- Family, friends, acquaintances
- Lecturers, university professors
- Company data bases: e.g. Regis-online for north west Germany
www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/angebote/top-links/jobs-praxis
- List of professional association members > research for fitting employers

4. Making Contact and Applying

Should I just call employers?

Your research will help you identify suitable opportunities. If everything is clear, go ahead and apply directly. If you have questions about the job requirements, call them. If you are considering a unsolicited application because no postings are currently available, definitely call!

You can rehearse a ,mock call‘ with a friend if you are unsure. If you want to visit a company in person – especially a smaller one – to introduce yourself, go ahead. You might even land an interview on the spot or at least leave a personal impression when submitting your documents.

Remember that your success in a face-to-face meeting also depends on how confident you feel. A phone call might be the easier first step. It also offers a chance to make a positive impression. That said, a verbal conversation rarely leads directly to an internship offer. A written application is usually still required.

You may also choose to make initial contact by email. This is advisable only if:

- No one can be reached by phone despite multiple attempts.
- The company’s website lists a dedicated contact person and email for internship inquiries. Otherwise, your message may never be forwarded appropriately.

Other ways to initiate contact include approaching the company at a fair, at a

networking event, or via social media platforms like LinkedIn.

In all cases aim to build contact politely, professionally, and respectfully (incl. with regards to the other person`s time). Use the opportunity to position yourself as a relevant candidate

Application

Every application is a form of self-marketing. The same standards apply for internship applications as for graduate jobs. Your application should include the following:

- Cover letter
- Curriculum vitae (CV) – photo optional
- Certificates

a) Cover Letter

If you are applying for an advertised position, tailor your cover letter to the requirements and explain why you are a relevant candidate. Recruiters want to see what motivates you to apply to this company and for this role specifically.

Use the letter to present aspects of your profile that are not fully reflected in the CV – such as soft skills. Keep in mind that HR staff usually review your documents first, before forwarding them to the hiring manager. As HR employees are not experts in your working field, make it easy for them to recognize you as a relevant candidate. Use similar language to the job advertisement and clearly explain how your existing skills and knowledge are relevant, as it cannot be assumed to be common

knowledge and easy to identify without such (e.g. transferability of similar skills - but not the same as requested in the advertisement).

Provide specific examples from your experience to give context to your key statements – but avoid repeating your CV. If you have already had a phone call or personal conversation, mention it. Also include your availability and the desired internship duration if there is no separate section for this in the application form.

For unsolicited applications, focus on the tasks you are seeking. Highlight academic and other skills that make you particularly suitable for the company or institution. Include your motivation and your goals for the internship.

The Career Center offers personal support and workshops for creating application documents tailored to German and international job markets.

b) Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Your CV should be in tabular form. Usually, the most relevant sections come first, and the entries within each section are listed in reverse chronological order. You may choose a classic single-column or a modern two-column layout (best for one-page CVs). A photo is optional and may be placed in the top-right corner or on a separate cover sheet.

Your CV should include:

- Personal information:
- Full name, address, phone number, email

- Optional: Place/date of birth, nationality, photo
- Optional: short ‚About me‘ section (2–3 lines; recommended if, according to the job posting, only the CV is required); Adopt a perspective that highlights the added value for the company. Focus on aspects that are not typically included in the CV (e.g. soft skills, motivation)
- Education:
 - Degree(s), university name, location (including country if abroad), specialization, projects if relevant
 - Skilled worker training
 - Optional: final grade (only if very good across all degrees); foreign degrees should include German equivalents information
- Professional experience: internships, part-time jobs (role, employer, location)
- Additional qualifications and training
- Skills: languages (with level per CEFR), IT skills, other relevant competencies
- Optional: volunteer experience, hobbies/interests
- Optional: place/date and signature
- Larger companies or those receiving many applications often use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) before a human sees your documents. To optimize your CV for ATS:
 - Avoid graphic elements like skill bars for key skills
 - Use a clean tabular format
 - Use keywords from the job advertisement
 - Test readability by ATS (are all information taken into consideration and are the informations connected correctly?)

c) Certificates and Transcripts

Combine all certificates that support your CV into one PDF. This includes school and academic degrees, job and employer references / letter of recommendation, transcripts of grades (unfinished degrees), training certificates, language certificates, etc.

