



12 Tips for Engaging with Remote Externs

Due to COVID-19, we know that many Atlanta's John Marshall Law School (AJMLS) externs are working remotely, which means many supervisors are also teleworking and still responsible for overseeing extern engagement. While it is becoming more common for lawyers to telework, it remains uncommon for newer lawyers (let alone student learners) to have this option. This will be great practice for externs' future careers, but for many externs and perhaps some supervisors, this is a major adjustment. To help externs be as successful as possible and to help support you as their supervisor during this challenging time, we share the following tips and best practices for working with remote externs.

Please note: even with unique working arrangements, students will still be required to log hours, set learning goals, complete reflective work, and meet with externship faculty. We will also continue to ask you as the supervisor to confirm your extern's learning goals and complete a midterm and final online evaluation about their work at the end of the semester.

More broadly, if you have questions, concerns, or need help in navigating this new dynamic, do not hesitate to reach out to the Atlanta's John Marshall externship team via email or phone (our office phones forward to our cells during remote engagement):

- Bridgett E. Ortega (Associate Dean), bortega@johnmarshall.edu / 678-916-2678
- Paul Wilson, (Program Administrator) pwilson@johnmarshall.edu / 678-916-2679

Tip #1 Acknowledge the Challenging Situation We Are All Facing as Individuals, as Workers, and as a Profession

- Externs often think supervisors are invincible. While they know, technically, this situation is new for everyone, they tend to think experienced lawyers have it together. Acknowledging and admitting that this is an unprecedented situation that causes challenges and stress, and requires creativity and flexibility, will go a long way towards setting the extern at ease and building a more trusted, authentic relationship.
- When possible, engage externs in thoughtful dialogue about the pandemic's effect on the work, your office and practice area more generally, and our profession.

Tip #2 Set Up Regular Check-Ins

- As you know, we always recommend that supervisors have weekly meetings with externs to help answer questions, ensure externs are on track, deliver feedback and give new assignments, and to connect more generally. This practice has never been more important.
- We recommend that you organize a set day/time each week to meet with your extern(s) via a video chat ideally or at least via phone for 30 minutes or more. To help make these meetings most efficient for



you, consider setting an agenda or asking the extern to do so. That way, the meeting is as focused as possible and everyone can prepare in advance.

Tip #3 Help the Extern(s) Set Up a Work Schedule

- With remote work, it is harder to know when people are working and what else they may have going on. We strongly recommend you discuss a set schedule with your extern in advance if possible. This could be centered on the total number of hours the extern will work per week, the number of days the extern will work per week, and/or which days (and which hours) the extern will work per week. While some flexibility is needed during these challenging times, externs tend to work better, even when situated in an office, when they have a clearly defined schedule. This will also ensure they are available for meetings and calls as they arise and can help you with scheduling these in advance.

Tip #4 Check-In Regarding Additional Responsibilities and Real Life Constraints the Extern May Have

- While they will be working remotely, externs are still expected to adhere to their schedule and work responsibilities. With that said, given this ever-changing situation, ask about what other responsibilities externs may have during this crisis – parental responsibilities, caring for an older aged parent, and the like. Offer some flexibility to show support and display empathy, even if you also are experiencing challenges. Understanding their situation and recognizing additional challenges that they face can help you get to know them better and to adapt expectations if appropriate and needed.

Tip #5 Don't Forget to Include the Extern in Virtual Meetings/Calls as Much as Feasibly Possible

- Remote work generally eliminates your ability to pop by an extern's office area and invite them to a meeting at the last minute. When you can, plan and notify the extern of such meetings so they can be available or shift something around if needed. Externs will really miss the camaraderie of an office and the ability to "tag along" with supervisors. To the best of your ability, try to virtually include them in anything and everything appropriate.

Tip #6 Help the Extern Prioritize by Setting Deadlines and Supporting their Daily/Weekly Goals

- We have advised students to think about what they tangibly hope to accomplish on specific days and during an entire work week while in a remote placement. You can help them do this effectively by offering prioritization among projects and by setting up clear deadlines. Sometimes supervisors don't want to have firm deadlines to avoid pressuring the extern. With remote work, deadlines (even if there is some flexibility) are critical to help keep externs focused, on task, and motivated. If externs are juggling multiple assignments from multiple supervisors, this is even more important.



