



GDC: Internship Reference Guide

Internships can be a valuable component of practical education and help fortify the foundation of a professional career in graphic or communication design.

For students, internships offer real-world exposure to the business of design and the pace of the marketplace as well as hands-on experience applying strategic thinking and using the tools and techniques of their trade.

For studios and agencies, interns can bring vitality to the workplace and fresh perspectives in creative problem solving. Internships offer studios and agencies opportunities to give back to the industry and the community. Interns themselves can also prove to be a high quality source of potential talent to draw upon once they complete their formal education.

The GDC® sees internships as a useful part of a designer's education and path to professional practice.

In Canada, regulations regarding internships are enacted and enforced at the provincial and territorial level. The specific laws governing internships differ greatly from region to region. For example, what is illegal in British Columbia may be common, acceptable practice in Ontario.

The GDC, in consultation with the Canadian Intern Association, has developed the following as a reference for its members and the public – whether you are an intern or internship provider.

What is an Internship?

Generally speaking, internships, (not to be confused with practicums*, co-op placements* or mentorships*) have the following qualities:

- Operate for a clearly defined period of time
- Have a formalized set of learning objectives
- Contain milestone and key target dates for the achievement of those learning objectives
- Include instructor involvement and evaluation of student performance
- Run concurrently with an educational program for credit, while the student is enrolled in a program (e.g. a summer internship), or immediately upon completion of an educational program
- Are designed for the benefit of the intern

**see definitions below.*

What you should know

It is not legally possible to opt out of minimum wage in Canada. So, do not propose nor agree to such request. Additionally, providing an honorarium does not negate the requirement to pay minimum wage.

If you are an intern, keep records of your hours. This will be a useful reference should you feel a need to file a claim for minimum wage with the relevant Ministry of Labour once your internship is over.



Unpaid Internships

All members of the GDC, (including students, freelancers, studio or agency owners, etc.), agree to abide by the GDC Code of Ethics upon becoming a member. The GDC Code of Ethics protects intellectual rights as well as the rights of the individual to fair and equitable practice of their profession. Our Code of Ethics prohibits members from engaging in unpaid work, with a few exceptions (e.g. pro bono, etc.).

Unpaid internships that are not for school credit are generally illegal. However, not all unpaid internships are illegal. Each province has its own specific employment laws. See the links and resources section below to find out more about what is legal where you are working or going to school.

Interns are encouraged to avoid or decline scenarios where unpaid work is masked under an “internship” label. A true internship will provide you with exposure to current skills and practices and valuable real world experience. Genuine internships are not intended to be a solution to avoid human resource expenses for the studio or agency.

Studio owners should be diligent in ensuring that their internship programs comply with local employment legislation. There are established tests that can help determine if what you are offering is a genuine internship or is considered employment. If the latter is found to be true, compensation may be required.

FAQ: For Interns

Q: Are unpaid internships illegal in my province?

A: Unpaid internships that are not for school credit are generally illegal. However, not all unpaid internships are illegal. Each province has its own specific employment laws. See the links and resources section below for reference.

Q: Is my “internship” genuine?

A: Be informed and avoid or outright decline a scenario where you feel unpaid work is being masked as an internship. A true internship will provide you with exposure to current skills and practices and valuable real world experience while directly linking educational components. Whether paid or for academic credit, an internship often includes an element of supervision from your institution in the form of a site visit or progress report. Genuine internships are not intended to be a solution to avoid human resource expenses for the studio or agency.

Q: Can I be asked to sign away my right to minimum wage?

A: NO. No one can legally opt out of minimum wage in Canada.

Q: I’m a member of the GDC, can I participate in an unpaid internship?

A: Yes, you can accept and participate in an unpaid internship provided that it is a legal, genuine internship. However, GDC members are prohibited (via their Code of Ethics) from engaging in unpaid work, with a few exceptions (e.g. pro bono, etc.). This makes it imperative that you ensure that the internship program is legitimate and not unpaid work promoted as an internship.

Q: I’m a member of the GDC, what do I do if I’m offered an unpaid internship?

A: If you are offered an internship that does not meet the standard of academic credit or minimum wage for the hours worked, use the GDC Code of Ethics and the resources below as a means to inform the internship provider why the offer does not meet professional best practices.



Q: What do I do if I find the studio or agency is exploiting my internship as unpaid work?

A: Keep a record of your hours to use as a reference should you feel a need to file a claim for minimum wage with your provincial or territorial Ministry of Labour.

Q: Who owns the intellectual property rights to what I may create during my internship?

A: It is important to discuss and define ownership and use in writing prior to the internship. In this way, both you and the studio or agency have clear expectations of rights and responsibilities.

FAQ: For Studio Owners and Agencies

Q: I run a studio/agency, and wish to offer a few internships. What should I know first?

A: Be diligent in ensuring that your internship program provides a learning experience for interns and that it complies with employment legislation in your province or territory. See the links and resources section below for reference.

Q: How can I tell if what I offer is a genuine internship or entry-level employment?

A: There are established guidelines that can help determine if what's being offered is an internship or is considered employment. If the latter is found to be true, compensation may be required.

Q: Can a studio or agency owner ask an intern to sign away their right to minimum wage?

A: NO. No one can legally opt out of minimum wage in Canada.

Q: Our studio offers interns an honorarium, do we still need to pay minimum wage?

A: Yes. Providing an intern with an honorarium does not negate the requirement to pay them minimum wage.

Q: Who owns the intellectual property rights to work created by an intern during an internship?

A: It is important to discuss and define ownership and use in writing prior to the internship. In this way, both you and the intern have clear expectations of rights and responsibilities.

Links & Resources

As every province and territory has its own employment laws, you (as a potential intern or as a studio owner) should review the specific laws applicable in your part of the country. It is important that both parties understand their rights and responsibilities. You can quickly and easily access information on the laws pertaining to you using the following links and resources:

Alberta

<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/working-in-alberta/1224.html>

British Columbia

<http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/igm/esa-part-1/igm-esa-s1-work.htm#3>

Manitoba

<http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/e110e.php>

New Brunswick

<http://laws.gnb.ca/en/showfulldoc/cs/E-7.2//20120527>

Newfoundland & Labrador

<http://assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/l02.htm>



Links & Resources (continued)

Nova Scotia

<http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/labourst.htm>

Ontario

http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/is_unpaidintern.php

PEI

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/labour/index.php3?number=1004723&lang=E>

Saskatchewan

<http://www.lrws.gov.sk.ca/labour-standards-legislation-regulations>

Quebec

http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/N_1_1/N1_1_A.html

Canadian Intern Association

<http://www.internassociation.ca>

Definitions

Practicum: is a graduate (or undergraduate) level course, often in a specialized field of study, that is designed to give students supervised practical application of a previously or concurrently studied theory.

Co-op Placement: is a structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. A cooperative educational experience, commonly known as a “co-op”, provides academic credit for experiential learning structured job experience.

Mentorship: is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. However, true mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing ad hoc help. It is about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialog, and challenge. The mentor will not ask the mentee to perform work for his/her client