Arrange them in the same order as they appear in your CV. Do not include documents where the linked information is not mentioned in the CV.

This serves to support and prove your statements. The Career Center offers extensive help with your application –first information is available at:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/counselling

- www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/veranstaltungen or www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/workshops
- www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/beratung/ratgeber-berufsstart-karriere
- www.berufsstart.de/bewerbung

Checklist: Telephone Contact

What is the goal of the phone call?

- Find the right contacts for internships or HR processes.
- Clarify details about the available position.
- Is an internship in the desired field possible?
- What conditions need to be met (on both sides)?
(e.g., clarify requirements for recognition as a mandatory internship)
- What application format is preferred?
- What time frame is desired or possible for both parties?
- Is the job posting also applicable to voluntary internships?
- Please ensure that you only ask questions that are not already clearly answered in the job advertisement.

Prepare for the phone call:

- Research information about the employer online.
- Have your resume ready in keyword format.
- Be able to state and describe your expectations regarding the content and tasks of the internship.
- Prepare questions, e.g. about the company's areas of activity
(Important: check the website in advance!)
- Take notes during the phone call.
- For calls before application: Have your application documents prepared so that you can send them shortly after the phone call.

Application by Email

Application via email follows the same rules. Cover letter, CV, and certificates are combined into a single PDF with a small file size and attached to the email. A greatly shortened version of the cover letter can be included in the body of the email. Your motivation and goals can serve as a strong introduction here.

Quality Assurance Standards for Successful Internships

Internships serve not only as a means of career orientation for students. In addition, the mandatory internship offers the opportunity to start preparing for a specific professional field or role. However, making use of this opportunity requires an in-depth ref-

lection on the potential tasks and responsibilities of the intended internship and on your own career goals.

Degree programs and institutes have developed various procedures and processes to assess the quality of internships. Therefore, always consult the internship coordinators responsible. A list of contact persons in each department can be found on our website at:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/angebote/downloads

→ Contact persons in the Faculties

→ Praktikumsbeauftragte_Praxisbüros_Studienzentren_Uni Bremen

→ www.uni-bremen.de/studium/starten-studieren/praxisorientiert-studieren

Important questions that may help:

- Which professional fields are of particular importance from your current perspective?
- Which companies or institutions would you like to get to know in this context, and why?
- Which key competencies and subject-specific skills do you believe especially distinguish you?
- Which (independent) tasks and areas of responsibility have already been discussed with your internship provider?
- Which of the mentioned key competencies and subject-specific skills will be particularly relevant when performing the agreed tasks?
- What added value do you believe to gain by the end of your internship?

This set of questions also gives you the opportunity to consider and incorporate all essential aspects needed for a successful mandatory internship in your planning process in advance.

During a mandatory internship, a supervisor from your institute or degree program will support you. This person will assist you with any questions regarding the university's requirements for completing an internship.

A key component of a mandatory internship is the subsequent internship report.

Special Notes for International Students

A general recommendation is to align your application documents` language (cover

letter and CV) with the language of the job advertisement. Otherwise, especially in ATS (Applicant Tracking System) processes, there is a high risk that your application may not be recognized as relevant. As a non-native speaker, it may be advisable to have your documents proofread by a native speaker or to use software tools to check spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Additionally, it is particularly important to include all languages spoken along with your proficiency levels within your CV. Relevant language certificates should only be attached as part of your certificates document if they reflect your current level of proficiency.

If you choose to include your grades in the education section of your CV (optional), it is recommended that you first state the

original grade and then provide the equivalent according to the German grading system if your grade comes from a non-German system.

If you have official translations of foreign degrees or documents – such as those obtained during your university application process – it is advisable to include both the original and the official translation in your submitted certificates (if the original is not in German or English).