- You could consider asking externs whether it is worth sharing their daily or weekly goals with you in advance so you know they are on track and so that you can help them prioritize if needed.

Tip #7 Ensure Externs Have Access to Appropriate Files and Relevant Contact Information

- If externs need access to a shared drive or email account, try to set this up in advance so that they are ready to work. If they have issues with any of these technologies, be sure to let them know who to contact (whether you or another professional at the office).
- Relatedly, if you will be unavailable, who is the extern supposed to engage with if something arises? Be sure that externs have names/contacts of individuals they may need to work with regularly or reach out to on occasion.

Tip #8 Establish a Plan for Saving Documents, etc.

- Develop a system for how you would like the extern to save and share their work. Are there certain naming formats? Should they email or upload their work product?

Tip #9 Help Externs Understand Ethical Rules, Especially Confidentiality

- We always discuss relevant ethical rules, including confidentiality, but ensure externs understand any specific rules you may have.
- We have informed externs to be mindful of who is nearby when they are on calls, documents left open on a computer, documents left on a kitchen table, and the like, but reiterating these lessons is always helpful.
- You can also consider assigning work that does not include confidential information.

Tip #10 Continue to Share Feedback in Multiple Ways

- Whether it is offering tangible feedback on written product or giving feedback on conduct during a meeting, externs really want to learn and want to hear your thoughts. The scheduled meeting is a great time to discuss how the extern is doing. Additionally, acknowledging work product when it is received, sharing the final documents that are filed/submitted, and, when possible, inputting track changes/comments into their documents, can really help them learn and create an improved work product next time.
- Reviewing constructive feedback over email without any context can be difficult. We suggest when possible that you share constructive feedback via a video or phone conference. Of course, a track change document is useful but again, consider whether a short chat discussing the document would be



helpful for understanding and for digesting the feedback, especially given the different type of relationship that remote externs and supervisors may have.

- Relatedly, celebrate success – whether for a great work product or simply for completing a very intense project – this will help motivate externs and let them know what to keep doing!
- In appendix I and II, we include some of our suggested strategies for delivering constructive feedback. We are happy to discuss these in more detail with you at any point.

Tip #11 Consider Zoom-Based or other Conferencing Platform for Virtual Networking, Mentoring Events and Virtual Trainings

- Externs really cherish the professional development, networking, and career guidance they receive from supervisors and team members. If possible, consider hosting a small handful of zoom or other teleconferencing sessions over the lunch hour that discuss jobs in your field, useful connections and associations, and offer other networking and mentoring advice to externs.
- Externs will be able to review training materials on their own, but if you normally host in-person training sessions, consider whether you can adapt such trainings to video or phone to allow for real time engagement and feedback.
- Invite Externs to virtual training and networking events that you may be participating in.

Tip #12 Connect and Engage as Often as You Can

- It is so hard to develop new relationships virtually. We know you are under a lot of stress and that this entire remote format is new for many of us. Externs will appreciate any outreach, check-ins, and any other ways you can show that you care, that you want to get to know them, and that you are happy they are contributing.



Appendix I: Constructive Feedback Framework

FAST

- **F**requent
- **A**ccurate
- **S**pecific
- **T**imely

BAM

- **B**e Honest
- **A**lways focus on the good first, room for improvement second
- **M**ake them better

SKM

- What you should **S**top doing
- What you should **K**eeP doing
- What you should do **M**ore of

AID Strategy

- **A**ctions: specific observations
- **I**mpact: result of the actions
- **D**o: mutually agree on alternative approaches for the future



Appendix II: Feedback Outline Worksheet

1. Write out two key points that you want to address.

- a. _____
- b. _____

2. Write out two positive observations.

- a. _____
- b. _____

3. Transition to constructive feedback.

4. Two areas for improvement/development.

- a. _____
- b. _____

5. Agreed upon action steps and notes.
