

Student Externship Handbook

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Bridging the Classroom and Your Future Practice

Note: This Handbook was updated using assistance from Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI was used to make the former version of this Handbook more concise and, hopefully, reader-friendly and helpful!

Welcome to your Externship! This is an exciting opportunity to step out of the classroom and gain hands-on, real-world legal experience under the guidance of an experienced attorney-mentor.

An externship is designed to be an experiential learning journey. You will take on substantial responsibility, setting your own goals and performing work analogous to that of a practicing attorney. Because you are stepping into this professional space, you will be held to the same high ethical and professional standards as the lawyers you work with—whether you are working in a physical office, entirely from home, or in a hybrid environment.

I. The Two Components of Your Externship

To receive academic credit, your externship requires completing two equally important parts:

1. The Experiential Component (Your Placement)

You must work the minimum number of hours required by the specific Externship Model you selected. You will log and report these hours on a weekly basis to track your progress.

2. The Classroom Component (Reflection)

Learning doesn't stop when you leave the office. To satisfy the classroom component, you must submit a **Weekly Report** to the Google Classroom for every week you work. These reports are designed to help you proactively learn about ethical issues, professionalism, and workplace dynamics—such as how to receive constructive feedback.

II. Navigating Remote and Hybrid Externships

As workplaces evolve, many legal externships now feature remote or hybrid schedules. Working outside of a traditional office environment offers flexibility, but it requires an extra layer of discipline, communication, and professionalism to ensure a successful experience. Even if all your work will be in a physical office, please review the advice offered below, as it is relevant even to fully in-person placements.

1. Communication is Your Lifeline

In a remote setting, you cannot rely on casual run-ins in the hallway. You must actively manage your visibility:

- **Establish a Daily/Weekly Check-in:** Agree on a communication routine with your mentor. A quick morning message outlining your daily goals or a scheduled 15-minute sync at the beginning and end of the week keeps you aligned.
- **Over-Communicate on Projects:** When working off-site, supervisors cannot see your progress. Provide regular updates. Let them know when you start a project, when they can expect a draft, and immediately signal if you run into any roadblocks.
- **Clarify Communication Channels:** Ask your mentor which tool is preferred for different situations. Use email for formal work submissions, instant messaging (like Slack or Teams) for quick questions, and video calls for complex task briefings or feedback sessions.

2. Time Management and Self-Discipline

Without the structure of a physical office, managing your time effectively is critical:

- **Set Dedicated Working Hours:** Establish a clear daily schedule and stick to it. Inform your supervisor of the hours you are "on the clock" and actively monitor messages.
- **Track Hours Honestly:** Accurately record your remote working time. Only log hours spent directly on research, drafting, reviewing files, or attending virtual meetings.
- **Minimize Distractions:** Set up a dedicated, quiet workspace. Treat remote workdays with the same focus and professional boundary-setting as a day in the physical office.

3. Remote Ethics, Security, and Confidentiality

Working from home does not relax your ethical obligations. In fact, it requires heightened vigilance:

- **Protect Client Privacy:** Ensure your screen is not visible to family members, roommates, or visitors.
- **Secure Communications:** Never use public Wi-Fi networks to access sensitive client files or case management systems. Always use a secure password-protected home network or the virtual private network (VPN) provided by your placement.
- **Conduct Private Conversations:** Use headphones or move to a private room when conducting video hearings, phone conferences, or discussing confidential legal strategy.

III. Your Role as an Extern: The "Golden Rules"

Even though you are still a student, you are a professional the moment you step into your placement. Your behavior and work product directly impact your professional reputation—your credibility is your most valuable asset.

- **Proofread Everything:** A "draft" is never an excuse for sloppy work. Every document you hand in—from an informal email outline to an appellate brief—should be spell-checked, grammar-checked, and formatted with perfect citations. Read your work closely; computers miss contextual errors (like *their* vs. *there*).
- **Be Punctual:** Meeting deadlines is a non-negotiable part of legal practice. Always clarify project deadlines with your supervisor. If an emergency arises and you cannot meet a deadline, notify them immediately—never wait until the last minute.

Note: If you are feeling overwhelmed by your workload, the time to speak up is when the assignment is handed to you, not three weeks later when it is due.

- **Be Courteous:** Display a professional demeanor at all times. Treat everyone with respect, listen carefully without interrupting, and keep personal life/problems separate from work. If a conflict arises, handle it discreetly and privately with the person involved.
- **Be Professional:** Act with absolute integrity. Be honest and forthright with your supervisors, clients, opposing counsel, and the court. Take full initiative, proactively look for solutions, and own up to your mistakes immediately without making excuses.

IV. Working with Your On-Site Mentor

Your First Day: Orientation Checklist

On your first day (whether in person or via a virtual orientation call), set aside time with your mentor to establish clear lines of communication and performance expectations. Make sure you cover these essential topics:

- **Office Basics:** Office policies, dress code, safety codes, keycards, and physical layout (including any off-limit areas) for in-person days.
- **Logistics:** Your expected work schedule (start/end times), whether you will work remotely or in person on specific days, and how to access your workspace, remote servers, and digital equipment.
- **Introductions:** Meeting the team, including other attorneys and key support staff, either in person or via introductory video calls.
- **Safety Net:** Whom to contact in case of an emergency if your mentor is unavailable.

