

**What was your first day in your host country like? What about your first day at the internship site? Did your pre-departure expectations match the reality?**

My first day in my host country was pretty easy and delightful. Ireland was a great destination for my first time going abroad because the primary language spoken there is English and the culture is relatively similar to the very Western culture that I was raised in. I arrived in the middle of the night, which I would definitely recommend to future interns at this location. As exciting as it was to arrive in Ireland, the long hours spent on flights and navigating my way from my home to Dalkey left me feeling pretty exhausted and I was ready to rest. Luckily transit between the airport and Dalkey is pretty simple. I took the Airbus, which has a direct route from the airport to Dalkey, and my host family met me at the door to their home with a very welcoming attitude. I was staying with Ciara (kee-air-a) Condon, although her and her husband were out the day I arrived. But she communicated regularly and clearly with me ahead of time about the rules of the house and how they were going to handle my arrival. The home was very clean and cozy and I felt at home. Her kids were ready when I arrived and they met me with kindness and understanding, which was refreshing and helpful considering how far I'd just travelled. They were able to give me tips on where I should go for sightseeing and shopping and how best to get from one place to the other without a car. In summary, my first day in my host country was mostly spent sleeping, but arriving and night and going to bed as soon as I was able helped me get over the serious jet lag a lot more quickly than I otherwise would have.

I planned my arrival in Ireland at the beginning of the weekend before I started work so that I could have some extra time to get acclimated to the country. I spent the first weekend getting used to the bus and train system in Ireland. I highly recommend that future interns get a LEAP card as soon as they can after arriving. These can be purchased at convenience stores and allow the card holder to quickly and easily scan on and off every form of Dublin transportation except for taxis. Even if you're able to walk to the internship, riding buses around Dublin is a great way to explore the city and the surrounding suburbs.

My first day at my internship was a little hectic. It's a bit challenging to find the office if you don't know what you're looking for. I tried to find the location on Google maps ahead of time, but I couldn't figure out how to access it. I ended up figuring out how to find it through the advice of a previous intern. My co-workers were incredibly friendly and kind and helped me get set up at my own desk and computer right away.

Learning how to work at my host company was a bit challenging because they do a variety of different jobs for a plethora of clients. When I was working with them, their primary client was Tourism Ireland. If you'd like to see an example of their work, you can look at the Tourism Ireland website and most of the content you'll find was done by my host company. Interns can be assigned everything from copywriting to selecting photos for Tourism Ireland's Instagram (also entirely run by my host company) to editing and fixing pages on the Tourism Ireland website. On my first day, I was given a few small tasks, writing social media posts and tweets, to ease me into the work load. For instance, I assigned to write copy for some of my host company's clients. I was essentially given small tasks until I could prove that I could write well and turn important projects in on deadlines. Although my first tasks were pretty simple, I still believe the most important piece of advice I can give to future interns is this: don't be afraid to ask questions. There are a lot of moving parts, from regulations on what my host company can and can't right based on guidelines from their

clients or simple knowledge about the culture of Ireland that, I, for instance, simply didn't have when I first started. My co-workers were very kind and helpful and I never felt guilty for asking questions.

It was a bit different from what I was expecting, however. Before arriving in Dublin, I believed that the workplace would be a bit more laid back than other offices I had worked in before. However, I quickly learned that the management at my host company take their work very seriously. It is a family run business made up of people who earnestly pursue high quality work done for every job crafted to perfection for each of their clients. This means that every piece of copy is edited at least once by a manager, then by the copywriters and interns, and then it is submitted either for editing again or a double check from management before publishing. I would describe my host company as an intense place to work, but overall enjoyable. As I gained more and challenging tasks, from writing small social media posts, like tweets, to updating websites through CMS, copywriting, and posting Instagram stories for client accounts, I also got to know my coworkers. They treated me to lunch on the first day and invited me along to after work hangouts and dinners. Overall my workload has grown and became more difficult, but someone was always ready to help. It was expected that I worked hard and turned projects in on deadline, but everyone was very kind and made sure I was comfortable with the difficulty of the work I was given.

**2. How did your impressions of the host culture and internship site change over time? What are some of the biggest differences you encountered?**

My impressions of my host culture and internship didn't shift too much because I approached my time in Ireland with as open a mind as I could manage. I tried to be prepared for anything. Even after working through the very helpful assignments that were provided by IE3, I knew there were bound to be things I couldn't expect. The biggest differences in both culture and workplace that I encountered was the willingness people have to joke and poke at each other. Despite the sometimes stressful of work at my host company, my co-workers were perfectly comfortable poking the occasional, light-hearted fun at each other. Overall, the culture can seem very informal. When one of my co-workers first poked fun at my American accent, I knew I had been accepted. More than once, I took up a conversation with a stranger on the train who poked fun at my American accent.