In Germany, it is standard practice to receive employer references for every employment. Therefore, employers usually expect these references to be included in your application if you have professional experience. If you have gained work experience abroad, you may not have received a document comparable to the

Checklist: Application documents

- Complete documents: one-page cover letter, CV (Curriculum Vitae) max. 2 pages, certificates
- Focus on relevancy and clarity. More is not better. Your goal should be a clear, focused, and relevant self-presentation for the desired position. Tailoring to the specific job may be necessary.
- Describe in your cover letter how you meet the desired requirements and beyond that, why you are a relevant candidate. Do not simply repeat your CV, but use the cover letter to present your motivation and goals, as well as relevant aspects that go beyond the CV. Use concrete examples from your past to give your key statements context and emphasis.
- Pay attention to ATS (Application Tracking System) optimization in your CV (especially relevant for applications to large companies)
- Content of the CV: reverse chronological order per section, sections sorted by descending relevance
- CV and cover letter should be signed
- Certificates: combine them into one PDF, ensure good scan quality, and sort them following the same order as in the CV. If something is not mentioned in the CV, it should not appear in the certificates either.
- In an unsolicited application, highlight your skills and strengths relevant to the desired internship.
- Form/layout/font: consistent, easy to read (minimum font size 11), distance to page`s edge large enough (nothing should be cut off when printed)
- In all communications (including cover letters)
 - Address the person directly: "Dear" followed by first and last name, without using Mr. or Ms. to account for gender diversity.
 - Use formal language: ‚Dear‘ form, ending with ‚Best regards, [Your first and last name]‘
- For email applications: Attachments should be PDF, max. 4 MB

German system. In this case, you can use an appropriate alternative, such as letters of recommendation, if available.

5. Legal Framework

With regard to the rights and obligations of interns toward their internship provider, the same basic conditions generally apply as for employees under a regular employment contract.

The internship provider is obligated to provide all necessary information and materials required for the proper performance of your tasks. In return, you are required to handle these informational tools and materials with care. Furthermore, you are subject to the instructions of your internship provider. In other words, interns are generally considered

employees – regardless of whether or not they are being paid. The determining factor is whether you are integrated into the company structure (e.g. workplace, working hours) and act under instructions.

This is based, among other things, on § 5 of the Labor Court Act (Arbeitsgerichtsgesetz), which states that the legal status as an employee includes workers and employees as well as those employed for their vocational training.

Interns are considered part of a company's workforce who are in vocational training. This follows from § 3 in conjunction with § 10 of the Vocational Training Act (Berufsbildungsgesetz). § 3 stipulates that even individuals who are not undergoing formal vocational training are subject to rights and obligations similar to those under general labor law.

§ 26 of the same Act clarifies that vocational training does not only refer to traditional apprenticeships:

“Insofar as no employment relationship has been agreed, persons who are engaged to acquire vocational skills, knowledge and qualifications or occupational experience without undergoing initial training within the meaning of this Act shall be covered by sections 10 to 23 and section 25, subject to the proviso that the statutory probationary period may be shortened, the contract need not be set out in writing and, notwithstanding section 23 subsection (1), first sentence, no compensation for damages may be claimed if the contractual relationship is prematurely terminated after the expiry of the probationary period.”

(Translation source: Vocational Training Act (2005), In Bibb, p. 9, www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/bmbf_berufsbildungsreformgesetz_en.pdf)

According to prevailing legal opinion, this includes interns – provided that the focus remains on your professional development. Although this means you are legally considered an employee, not all labor laws apply to you without restriction. For example, a written contract is only required if you are paid for your work – regardless of the amount.

The same applies to protection against dismissal. Your rights are even more limited if you are completing a mandatory internship during your studies that is required by your study or internship regulations. In this case, the law considers you primar-

ily a student and you are therefore not entitled to paid vacation or continued remuneration during sick leave.

However, fundamental employee rights such as appropriate rest periods or a workplace free of health risks do apply for all kind of internships – no matter if paid or unpaid, voluntary, or mandatory.

Insurance Requirements

When completing an internship during your studies, there are several important aspects of social insurance to consider.

Mandatory Internships

Students who complete a mandatory internship (often in the form of a practical semester) during their studies, as required by their program's curriculum, examination, or study regulations, are exempt from all branches of social insurance during this time – regardless of their weekly working hours.

BUT: The amount of income earned can affect your eligibility for family health insurance. Please check with your health insurance provider for the current income thresholds.

Voluntary Internships

Different rules apply to internships that are not required by the curriculum. Stu-

dents completing a voluntary internship are generally exempt from health, nursing care, and unemployment insurance as long as their studies remain their primary occupation.

Exemption from pension insurance applies only if no remuneration is paid or the earnings do not exceed the so-called mini-job threshold (as of 2025: €556/month). The same rules apply as for student jobs during the semester or semester break. Please consult your health insurance provider to find out how a voluntary internship or employment might affect your current insurance status.