Establishing Effective Communication

During your first week, sit down with your mentor to align on the core parameters of your working relationship:

Focus Area	Key Questions to Clarify
Your Goals	Discuss what you want to achieve (e.g., writing experience, courtroom exposure, observing virtual or in-person negotiations). This discussion is required in order to complete the GEN1 assignment.
Work Quality	Are they looking for highly polished "final" drafts, or quick, informal outlines and oral briefings?
The Workflow	How will you receive assignments? Will there be weekly case meetings, or a roll-on basis? Who resolves conflicts if multiple attorneys assign you work?
Meetings	How often will you connect? Do they prefer scheduled weekly video meetings, daily quick chat messages, or an open-door policy?
Feedback Loop	How and when will you receive feedback? Do you prefer oral critiques via video call or written redlines?
Conflicts & Privacy	What is the office's conflict check system? What are the specific confidentiality rules of the office (especially when handling physical or digital files away from the office)?

V. Ethics & Professionalism

As an extern, you are legally and ethically bound by the **Codes of Attorney Professional Responsibility** in your jurisdiction (or the **Code of Judicial Ethics** if you are in a judicial placement).

If you have even a shadow of a doubt about an ethical issue, confidentiality concern, or potential conflict, **stop and ask**. Speak with your mentor or someone in the chain of command before taking action.

💡 **Need help?** If you ever have concerns about the ethics or professionalism of your on-site mentor, contact Externship Director immediately for confidential guidance.

VI. Working with Placement Support Staff

The support staff (secretaries, paralegals, court clerks, and legal assistants) are the engine of any legal office. They often have decades of experience and understand court filing procedures, database search tricks, and administrative systems better than anyone. Treat them as key mentors, even if your interactions are strictly virtual.

Dos and Don'ts of Staff Collaboration

DO:

1. **Learn names quickly:** Introduce yourself on day one, learn what they do, and express your excitement to work with them (via email or chat if remote).
2. **Understand the system:** Ask your mentor how you should utilize support staff. Never assign work directly to staff without checking the proper office protocols first.
3. **Communicate clearly:** Provide clear instructions, polite requests, and realistic deadlines. When working remotely, clarify details in writing to avoid digital misunderstandings.
4. **Always say thank you:** Expressing sincere, specific gratitude—even in a brief message—builds lasting professional alliances.
5. **Address issues constructively:** If you run into a communication barrier, address it calmly and privately using "I" statements (e.g., *"I want to make sure I am explaining my deadlines clearly. Do you have advice on how we can coordinate better?"*).

DON'T:

1. **Don't ignore friction:** If an issue arises and a private conversation or video call doesn't resolve it, consult your supervising attorney for advice.
2. **Don't jump to conclusions:** If an assignment is late or an email seems brief, remember they may be managing competing demands from senior partners or dealing with external pressures. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
3. **Don't raise your voice:** Never demand, yell, or use defensive/demanding language in messages or emails.
4. **Don't gossip:** Legal circles are incredibly small. What you say about co-workers in chat messages or emails will always make its way back to them. Save the venting for home.
5. **Don't take legal advice from staff:** Always clarify legal and strategic decisions directly with an attorney unless explicitly instructed otherwise.

VII. Weekly Reports: Reflecting on Your Practice

Your Weekly Report is your tool for self-evaluation and growth. Rather than listing dry timelines of your day, your journal entries should be thoughtful, analytical reflections on the legal profession.

The 4 Required Sections of Your Weekly Report

Each report submitted to the Google Classroom must contain:

1. **Heading:** Your name, placement name, date, week number, and the total number of hours worked that week.
2. **On-Site Mentor Overview:** A brief summary of your interactions and meetings with your mentor (including virtual meetings).
3. **Reflective Journal:** A substantive, reflection description of your week, including what you worked on and reflections on what you observed/learned during the week.
4. **Assignment:** At least one assignment completed. A total of 13 assignment, five of which are required, must be completed during the Externship.

Substantive Topics to Reflect On

Use these prompt areas to guide your writing:

- **Goal Tracking:** How are you progressing toward your personal externship goals? What revelations or frustrations have you encountered?
- **Professional Responsibility:** What ethical issues or questions of professional etiquette have surfaced in your office this week? How were they addressed?
- **Supervision & Critique:** How are you adapting to your supervisor's feedback style? What have you discovered about how you receive and implement criticism?
- **The Business of Law:** How is the office structured? How do they handle conflict checks, time-tracking, and billing? How does this reality compare to what you learned in the classroom?
- **Substantive Skills:** Reflect on the trials, client meetings, depositions, or drafting sessions you observed or participated in (virtually or in person). What strategies worked? What would you have done differently?
- **Work-Life Harmony:** How do the attorneys around you manage the pressure of their practices alongside their personal lives? How do remote work policies influence workplace culture and personal boundaries?
- **Remote Work Dynamics:** What have you learned about managing your time, staying motivated, and maintaining professional visibility in a digital workspace?

We wish you an engaging, educational, and inspiring semester! Make the most of every assignment, ask questions, and enjoy taking your first major steps into the legal profession.

If you have any questions or encounter any eissues, please email Libby Davis, Director of Externships & Practica, at eadavis@lclark.edu.