Additionally, I believe the people I encountered outside of the workplace were generally more friendly than the average people I have come across in the states. I noticed more frequent polite gestures being extended, such as the opening of doors. In general, the differences were small, as the big picture of the culture in Ireland that I experienced was a great deal similar to what I am used to, but the people seemed easier with each other and seemed to make more of an effort at being kind even to strangers.

**3. Considering the entire experience, what were the most important benefits of your internship - personally and professionally?**

Both personally and professionally, the most important benefits of my internship was being able to work with and get to know the people. When I first began my internship, I felt very out of place and quite a bit awkward. Since I have worked a in few different jobs before, I was expecting to feel this way as the first few days at a new job are often the hardest for me. I wasn't prepared, however, for the differences and awkwardness in conversation. While my co-workers never ceased to be kind and friendly to me, I could tell that my normal

conversation skills were a bit lacking. It's difficult to explain, but certain things I would say weren't received quite as I thought they'd be, or a phrase I used to use back home wouldn't make sense. It was easy for me to get hung up on short, awkward moments that came from technical differences in speech. I even once found myself very embarrassed after trying to poke fun at my co-workers, as they did at each other in a friendly way, and was met with blank stares. I was afraid that little missteps like this would be the rule for my time in Ireland. For a while, I stopped speaking up when I thought of something to say and tried my best to observe and check myself once or twice before speaking.

Although I wasn't a particularly talkative member of the team for a while, I eventually learned from observing their conversations. The more I quietly observed, the more comfortable I became in joining in casual and professional conversations. After learning and patiently waiting for my understanding of how best to relate to people to catch up, I was able to easily engage with my co-workers and supervisors alike on a casual and friendly level. This was especially helpful as I travelled across the island of Ireland, from Galway to Cork and back to Dublin. I found myself very happy and comfortable striking up conversations with strangers about more than just the weather and life in Ireland got a lot easier. All it took was a bit of watching and learning so I could better understand how to approach people and eventually, I felt right at home at my internship and in Dublin.

## **2. What were the biggest challenges you faced during your internship? How did you overcome these?**

The entire experience as a whole taught me a variety of things, from how to navigate the culture of a workplace to how to write copy. The most important thing I learned in my internship, however, was how to handle criticism and critique face to face. I have worked for newspapers in the past, so I was accustomed to having my work edited for publishing. Copywriting, however, is not and certainly was not my forte when I began interning at my host company, and every time I submitted my work for editing, this was abundantly clear. This was partially due to my inexperience with writing copy. But it's also important for future interns to note that copy written for my host company's clients is subject to their individual guidelines as well as the sensitivities of people in Ireland that aren't immediately clear to people who aren't from Ireland. Even the best of copywriters at my host company are constantly checking and double checking their work, editing it until it is as close to perfection as possible.

Unfortunately, I struggled at first with both writing this copy and the harsh critique I received. I wasn't used to being told all of my mistakes both in person and in front of my co-workers. I am a perfectionist to my core and felt incredibly disappointed in myself even if a sentence I had written was wrong. It was a bit emotional to handle at first and I had a difficult time trying to contain my embarrassment in the workplace. I believed that I was a failure and that my co-workers and supervisors were disappointed in both me and my work.

After a while, however, I noticed my co-workers discussing some projects of theirs that had been subject to critique as harsh as my own. I finally felt comfortable talking to them about my own challenges with critique and found that we were all in the same boat.

This was an important benefit for me because I needed to learn how to distance my personal feelings about my work from the professional repercussions of it. My supervisors began to tell me why some of my work was being sent back to me with a request to start

from scratch and the more I understood why I wasn't doing as well as I would have liked, the more I was able to let go of my frustrations. There were sentences of copy I wrote that my editors knew could be inflammatory to the audience the work was intended for and they wanted me to learn how to consider the audience even more than the intended message I was writing. I learned how to take critique to heart without being offended and my work became better because of it. Altogether, harsh critique helped me grow as a professional writer.