Pre- and Post-Study Internships

People completing a mandatory pre-study internship (as a requirement for admission

to university) or a post-study internship (after completing their studies) are subject to health and nursing care insurance contributions if the internship is unpaid. The duration of the internship does not affect this rule. In such cases, interns are responsible for their own health and nursing care insurance contributions.

If you are covered by family insurance, it takes precedence, and no personal contributions are required.

If you are not covered by family insurance, you must pay contributions yourself, at the same rate as student insurance.

If the internship is paid, health and nursing care insurance is also mandatory. In this case, however, the employer is responsible for paying the contributions.

During a mandatory pre- or post-study internship, pension and unemployment insurance are mandatory regardless of remuneration. If no payment is made to the intern, the employer alone is responsible for these contributions. A fixed contribution amount is calculated based on an assumed income: the monthly basis is 1% of the monthly reference value in pension and unemployment insurance. These reference values are published by the Federal Ministry of Labor in the Federal Gazette.

Always consult your health insurance provider before starting a pre- or post-study internship, as the social insurance assessment can be quite complex in these cases.

Other Information

In addition to the employment types already mentioned, there are several special cases where the previously outlined regulations only partially apply or do not apply at all. These include:

- Employment during a leave of absence (semester off)
- Suspended employment arrangements in which your previous employer continues to pay you during your studies
- Vocational training as part of company-based apprenticeships

Useful Information for International Students

Are you from a European Union member state and studying at the University of Bremen? If so, you do not need permission from the immigration authority to complete an internship.

International students who are not from the EU or the EEA and who are studying at the University of Bremen may work alongside their studies if their residence permit allows it. This permit is issued by the local immigration authority (Ausländerbehörde). For questions, please contact the BSU – City Office Campus:

→ www.uni-bremen.de/en/bsu and
www.uni-bremen.de/bsu

→ [www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/
angebote/bremen-braucht-alle-koepfe](http://www.uni-bremen.de/career-center/angebote/bremen-braucht-alle-koepfe)

Internships completed alongside your studies do not count as employment time, as long as you remain enrolled as a student at the University of Bremen or another university. In that case, the internship is considered part of your academic program.

If you have questions about research, applications, or interviews, we recommend using the open consultation hours of the Career Center:

→ [www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/
teams](http://www.uni-bremen.de/en/career-center/teams)

6. Internship Contract

Key Provisions

An internship does not necessarily require a written contract, especially if it is unpaid. A verbal agreement is also considered a valid contract under the German Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*). However, in practice it has proven useful for both parties to sign a written internship contract for mutual protection.

In line with the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*), an internship contract should include the following elements:

Working Hours

Your working hours during an internship are generally based on the regular working hours of the company employing you. However, these must comply with the applicable Working Hours Act (*Arbeitszeitgesetz*). According to § 3 of the Working Hours Act, interns may not exceed an average of 8 working hours per weekday over a six-month period or 24 weeks. The maximum number of hours worked on any single workday may not exceed 10 hours. Work on Sundays and public holidays is not permitted.

Exceptions to this are allowed under § 10 of the Working Hours Act but only in limited cases, such as in healthcare, event management, or the media industry.

These regulations apply analogously to mandatory internships. This essentially

means that you are not required to work overtime, regardless of whether your internship is voluntary or required by your degree program.

That said there may be situations where it makes sense to work more than 8 or even 10 hours on a particular day – especially if you're contributing to an important project with a tight deadline and have the opportunity to gain valuable experience. We therefore recommend that you do not strictly rely on legal limitations but assess on a case-by-case basis whether the extra effort provides personal or educational benefits.

If you are employed as a full-time intern, your weekly working hours will typically range from 37.5 to 40 hours. These hours may fall within a fixed schedule (e.g., 8:00

Checklist Internship Contract:

- Start date and duration of the internship (possibly including a probation period)
- Working hours
- Vacation entitlement
- Termination conditions
- Learning objectives/tasks
- Contact person or supervisor
- Preparation of a work or training plan
- Certificate of completion
- Liability issues
- Illness
- Accident insurance
- Reference to the type of internship (voluntary or mandatory as part of your studies)
- Remuneration and/or reimbursement of expenses

a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily) or under a flexitime arrangement.

If flexitime is available, your internship provider will usually define a core working time during which you must be present (e.g., 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). You can schedule the remaining hours flexibly.

Creating a Work or Training Plan

Since internships usually last only a few weeks, it is advisable to create a plan outlining your tasks and associated learning goals, the department(s) you will be working in, and your assigned supervisor – all within a defined time frame. This ensures that your training period is used effectively and prevents idle time filled with tasks like making coffee.

Liability Issues

As the saying goes: “You can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.” In other words, mistakes can happen. If you make an error during your internship that results in damage to the company, it is recommended to include a liability clause in the internship agreement, such as: “The intern is liable for damages to the company only in cases of intent or gross negligence.”

This means that as long as you act to the best of your knowledge and ability – and in a manner any reasonable person would – there is nothing to worry about.

However, if you intentionally cause harm or act with gross negligence (e.g. disregarding basic standards of care) you may

be held liable for the resulting damage. In such cases, a private liability insurance policy usually will not cover the damages. Still, we strongly recommend obtaining such insurance before starting your internship to at least be protected in the event of a well-intentioned mistake.

As for clients or third parties, you are not personally liable for damages, as interns are considered vicarious agents (Erfüllungsgehilfen) of the company under the German Civil Code (BGB).

Illness

If you become ill during your internship, it is advisable to follow the same procedures as regular employees. Notify the appropriate office (HR department or your supervisor) of your illness as early as possible on the first day of your absence.

According to § 5 of the Continued Remuneration Act (Entgeltfortzahlungsgesetz, EntgFG), the employer must be informed of your incapacity for work “without delay”. If your illness lasts longer, you should submit a doctor’s note latest by the third day of your absence.

If the company has internal policies that differ from these general rules, your employer is obligated to inform you of them.

Termination

In some cases, there may be valid reasons to consider terminating the internship – especially if, after two or three weeks, it becomes clear that meaningful training in line with your expectations or with your university’s internship requirements is not being provided. However, you cannot sim-

ply stop showing up at your internship without consequences.

If you have a legitimate reason to resign, the relevant rules depend on whether your internship status is closer to that of a student or an employee, and whether specific notice periods have been defined in your internship contract.

If your internship qualifies as employee status and no contractual notice periods are defined, the following applies:

- Under § 622 BGB (German Civil Code) and § 26 in conjunction with § 22(1) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG), the internship can be terminated at any time without notice during a probation period, if one has been agreed upon.
- After the probation period, the internship can be terminated (§ 22(2) BBiG):

- By the intern with a notice of four weeks, for the purpose of giving up the internship or starting different training.
- By either party without notice for good cause.

These rules apply only if no different arrangements were made in the contract and if no exceptional circumstances (e.g. misconduct) justify an immediate termination.

Your internship provider may also have valid grounds for termination. Examples include:

- Long-term illness, making it impossible to continue the internship meaningfully.
- Lack of required skills or performance (termination on grounds of personal capability).
- Repeated tardiness, unreliability, or violation of confidentiality (termination for reasons of conduct).

Note: If you are completing a mandatory internship as part of your studies, you do not benefit from statutory employee protection against dismissal.

However, during the probation period – if one is agreed upon – either party may terminate the internship at any time and without giving reasons.

Accident Insurance

According to § 2(1) of the German Social Code Book VII (Sozialgesetzbuch VII), all students who are properly enrolled at a university are legally covered by accident insurance during their academic studies and training – provided that their studies are their primary occupation.

So, for example, if you have an accident

on university grounds – such as slipping on the stairs – you are insured.

However, if you are doing an internship and something happens to you on company premises, you are not covered by the university's insurance. Instead, in most cases, you are protected through the statutory accident insurance of the internship provider.

This is based on § 7(2) of the German Social Code Book IV (SGB IV), which classifies internships – regardless of their duration or whether they are paid – as a form of company-based vocational training (betriebliche Berufsausbildung).

Important condition: You must not be at the company by chance. Your presence must be due to an assignment or your in-

volvement in a work-related process. Every employee in Germany – including interns – is legally covered by accident insurance. If an employer fails to pay the required contributions, they are liable to make retroactive payments to the accident insurance provider.