**Who was your site supervisor/mentor and what sort of guidance and direction did you receive from them? What was the communication style like?**

My site supervisor was the Managing Director of my host company. She offered guidance on how to consider the audience that is intended for each specific copy that I have written. She was able to help me grow as a writer in this way, and she also encouraged me not to be afraid to edit and re-edit my work until it was perfect, even if it was just a caption for a photo on Instagram.

Essentially, she directed me to treat everything I wrote as if it was the most important piece of copy I would ever write. This would lead to higher quality content overall.

**What guidance did you receive from your academic faculty at home (if any)? What projects did you complete for credit?**

My academic faculty at my home institution were very helpful in connecting me back to my campus for checking up on how I was doing. I was also encouraged to seek help from them if I ever felt that it was necessary. My primary faculty advisor for this internship met with me several times during my application process to this internship, conducting interviews with me to see if I would be a good fit and helping prepare me for any challenges I might face during transit, on arrival, or during my internship. He also checked in with me via e-mail once I was in Ireland and helped talk me through some of the more challenging aspects of the trip. Overall, I strongly recommend that any future interns seek out a faculty advisor they can trust, as it can prove to be very helpful.

**What do you wish you had known before you arrived? Think about culture, logistics, host site, language, etc.**

I wish that I had known that it is ok to mess up and that no one would judge me for it. Fortunately, people at the host site are incredibly understanding to interns and they certainly gave me a lot of leeway whenever I messed up, either socially or on a project I was given. However, I wish I had known that mistakes were not going to be met with judgement, as long as I was upfront about them. It would have helped me relax a lot sooner and just generally enjoy my time in Ireland just a little bit more.

I also wish I had known how much money I was going to spend. I did budget and plan carefully so that my housing was taken care of before I even arrived in Ireland and a payment method was set up. However, I definitely didn't plan for exactly how much money I would want to spend on things that were just small and fun, like a dinner out or even small trinkets that I wanted to remember the people and places by. I definitely would have set aside a bigger chunk of money for leisure activities.

**What tips do you have for future interns headed to your same internship site, host city, or country? Consider discussing housing, transportation, clothing, budgeting, entertainment, culture, and social groups.**

For future interns, I have a few tips. First of all, reach out to whomever you have been put in contact with as a representative and don't be afraid to ask all the questions you have ahead of time. It might save you a bit of stickiness upon arrival. It's also helpful to have that contact information saved in your phone, in case you can't find the offices, like I couldn't, or in case of some kind of an emergency.

Second of all, if your co-workers invite you out and you can swing spending time with them, you really should. It gives you an opportunity to let off steam about work or gain insight about the inner workings of the office through casual conversation. Also, the people I worked with at my host company are completely delightful and I'm very glad that I took the extra time to get to know them. It helped make my time in Ireland and the office a lot more fun.

Third of all, as locals for tips on travel. I asked my co-workers; you can ask anyone you make friends with. People who live in Ireland have a lot more insight than I do on how to travel cheaply across the island and also across the continent of Europe. I definitely recommend planning a few weekend trips, and the management at my host company are perfectly happy letting the interns take an extra day off so they can have a longer weekend while traveling around. For transit within Ireland, GoBus.ie was a site I used to get cheap bus tickets from Dublin to Galway and Cork. The trains are also a good and cheap option for travel elsewhere. For travel around Europe, try to use RyanAir. When you search for flights, be sure to put your browser in incognito mode, so that the website won't remember you and drive up the prices with each visit.

Fourth of all, consider your housing wisely. I chose to stay with a host family, which was great for having provided meals and a family-type setting to live in. It can be cozy and comforting to live somewhere that feels more like home. However, as much as I enjoyed my host family, if I could do it again, I would have arranged housing elsewhere in Dublin. Any place near the DART line will give you an easy commute to Dalkey for work. Student accommodation is easy to find but it may be a little more expensive. You can also use websites like Daft.ie to find rentals with roommates. There are also Facebook pages you can mine for housing. I recommend doing this because it will automatically connect you with a group of your peers. Even if you aren't housed with people who are all from Ireland, it's still a great network to set yourself up with and you will have people to explore the night life of Dublin with safely.

Lastly, be yourself and have a lot of fun. The cultural exercises and learning activities provided by IE3 were incredibly helpful for me in preparing for how to work with people from a different culture. But at the end of the day, when I relaxed and strived to just be myself, I had a lot more fun and my interactions with people went over really well. Ireland is a great place to get your feet wet in international travel, as it is adventurous, fun, but life is not too terribly different from here in the United States.

I had a great time in Ireland and with my host company and I am certain future interns will too. Best of luck!