As a point of contact for further information regarding accident related protection you can contact the Unfallkasse Bremen:

→ www.ukbremen.de

Vacation Entitlement

Your entitlement to vacation during an internship depends on whether your status is closer to that of a student or an employee.

If you are completing a mandatory internship as required by your study or internship

regulations, the primary focus is on acquiring professional knowledge, skills, and experience. In this case, you are not entitled to vacation.

However, if your internship is more similar to an employment relationship as defined by labor laws, then you may be entitled to vacation under the Federal Vacation Act (Bundesurlaubsgesetz).

According to § 4 of the Federal Vacation Act:

- An employee who has been employed for at least six months is entitled to 24 working days of vacation per year (based on a 6-day workweek).
- If the employment lasts less than six months, you are entitled to 2 working days of vacation for each full month worked.

In some cases, vacation entitlements may also be governed by applicable collective bargaining agreements or internal company policies.

Remuneration and Minimum Wage

Interns are generally regarded as employees and therefore subject to minimum wage regulations. However, exceptions to the minimum wage requirement apply to the following types of internships:

- Internships that are mandated by school, training, or university regulations (mandatory internships)
- Internships undertaken for career or study orientation purposes, but only for up to three months
- Internships lasting up to three months that accompany a course of study

or vocational training, provided no previous internship of the same kind has been completed with the same employer

For the following types of internships, the minimum wage applies starting from the fourth month:

- Internships for career or study orientation (orientation internships)
- Internships that accompany studies or vocational training but are not required by the respective regulations

Current minimum wage regulations and updates can be found at:

→ <https://www.bmas.de/EN/Labour/Minimum-Wage/minimum-wage.html>

The brochure “Mindestlohn für Studierende – Fragen und Antworten” (Minimum Wage for Students – Questions and Answers) from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs offers a concise overview of frequently asked questions. It is available for free download or postal order:

→ https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/a765-mindestlohn-fuer-studierende.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=19

Practical experience shows:

- Internships in public service or with nonprofits/social and cultural organizations are often unpaid
- Internships in private sector companies are more likely to be paid

Whether an internship is paid often depends on how much economic value the intern provides to the organization. In some cases, even in unpaid internships, it may be possible to receive a small honorarium for specific tasks.

In any case, the question of payment should be clearly defined in the internship contract. This also applies in the reverse situation: if the internship is unpaid, the explicit waiver of remuneration should be stated in the contract.

Ultimately, you should carefully evaluate the personal value of the internship – even if it is unpaid.

Internship Certificate

According to § 109 of the German Trade Regulation Act (Gewerbeordnung), employees are entitled to a written employment reference. Similarly, § 630 of the German Civil Code (BGB) states that the obligated party may demand a certificate about the nature and duration of the service relationship.

However, a short-term internship (usually a few weeks) is not considered a permanent employment relationship, so this general right may not always apply automatically.

Nevertheless, for all students who complete an internship in employee-like status, § 16 of the Vocational Training Act (Berufsbildungsgesetz, BBiG) applies. It requires the company to issue a certificate at the end of the internship, which must include:

- The type, duration, and objective of the training
- Information about the skills and knowledge acquired

Upon request, the certificate must also include details about the intern's:

- Conduct
- Performance
- Special professional competencies

In all cases, as an intern you should get a qualified or simple internship certificate from the company. Our recommendation would be to request this to be included in the internship contract.

A model qualified internship certificate should include comments on each of these criteria.

For legal advice and assistance with internship certificates, the Chamber of Employees Bremen (Arbeitnehmerkammer Bremen) provides support and has published a helpful brochure titled „Das Arbeitszeugnis“ (The Employment Reference):

→ <https://www.arbeitnehmerkammer.de/arbeitnehmerinnen-arbeitnehmer/recht/arbeitszeugnis.html>

Checklist Internship Certificate:

- Date of issue (usually the last day of the internship)
- Name and address of the intern
- Start and end dates of the internship
- Description of the tasks performed
- Performance evaluation, including:
 - Assessment of willingness to learn and work as well as motivation
 - Evaluation of ability to learn and work independently
 - Scope of subject knowledge acquired and evaluation of learning success
- Assessment of social behavior (e.g. toward supervisors and colleagues)
- Summary performance statement
- Final statement: expression of thanks and acknowledgment
- Signature of the issuing person(s)

A model qualified internship certificate should include comments on each of these criteria.